OK. Basically PISA consists of three tests in Maths, Science and Reading, organised by the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development - OECD for short. The tests were first run in 2000 and are set every three years. Currently, around half a million fifteen-year-olds from 65 different countries take part. Each test is marked out of 800 and the average marks for each country’s students gives the country's rank. The idea is that to compete economically, you need to improve education.  
So, moving on to the results, the table here shows a selection of countries from the last PISA test for Maths. As you can see, China’s almost 100 points ahead of my country, Finland. Such a big difference may be down to better education, but it may also be because of the kinds of kids who were tested. Unlike all the other countries, China's students all came from a single city, in this case, Shanghai.

More importantly, focusing on rank is a problem. Finland, for example, has fallen from being best in 2000.1have seen some headlines here saying ‘the miracle is over’ and ‘plunging’ standards. But there were only 40 countries taking part in 2000, not 65, and our score has actually dropped by just three per cent - not exactly 'plunging’. When you look at percentages instead of points out of 800, you may also note that although we are 22 places and 37 points ahead of Russia that’s actually only about four per cent.

So should we care about PISA? I guess it's good to have an independent test, but I don't think we should change our education to get better marks in it. These marks don’t really tell you what education is like. In South Korea, kids typically study twelve or more hours a day, and we sometimes do half that! I know where I'd prefer to study. And does it really matter in terms of the economy? Qatar is the richest country in the world, but comes almost bottom of the table. In short, I think we should decide what we as a country want from education and avoid comparisons.

Big changes

Branch changes