



# RETENTION RATES OF PUPILS IN SECOND LEVEL SCHOOLS

## 2008 ENTRY COHORT

**February 2015**

This report and others in the series may be accessed at:

[www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) and go to [Statistics/Retention Rates of Pupils in Second Level Schools](#)

Detailed time series tables containing all of the data presented in this report will also shortly be available on the Department of Education and Skills' [education statistics database](#).

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## Executive Summary

This is the eighth published report by the Department of Education and Skills on school retention in Ireland. It is based on a detailed analysis of the records held in the Department's Post-Primary Pupils Database (PPPDB) for the cohort of entrants to the first year of the junior cycle in 2008. This cohort sat the Leaving Certificate Examination in either 2013 or 2014.

### Main Results

- In 2008, there were 57,005 first time enrolments to the first year of the junior cycle programme in second level schools. Of this cohort, 540 pupils were recorded as emigrated or were deceased in the period under consideration. A further 390 pupils were found to be still in the second level school system in 2014 (these were mainly students who had completed Transition Year and also repeated a year). These groups were removed to give an initial adjusted cohort of **56,075** students for the purposes of the retention analysis.
- Of the 2008 entry cohort, **96.89%** sat the Junior Certificate Exams in 2011 or 2012 and **90.56%** sat the Leaving Certificate Exams in 2013 or 2014.
- The retention rate to the Leaving Certificate for males has continued to improve and the gender gap between the retention rates at national level now stands at 2.67% for the 2008 cohort. This compares to a difference of 3.59% for the 2007 cohort.
- Voluntary secondary schools continue to have the highest retention rates at both the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate stage; however the gap between the different types of schools is closing significantly, with a 1.2% difference between voluntary secondary and vocational schools for the Junior Certificate, and just under 5% difference between these two sectors in the Leaving Certificate retention rate.
- The average retention rate for DEIS second level schools continues to increase and is at a rate of 82.1% for the 2008 cohort, this is increased from a rate of 68.2% for the 2001 cohort.

It should be noted that this report deals with retention within the State-aided schooling system only. It does not take account of important educational pathways outside this system such as Youthreach and apprenticeship training. In effect, pupils leaving school to undertake these programmes are treated as early school leavers for the purposes of this analysis. It seems reasonable to assume that the 'true' retention rate, comparable to completion of upper second-level education (equivalent to NFQ levels 4,5 and 6 Advanced), is higher than that shown in Table 1.1 when participation in apprenticeship, out-of-school programmes and other training within the first year of leaving school is considered.

It is also important to note that while the analysis allows for movement of pupils between schools, it does not enable the tracking of those who leave State-aided schools including publicly funded fee-paying schools and move to non-aided second-level education providers. However, due to the fact that these students sit the State exams as external candidates, it is possible to include these pupils in the final Leaving Certificate retention rate by matching State Examinations Commission (SEC) external candidate data against the initial cohort data (see Appendix A for more details).

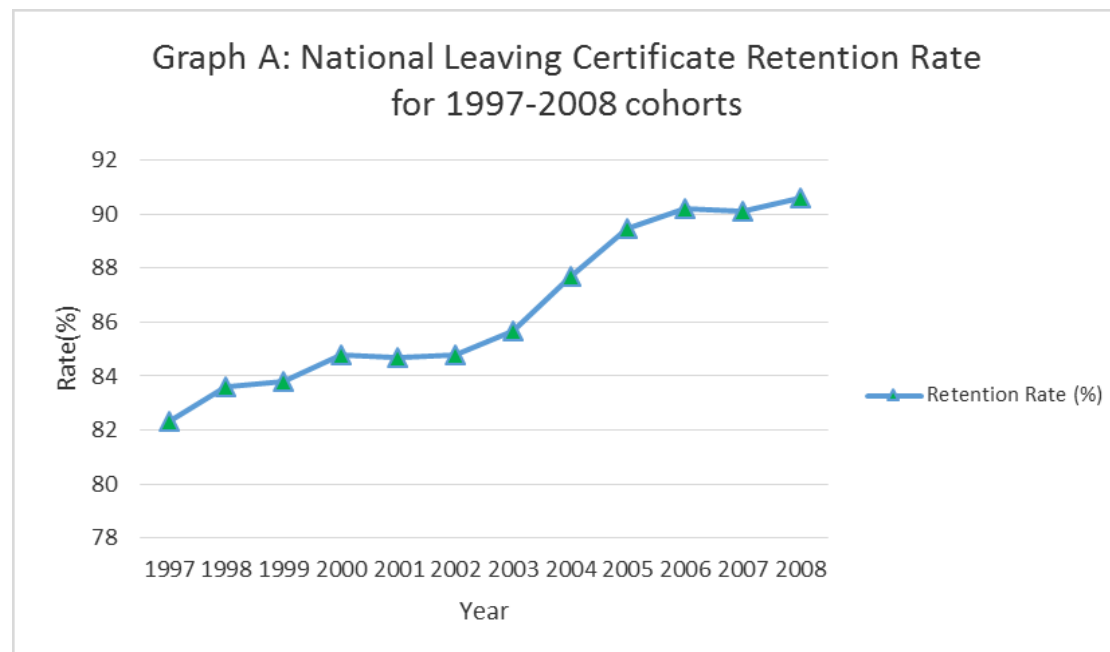
## General Trends in Retention Rates

Table 1.1 and Graph A show the national retention rates for the 2008 cohort compared to the rates for all previous cohorts since 1997.

**Table 1.1: National Leaving Certificate Retention Rate for 1997-2008 cohorts**

Year	Retention Rate (%)
1997	82.3
1998	83.6
1999	83.8
2000	84.8
2001	84.7
2002	84.8
2003	85.7
2004	87.7
2005*	89.5
2006*	90.2
2007*	90.1
2008*	90.6

**Graph A: National Leaving Certificate Retention Rate for 1997-2008 cohorts**



*\*Break in series from 2005 onwards due to revised methodology, see Appendix for more details.*

Over the 12 years from 1997 to 2008, there has been a gradual improvement in the Leaving Certificate retention rate, with an increase of 8.3% in total over the period. The rate remained flat at just under 85% for the 2000-2002 entry cohorts, before beginning to rise again for the 2003 cohort. For the 2006 cohort the retention rate to the Leaving Certificate rose above 90% for the first time since the analysis began, and remains above that level since then.

Table 2.1 shows the retention rates for each milestone and by gender for the cohort of students that entered the Junior Cycle in 2008.

Milestone	2008 entry cohort		
	Male	Female	Total
Junior Certificate, Year 1 (No.)	<b>28,740</b>	<b>27,335</b>	<b>56,075</b>
Junior Certificate, Year 2 (%)	99.20	99.15	99.17
Junior Certificate, Year 3 (%)	98.09	98.45	98.27
Junior Certificate Retention Rate	96.68	97.12	96.89
Senior Cycle, Year 1 (%)	94.38	95.45	94.90
Senior Cycle, Year 2 (%)	90.63	92.34	91.47
Leaving Certificate Retention Rate	<b>89.26</b>	<b>91.93</b>	<b>90.56</b>

As can be seen from the table, the majority of dropout occurs at second level between senior cycle year 1 and senior cycle year 2, where around 3.5% of the original cohort is lost. A significant loss also occurs after the Junior Certificate. About 2% of the cohort leave the system immediately after sitting the Junior Certificate exams.

A gender gap remains between the retention rates to the Leaving Certificate at national level between male and female cohorts, of approximately 2.7%. However while the gender gap remains, overall it has narrowed substantially in recent years. The 2008 difference compares to a gender difference of 11.3% for the 1995 entry cohort, and 8.9% for the 2001 entry cohort.

<b>Table 2.2: Retention Rates by School Type and Milestone, 2008 cohort</b>				
	<b>2008 entry cohort</b>			
<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Secondary</b>	<b>Vocational</b>	<b>C&amp;C</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Junior Cycle, Year 1 (no.)</b>	32,884	13,806	9,385	<b>56,075</b>
<b>Junior Cycle, Year 2 (%)</b>	99.26	98.99	99.12	<b>99.17</b>
<b>Junior Cycle, Year 3 (%)</b>	98.45	97.79	98.33	<b>98.27</b>
<b>Junior Certificate Retention Rate</b>	97.21	96.05	97.01	<b>96.89</b>
<b>Senior Cycle, Year 1 (%)</b>	95.53	93.31	95.05	<b>94.90</b>
<b>Senior Cycle, Year 2 (%)</b>	92.57	88.85	91.45	<b>91.47</b>
<b>Leaving Certificate Retention Rate</b>	<b>92.18</b>	<b>87.23</b>	<b>89.80</b>	<b>90.56</b>

Average retention rates to Leaving Certificate in the voluntary secondary school sector have continually been the highest since analysis began in 1991, and have been at a rate of approximately 92% for the last four entry cohorts. The retention rate for voluntary secondary schools has increased slightly to 92.18% from a rate of 91.85% for the previous cohort, with the rate for community and comprehensive schools slightly decreased to 89.80% compared to a figure of 89.94% for the 2007 cohort.

The retention rate in both vocational and community and comprehensive schools has increased in recent years. The gap in retention rates to the Leaving Certificate between the secondary sector and the community and comprehensive sector now stands at 2.4%, which is a slight increase on the previous gap of just under 2%.

The average Leaving Certificate retention rate for vocational schools, while lagging behind the rates for the voluntary secondary and community and comprehensive schools, continues to show very significant improvement. There has been an increase of almost 25% between the 1991 cohort with a retention rate of 61.5%, and the 2008 cohort at 87.2%. More recently we can see an increase of almost 13% between the 2001 cohort (with a retention rate of 74.5%) and the 2008 cohort.



**SECTION  
3**

**Geographic Breakdown of Retention Rates**

This section describes the trends in school retention in each county for the 2008 entry cohort. Note that data were analysed by address of schools rather than address of pupils.

**Table 3.1: Retention Rates to the Junior and Leaving Certificate by Administrative County, 2008 cohort**

<b>Administrative County</b>	<b>Cohort Size</b>	<b>Junior Cert Retention (%)</b>	<b>Leaving Cert Retention (%)</b>
Carlow	802	94.26	86.03
Cavan	813	97.54	89.91
Clare	1353	97.93	89.58
Cork City	1804	97.78	90.24
Cork County	4523	97.19	91.27
Donegal	2225	97.57	91.10
Dublin City	5261	96.76	88.58
Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown	2368	95.90	91.17
Fingal	3026	97.29	91.64
Galway City	897	95.32	87.51
Galway County	2146	97.34	91.38
Kerry	1884	96.55	92.52
Kildare	2709	97.53	92.14
Kilkenny	1114	98.20	91.56
Laois	730	96.03	89.04
Leitrim	448	98.21	92.63
Limerick City	1158	95.60	86.96
Limerick County	1367	97.37	93.70
Longford	638	95.14	88.87
Louth	1862	97.15	92.05
Mayo	1696	96.82	89.98
Meath	2030	97.19	92.51
Monaghan	874	97.14	91.19
Offaly	1075	96.93	90.88
Roscommon	542	97.05	90.77
Sligo	801	98.00	92.13
South Dublin	3332	95.80	88.48
Tipperary	2234	97.14	91.58
Waterford City	760	95.53	88.68
Waterford County	687	97.67	92.87
Westmeath	1345	96.80	90.41
Wexford	1928	96.32	90.46
Wicklow	1643	96.77	88.98

For 2008 the highest Leaving Certificate retention rate was in Limerick County, with a rate of 93.70%, followed by Waterford County with a rate of 92.87% and Leitrim with a rate of 92.63%. Carlow had the lowest retention rates, with a rate of 86.03%. It should be noted however that a relatively minor number of pupils choosing a different pathway in counties with small entry cohorts to the Junior Cycle can cause significant changes in the percentages retained to the Leaving Certificate year-on-year for those counties.

In general, as in previous years, cities showed a lower retention rate to the Leaving Certificate. Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford cities all had retention rates lower than the national average.

Figure B overleaf shows the geographic spread of retention rates by administrative county.



**Section 4.1 – DEIS schools**

The Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative is an action plan for educational inclusion. DEIS focuses on addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities throughout their school careers. The plan provides an integrated School Support Programme (SSP) which brings together, and builds upon a range of interventions for schools and school clusters/communities with concentrated levels of educational disadvantage. Table 4.1 (a) shows the retention rates for the 2008 cohort of entrants to the Junior Cycle in designated DEIS second level schools compared to schools that are not under the DEIS programme.

<b>Table 4.1(a): Retention Rates by milestone and DEIS designation, 2008 entry cohort</b>			
<b>Milestone</b>	<b>2008 entry cohort</b>		
	<b>DEIS</b>	<b>Non-DEIS</b>	<b>All Schools</b>
Junior Certificate, Year 1(No.)	11,018	45,057	56,075
Junior Certificate, Year 2 (%)	98.50	99.34	99.17
Junior Certificate, Year 3 (%)	96.79	98.63	98.27
Junior Certificate Retention Rate (%)	94.45	97.49	96.89
Senior Cycle, Year 1 (%)	91.23	95.80	94.90
Senior Cycle, Year 2 (%)	85.63	92.89	91.47
<b>Leaving Certificate Retention Rate (%)</b>	<b>82.09</b>	<b>92.63</b>	<b>90.56</b>

For 2008, there is approximately a 3% difference in the Junior Certificate rate between DEIS and non-DEIS schools. The Leaving Certificate retention rate for the 2008 cohort in DEIS schools now stands at just over 82%, which is around 8.5% lower than the national average rate, however the

improvement in DEIS schools' retention rates in recent years has been significantly higher than the overall improvement nationally. The majority of the loss of the cohort in DEIS schools occurs after Senior Cycle Year 1.

Table 4.1 (b) shows a time series of the Junior and Leaving Certificate retention rates from the 2001 to 2008 cohorts

<b>Table 4.1 (b) : Leaving Certificate retention rates by DEIS designation, 2001-2008 cohorts</b>						
	<b>Junior Certificate Rate (%)</b>			<b>Leaving Certificate Rate (%)</b>		
<b>Year</b>	<b>DEIS</b>	<b>Non-DEIS</b>	<b>All schools</b>	<b>DEIS</b>	<b>Non-DEIS</b>	<b>All schools</b>
<b>2001</b>	92.6	97.1	96.1	68.2	85.0	81.3
<b>2002</b>	91.6	96.8	95.7	68.6	84.7	81.3
<b>2003</b>	91.2	96.1	95.1	69.9	85.5	82.2
<b>2004</b>	89.6	95.8	94.5	73.2	87.4	84.5
<b>2005*</b>	92.3	96.6	95.9	78.4	91.7	89.2
<b>2006*</b>	93.8	97.0	96.4	80.1	92.7	90.2
<b>2007*</b>	94.1	97.6	96.9	80.4	92.6	90.1
<b>2008*</b>	94.5	97.5	96.9	82.1	92.6	90.6

The Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) conducted by the Central Statistics Office collects information on the educational attainment of the population, which is supplied to Eurostat and used for the compilation of European comparative statistics on early school leavers. Early school leavers are defined as persons aged 18 to 24 whose highest level of education or training is the Junior Certificate or equivalent, and who had not received any education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey. The information collected relates to all education or training received including initial education, further education, continuing or further training, training within a company, apprenticeship, on-the-job training, seminars, distance learning, evening classes, self-learning etc. As part of the EU2020 agenda on education and training, Ireland has adopted a target of further reducing early school leaving to no more than 8% by the year 2020.

Figure C shows the proportion of persons aged 20-24 years who had attained at least a Leaving Certificate or equivalent (QNHS data). Over eighty-nine per cent of persons aged 20-24, in 2013, had attained at least a Leaving Certificate or equivalent, an increase from 82.6% in 2000. There has been a growth in the proportion of young people with at least the Leaving Certificate or equivalent in recent years, possibly due to the increasing numbers of students now participating in second chance Further Education and Training programmes.

Figure C: Percentage of persons aged 20-24 with at least upper secondary education, 2001-2013

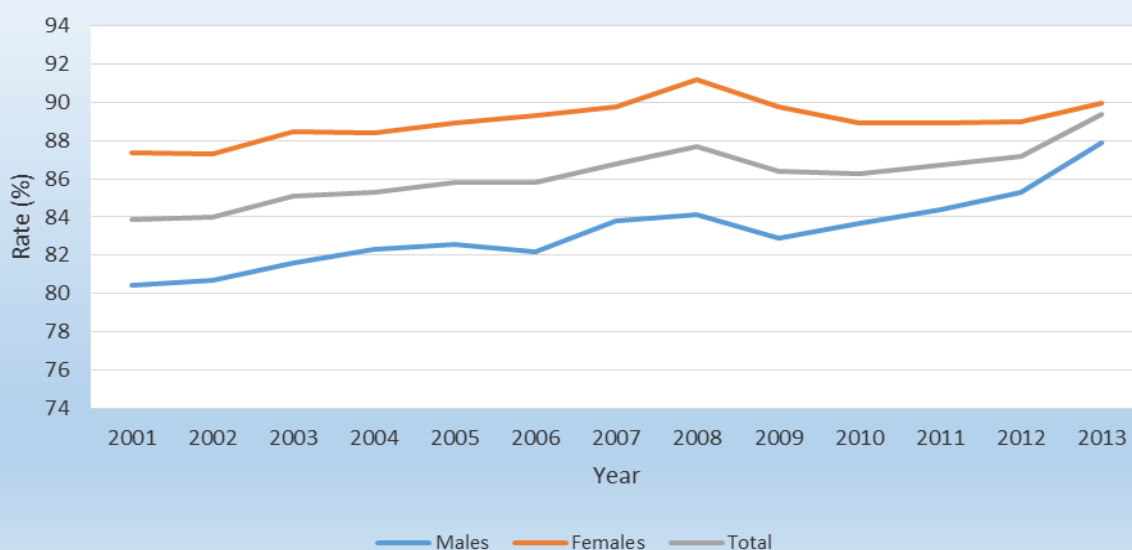


Table 5.1 shows the same information at EU level, where Ireland is ranked 8<sup>th</sup> among the EU28 member states.

Table 5.1: Percentage of persons aged 20 to 24 with at least a higher secondary education, in EU member states, classified by sex, 2013

	% of persons		
	Males	Females	Total
<b>EU-28</b>	<b>78.4</b>	<b>83.8</b>	<b>81.0</b>
<b>Austria</b>	87.3	87.4	87.4
<b>Belgium</b>	80	86.3	83.1
<b>Bulgaria</b>	85.7	86.3	86
<b>Croatia</b>	92.8	95.8	94.2
<b>Cyprus</b>	83.4	95.1	89.5
<b>Czech Republic</b>	90.4	91.4	90.9
<b>Denmark</b>	66.1	77.7	71.8
<b>Estonia</b>	79.7	88.8	84.2
<b>Finland</b>	84.7	87.1	85.9
<b>France</b>	84.7	88.1	86.4
<b>Germany</b>	75.1	78.6	76.8
<b>Greece</b>	83.5	89.9	86.7
<b>Hungary</b>	82.9	85.8	84.3
<b>Ireland<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>87.9</b>	<b>90.9</b>	<b>89.4</b>
<b>Italy</b>	73.6	82.3	77.9
<b>Latvia</b>	80.9	90.7	85.7
<b>Lithuania</b>	88.3	91.7	89.3

<b>Luxembourg</b>	72.6	81.3	71.5
<b>Malta</b>	72.6	79.9	73.6
<b>Netherlands</b>	74.4	82	79.0
<b>Poland</b>	86	93.6	89.8
<b>Portugal</b>	63.7	76.6	67.5
<b>Romania</b>	78.5	81	79.6
<b>Slovakia</b>	90.5	92	92.7
<b>Slovenia</b>	89.1	94.4	90.1
<b>Spain</b>	58.4	69.4	62.8
<b>Sweden</b>	84.6	87.9	86.4
<b>United Kingdom</b>	80.9	84.8	81.8

Table 5.2 presents data on early school leavers from 2005 to 2013. It shows a decrease in the proportion of early school leavers from 12.5% in 2005 to 8.4% in 2013 (however, some of this decrease may be due to changes in methodology). The proportion of female early school leavers decreased from 9.5% to 6.9% over the same period and the proportion of males decreased from 15.4% to 9.8%.

<b>Table 5.2: Early school leavers as a percentage of 18 to 24 year olds classified by sex, 2005 to 2013</b>									
<b>% of persons</b>									
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
<b>Males</b>	15.4	15.2	14.6	14.5	14.7	13.4	12.8	11.2	9.8
<b>Females</b>	9.5	9	8.4	8	8.6	9.6	8.8	8.2	6.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>12.1</b>	<b>11.6</b>	<b>11.3</b>	<b>11.7</b>	<b>11.5</b>	<b>10.8</b>	<b>9.7</b>	<b>8.4</b>

Table 5.3 overleaf presents the latest available figures for all EU27 member states which are for 2013. These show that the proportion of early school leavers in Ireland in 2013 (8.4%) compares favourably to the EU-28 average of 12% and ranks Ireland as eleventh in the list of EU member states.



**Table 5.3: Early school leavers<sup>1</sup> in EU member states classified by sex, 2013**

	% of persons		
	Males	Females	Total
<b>EU-28</b>	<b>14.4</b>	<b>10.9</b>	<b>12.0</b>
Austria	7.7	7.0	7.3
Belgium	13.2	8.7	11.0
Bulgaria	12.3	12.7	12.5
Croatia	5.5	3.4	4.5
Cyprus	14.8	4.2	9.1
Czech Republic	5.4	5.5	5.4
Denmark	9.9	6.2	8.0
Estonia	13.6	5.8	9.7
Finland	10.4	8.3	9.3
France	10.7	8.7	9.7
Germany	10.4	9.3	9.9
Greece	12.7	7.5	10.1
Hungary	12.5	11.1	11.8
Ireland <sup>2</sup>	<b>9.8</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>8.4</b>
Italy	20.2	13.7	17.0
Latvia	13.6	5.8	9.8
Lithuania	7.8	4.7	6.3
Luxembourg	8.4	3.7	6.1
Malta	23.2	18.4	20.8
Netherlands	10.9	7.4	9.2
Poland	7.9	3.2	5.6
Portugal	23.4	14.3	18.9
Romania	18.6	16.0	17.3
Slovakia	6.7	6.1	6.4
Slovenia	5.0	2.6	3.9
Spain	27.2	19.8	23.6
Sweden	7.9	6.2	7.1
United Kingdom	13.7	11.2	12.4

Source: Eurostat. ([epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu))

<sup>1</sup>Early school leavers are defined as persons aged 18 to 24 whose highest level of education attained is lower secondary or below and have not received education (either formal or non formal) in the four weeks prior to the survey.

<sup>2</sup>The Eurostat figures for Ireland (and other countries) are based on an annual average for 2013 and are rounded to the nearest whole number

The Post Primary Pupil's Database gives the Department the capacity to track pupils at various stages through the second-level system. Together with State exams data, it provides a comprehensive picture of a pupil's movement through second-level education.

Individual pupil data are supplied by schools, using a unique pupil identifier. More recently, with the co-operation of the schools, the Department has been in a position to use the Personal Public Service Number (PPSN) as the means to identify and track the vast majority of second level pupils.

The methodology employed takes the cohorts of entrants to the first year of the junior cycle in each year and tracks these cohorts through each subsequent year of their participation in State-aided second-level schools.

Approximately half of each entry cohort progress from Junior Certificate Year 3 straight to Senior Cycle Year 1, while the other half progress from Junior Certificate Year 3 to Transition Year. Table A shows the typical pathways taken by the 2008 cohort (a small number will take a different path if a year is repeated etc)

**Table A: Entry Cohorts classified by the academic year they were enrolled in each programme and by the year they sat the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate examinations**

Entry Cohort	Junior Certificate, Year 1	Junior Certificate, Year 2	Junior Certificate, Year 3	Junior Certificate 'sits'	Transition Year	Senior Cycle, Year 1	Senior Cycle, Year 2	Leaving Certificate 'sits'
2008	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011	2011/2012	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013
				2012		2012/2013	2013/2014	2014

### **Technical points**

The following technical points should be noted:

- For the purposes of the retentions process, pupils are assigned to the school they first entered even though they may have subsequently changed school.
- Should two schools have amalgamated during the time under consideration, their pupils are assigned to the newly created school. If a school closes and is amalgamated with another school, pupils are assigned to the new school.
- When a school closes and there is no associated amalgamation, the school and pupils in the school are excluded from the retentions process.
- A small cohort of 390 students that were first time entrants in 2008 were still in the school system at the end of the retentions analysis period. These typically were students who had completed transition year and also repeated a year, or in some cases the student had repeated more than one year of school, meaning that they had not completed their second level education by the end of the 2013/2014 academic year. These students were excluded from the analysis.
- A further adjustment is made to the initial cohort to take into account those from the cohort who may have emigrated or deceased in the period under consideration. The early leaver's information on the post primary pupil's database is used for this purpose.