



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Retention rates of pupils in second-level schools

Entry cohort 2013

November 2020

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Introduction

This is the twelfth publication of the annual retention rates report covering the progression of the first year entry cohort for each academic year. The reports cover 22 years, beginning with the 1991 cohort, building a continuous time series recording the trend of retention rates in post-primary schools. The 2013 retention rates to the Leaving Certificate are a measure of the percentage of pupils who entered the first year of post-primary schools in 2013 and who sat the Leaving Certificate examination in 2018 or 2019.

The progression of pupils through the education system was measured by analysing the Department's Post-Primary Online Database (P-POD) along with data on official participation in the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate state examinations provided by the State Examinations Commission (SEC). The starting cohort was also adjusted for emigration, deaths and those still in school in September 2019. Pupils who leave state-aided schools and continue their education in non-aided providers of education are captured through their participation as external candidates in official examinations (as provided by the SEC).

These retention rates do not address participation in important educational pathways outside the official school system, such as Youthreach and apprenticeship training, or early entry into the labour force. Pupils leaving school are regarded as early school leavers for this report. If participation in alternative educational routes, as measured by the completion of the National Framework of Qualifications levels of 4, 5 and 6 were included, alternative measures of retention could be compiled.

Executive summary

- In 2013, there were 60,784 enrolments in the first year of the Junior Cycle programme in second-level schools. This was adjusted for emigration and deaths (870) and for pupils remaining in school for the 2019–20 academic year (402) giving an adjusted cohort of 59,524 pupils.
- Of these, 91.2 per cent sat the Leaving Certificate examination in 2018 or 2019, while 97.5 per cent sat the Junior Certificate examination in 2016 or 2017.
- This retention rate to the Leaving Certificate of 91.2 per cent was a fall of 0.3 percentage points on the 2012 cohort when it stood at 91.5 per cent. The retention rate for males decreased by 0.4 percentage points from 89.9 per cent to 89.5 per cent. For females, the decrease was 0.3 percentage points from 93.1 per cent to 92.8 per cent.
- The gender gap between males and females stood at 3.3 percentage points, up slightly from 3.2 percentage points for the 2012 cohort.

- Voluntary secondary schools continued to have the highest retention rate with 93.2 per cent of pupils sitting their Leaving Certificate; community and comprehensive schools had a rate of 90.0 per cent, while vocational schools stood at 87.9 per cent.
- Schools participating in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) scheme saw their retention rate fall to 83.8 per cent, down from 84.7 per cent for the 2012 cohort. The gap in retention between DEIS and non-DEIS schools is 9.3 percentage points, higher than the same measure in the 2012 cohort, when it stood at 8.7 percentage points.

Retention rates at educational milestones

The progression of the 2013 cohort through the education system is presented in Tables 1a and 1b. Of the adjusted (59,524) starting cohort, 58,051 sat their Junior Certificate, a loss of 1,473 pupils giving a retention rate to the Junior Certificate of 97.5 per cent.

Between the Junior Certificate and the start of the Senior Cycle, a further 963 pupils failed to return to school, giving a retention rate of 95.9 per cent for fifth year. Between fifth and sixth year a further 2,167 pupils failed to return, and of the 54,921 pupils who did enter sixth year a further 656 failed to sit their Leaving Certificate in either 2018 or 2019.

When examined by gender, 2,103 female and 3,156 male students did not sit their Leaving Certificate. For both genders, the highest number of early school leavers occurred between Senior Cycle Years 1 and 2 (fifth and sixth year) with losses of 993 girls and 1,174 boys. For females, overall 39 more students returned to sit the Leaving Certificate compared to the female students who failed to return although not attending sixth-year in state-aided schools.

Table 1a Retention rates, by milestones, by gender, 2013 Cohort

Milestone	Cohort progression			Retention rates (%)		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Entry Cohort	29,327	30,197	59,524	100	100	100
Junior Cycle Year 2	29,123	29,954	59,077	99.3	99.2	99.2
Junior Cycle Year 3	28,985	29,759	58,744	98.8	98.5	98.7
Junior Certificate	28,675	29,376	58,051	97.8	97.3	97.5
Senior Cycle Year 1	28,178	28,910	57,088	96.1	95.7	95.9
Senior Cycle Year 2	27,185	27,736	54,921	92.7	91.9	92.3
Leaving Certificate	27,224	27,041	54,265	92.8	89.5	91.2

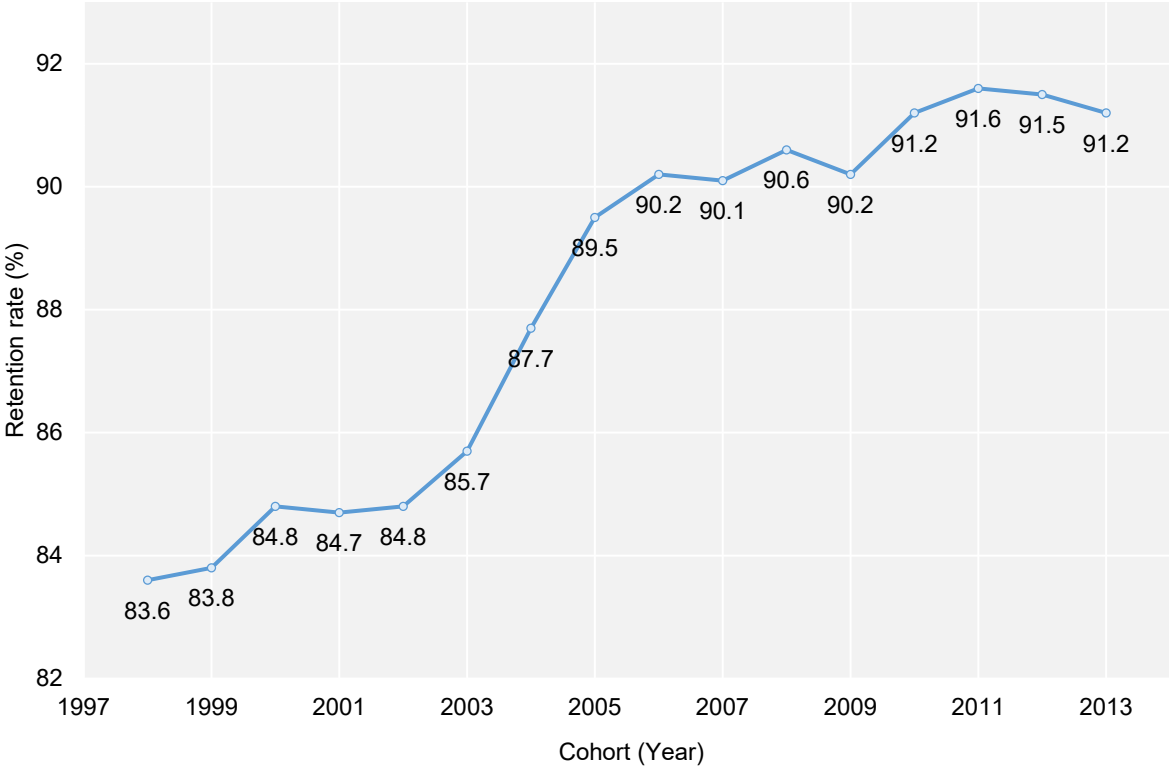
Table 1b Early school leavers, by milestones, by gender, 2013 Cohort

Milestone	Cohort progression			Leaving rates (%)		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Junior Cycle Year 2	204	243	447	0.7	0.8	0.8
Junior Cycle Year 3	138	195	333	1.2	1.5	1.3
Junior Certificate	310	383	693	2.2	2.7	2.5
Senior Cycle Year 1	497	466	963	3.9	4.3	4.1
Senior Cycle Year 2	993	1,174	2,167	7.3	8.1	7.7
Leaving Certificate	-39	695	656	7.2	10.5	8.8

Retention rates over time

Figure 1 presents the retention rate over time. The 1998 entry cohort had a retention rate of 83.6 per cent. Retention rates increased steadily reaching a high of 91.6 per cent for the 2011 cohort, before falling to 91.2 for this most recent cohort.

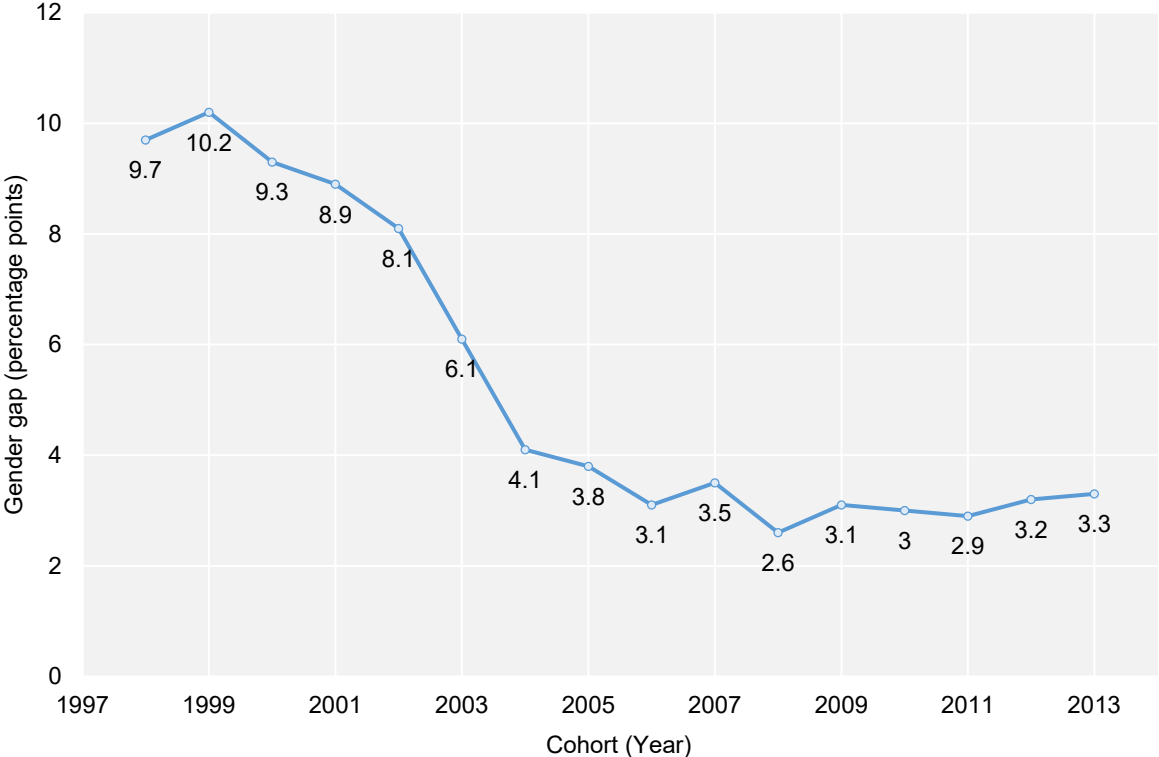
Figure 1 Retention rates, entry cohort 1998-2013



Gender gap in retention rates

The retention rate for males in the 2013 cohort stood at 89.5 per cent, with females at 92.8 per cent, a gender gap of 3.3 percentage points. The gap in retention between males and females, as illustrated in Figure 2, narrowed steadily between 1997 and 2011. This was most noticeable between 1999 and 2006, before generally stabilising thereafter.

Figure 2 Gender gap in retention rates, entry cohort 1998-2013



Retention rates by school type

The post-primary education sector in Ireland comprises three main school types. The largest group, voluntary secondary schools, accounted for 33,007 of the 59,524 pupils in the 2013 cohort. These schools are privately owned and managed, can be fee-charging or part of the free scheme providing both academic and practical subjects.

The second group, community and comprehensive schools, have boards of management largely representative of local interests. They typically provide a wide range of both academic and vocational subjects and accounted for 9,970 pupils in the 2013 cohort.

Vocational schools are managed by sub-committees of local Education and Training Boards and historically focussed on technical education, but today provide academic and practical subjects as well as often offering adult education. They accounted for 16,547 pupils in the 2013 cohort.

Table 2 Retention rates, by milestones, by school type, by gender, 2013 cohort

School type	Gender	Entry cohort	Leaving Certificate	Early school leavers	Retention rate (%)
Voluntary Secondary	Female	17,317	16,237	1,080	93.8
	Male	15,690	14,510	1,180	92.5
	Total	33,007	30,747	2,260	93.2
Community & Comprehensive	Female	4,598	4,261	337	92.7
	Male	5,372	4,709	663	87.7
	Total	9,970	8,970	1,000	90.0
Vocational	Female	7,412	6,726	686	90.7
	Male	9,135	7,822	1,313	85.6
	Total	16,547	14,548	1,999	87.9

Table 2 shows the cohorts by school type, gender and retention rates. The retention rates for voluntary secondary schools stood at 93.2 per cent for the 2013 cohort, the highest of the three school types, 2.0 percentage points above the national average. The rate for females was 93.8 per cent and 92.5 per cent for males, a gender gap of 1.3 percentage points.

The retention rates for community and comprehensive schools stood at 90.0 per cent, 1.2 percentage points below the national average. The rate for females was 92.7 per cent and for boys 87.7 per cent, a gender gap of 5.0 percentage points.

Vocational schools had the lowest retention rate to the Leaving Certificate at 87.9 per cent, some 3.3 percentage points below the national average. The rate for girls was 90.7 per cent, while for boys it stood at 85.6 per cent, a gender gap of 5.1 percentage points. The difference in retention for males between voluntary secondary and vocational schools was 6.9 percentage points.

Retention rates by DEIS status

In the 2018 academic year, there were 198 DEIS schools out of a total of 722 post-primary schools, with 74,142 students enrolled out of a total of 362,899 enrolments. The DEIS programme is the Department's main policy initiative aimed at addressing the educational disadvantage. DEIS schools are provided with additional supports to improve outcomes for pupils at risk of educational disadvantage.

Table 3 shows for the 2013 cohort that the retention rate to the Leaving Certificate of DEIS schools was 83.9 per cent, while for non-DEIS schools it was 93.1 per cent, a gap of 9.3 percentage points. The comparable results for the 2012 cohort were 84.7 per cent for DEIS, and 93.4 per cent for non-DEIS with a gap of 8.7 percentage points.

When looked at by school milestones, the data shows the largest loss of pupils from the educational system appears between fifth and sixth year. This resulted in 655 pupils who attended DEIS schools and 1,512 pupils who attended non-DEIS schools failing to return. Some of these students will continue education through Youthreach, apprenticeships and further education.

Table 3 Retention rates, by milestones, by DEIS status, 2013 cohort

Milestone	DEIS		Non-DEIS		All Schools	
	Pupils	Retention rate (%)	Pupils	Retention rate (%)	Pupils	Retention rate (%)
Entry cohort	12,573	100	46,951	100	59,524	100
Junior Cycle Year 2	12,423	98.8	46,654	99.4	59,077	99.2
Junior Cycle Year 3	12,298	97.8	46,446	98.9	58,744	98.7
Junior Certificate	12,083	96.1	45,968	97.9	58,051	97.5
Senior Cycle Year 1	11,788	93.8	45,300	96.5	57,088	95.9
Senior Cycle Year 2	11,133	88.5	43,788	93.3	54,921	92.3
Leaving Certificate	10,542	83.8	43,723	93.1	54,265	91.2

Table 4 presents the DEIS analysis by gender and shows that retention for males in DEIS schools stood at 81.4 per cent for the 2013 cohort. For females, in DEIS schools the retention rates gradually decline to 86.9 per cent losing 198 students before the Leaving Certificate in sixth year. In non-DEIS schools, 237 females do not enter state-aided sixth year schools but do return to sit their Leaving Certificate with 94.2 per cent.

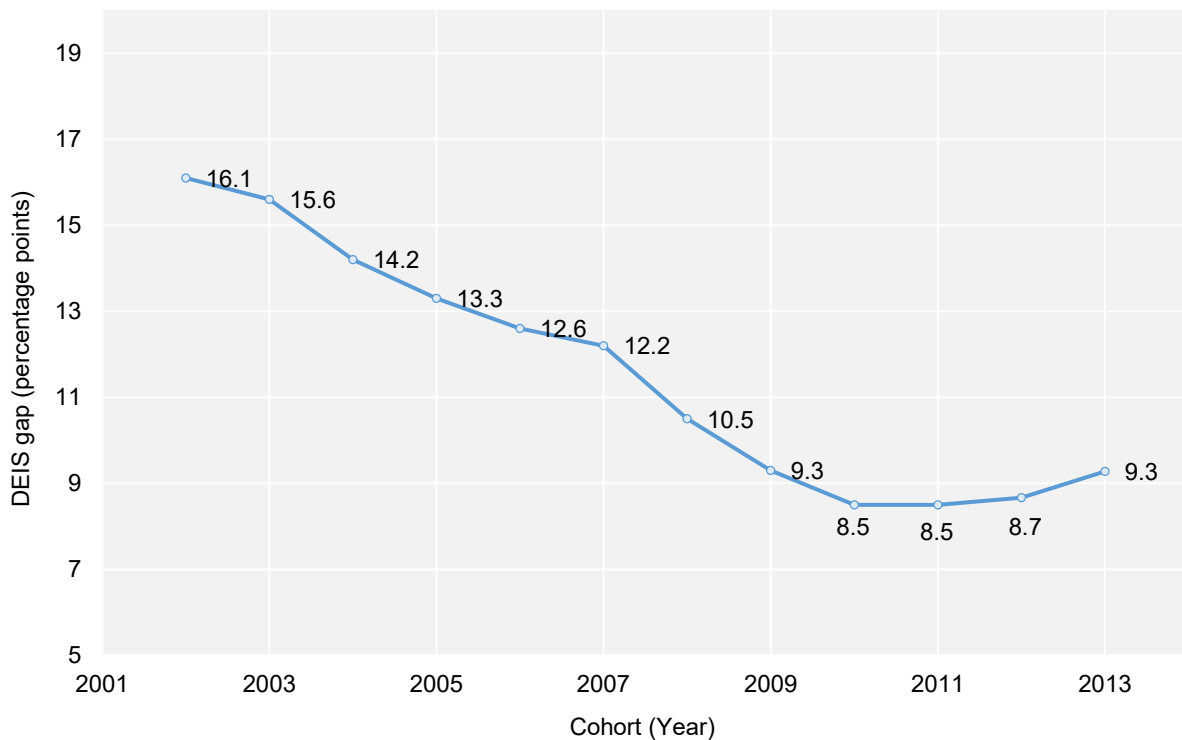
Table 4 Retention rates, by milestones, by DEIS status, by gender, 2013 cohort

Milestone	DEIS				Non-DEIS			
	Female		Male		Female		Male	
	Pupils	Retention rate (%)	Pupils	Retention rate (%)	Pupils	Retention rate (%)	Pupils	Retention rate (%)
Entry cohort	5,517	100	7,056	100	23,810	100	23,141	100
Junior Cycle Year 2	5,457	98.9	6,966	98.7	23,666	99.4	22,988	99.3
Junior Cycle Year 3	5,418	98.2	6,880	97.5	23,567	99.0	22,879	98.9
Junior Certificate	5,338	96.8	6,745	95.6	23,337	98.0	22,631	97.8
Senior Cycle Year 1	5,238	94.9	6,550	92.8	22,940	96.3	22,360	96.6
Senior Cycle Year 2	4,995	90.5	6,138	87.0	22,190	93.2	21,598	93.3
Leaving Certificate	4,797	86.9	5,745	81.4	22,427	94.2	21,296	92.0

Achievement gap

The achievement gap in retention rates between DEIS and non-DEIS schools, referred to as the DEIS gap, fell steadily between the 2000 and 2011 cohorts from 16.8 percentage points to 8.5 percentage points. This year’s results show a marginal increase in the gap to 9.3 percentage points for the 2013 cohort similar to the 2009 cohort (Figure 3). The reason for the increase in the gap for the past two years may be due to internal educational factors, increased labour force opportunities, alternative training pathways or a combination of all three elements.

Figure 3 DEIS gap, by retention rate, entry cohort 2002-2013



Retention rates by county

When examined by county (Table 6) the results shows the highest retention rate to the Leaving Certificate was in Mayo at 93.9 per cent, followed by Kilkenny (93.6%) and Cork (93.5%). The lowest rate was found in Longford at 86.2 per cent. Note that as the total cohort in some counties was small the retention rate is liable to fluctuate based on small changes from year to year.

Table 6 Retention rates, by county, 2013 cohort

Administrative county	Pupils	Retention rate (%)
Carlow	904	90.6
Cavan	882	89.2
Clare	1,369	92.8
Cork City	1,938	91.1
Cork	4,709	93.5
Donegal	2,228	91.2
Dublin City	4,979	89.3
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	2,393	93.0
Fingal	3,647	90.9
Galway City	973	87.6
Galway	2,317	93.1
Kerry	1,832	91.9
Kildare	3,118	91.3
Kilkenny	1,242	93.6
Laois	1012	89.3
Leitrim	382	91.9
Limerick City and County	2,644	91.8
Longford	662	86.3
Louth	2,091	90.0
Mayo	1,724	93.9
Meath	2,459	93.0
Monaghan	870	91.4
Offaly	1,046	89.0
Roscommon	555	91.4
Sligo	831	93.3
South Dublin	3,800	88.6
Tipperary	2,258	90.9
Waterford City and County	1,492	92.5
Westmeath	1,422	90.9
Wexford	2,004	90.8
Wicklow	1,741	88.2

International Comparisons

Table 7 presents results on the level of education for persons aged 20 to 24, by gender, for selected countries in the EU as derived from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) Labour Force Survey for 2019. The data shows for the EU as a whole that 83.9 per cent of people were educated to at least upper secondary, while in Ireland the comparable figure was 94.1 per cent, the fourth highest in the EU.

Table 7 Percentage of persons aged 20 to 24 with at least upper secondary education in the EU Member States, classified by gender, 2019

Geography	Upper secondary education (%)		
	Female	Male	Total
EU (28 countries)	86.4	81.4	83.9
Euro area (19 countries)	85.4	79.7	82.5
Croatia	97.1	97.5	97.3
Montenegro	95.3	95.1	95.2
Greece	95.7	93.4	94.5
Ireland	94.7	93.6	94.1
Lithuania	94.1	91.0	92.5
Slovenia	93.5	91.5	92.4
Poland	93.2	88.4	90.8
Slovakia	89.9	89.9	89.9
France	90.7	86.4	88.5
Finland	88.6	87.9	88.2
Austria	90.3	84.4	87.3
Latvia	88.9	85.5	87.1
United Kingdom	88.0	84.0	85.9
Sweden	88.1	81.4	84.6
Romania	83.0	83.8	83.4
Portugal	87.2	78.6	82.9
Netherlands	85.6	78.9	82.2
Italy	84.5	79.7	82.0
Norway	84.6	77.2	80.8
Germany	80.2	75.0	77.5
Spain	79.7	68.5	74.0
Iceland	75.9	58.6	66.7

Data sourced from Eurostat.

Appendix A: Methodology and Technical Notes

Method

The recorded progression of pupils through educational milestones was carried out through an examination of the P-POD. These milestones were further validated by the State Examinations Commission records of official participation of the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate state examinations. This provided a collective continuity of progression for a pupil through the state-aided schooling system.

Individual data for pupils were supplied by schools using a unique pupil identifier (UPI). The UPI remains consistent through amalgamations, closures or movement between schools. Recently, with the co-operation of the schools, the Department has used the Personal Public Service Number (PPSN) to identify and record the majority of second-level pupils.

The first year entrants to the Junior Cycle recorded on the 30th September 2013 (known as the School Census) became the raw cohort for the academic year of 2013–14. The raw cohort was adjusted for deaths, emigration and pupils remaining within the schooling system by 2019 to become the entry cohort. This information was recorded by individual schools onto P-POD retrospectively. Progression to the next year of the Junior Cycle was confirmed through the School Census 2014–15 using the UPI or PPSN. This was repeated for each year recording the progression of a pupil until 2019. Throughout the progression of milestones, a total of 6,874 pupils missed a milestone but 1,615 returned at a later milestone to continue within the schooling system to the Leaving Certificate examination.

The SEC provided records of pupils' participation in the state examinations. This information was cross-referenced to assess a pupil's progression through the school cycles with associated milestone examinations. Pupils from the entry cohort that were not present on P-POD before the final year of senior cycle or did not sit the Leaving Certificate were considered early school leavers.

Programmes and examinations

The entry cohort relates to a student entering the Junior Cycle programme or the Junior Certificate Schools Programme. The Junior Cycle year 2 or 3 is a continuation of the chosen programme. The Junior Certificate examination comprises of a student sitting either the Established Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate Schools Programme or elements of the reformed phased introduction of the Junior Cycle examination.

The Senior Cycle 1 refers to a student choosing to enter into the Established Leaving Certificate programme, the Leaving Certificate Applied programme or the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. The Senior Cycle year 2 is a continuation of the chosen programme. The Leaving

Certificate examination relates to a student sitting the Established Leaving Certificate examination or the Leaving Certificate Applied examination. External Leaving Certificate examinations sits were counted if a student initially enrolled with a post-primary school.

Schools

Pupils were assigned to the first school they registered in; their retention to the Leaving Certificate was associated with that school type regardless of any subsequent moves by the pupil. If schools amalgamated during the period of analysis, from 2013 to 2019, their pupils were assigned to the newly created school. Similarly, where a school closed and was amalgamated with an existing school, pupils were assigned to the new school.

Students

A cohort of 402 pupils from the 2013 entry cohort were still in schooling at the end of the retention analysis period. Generally, these were pupils who had completed the Junior Cycle, Transition Year and also repeated at least one academic year. These pupils had not completed their second-level education by the end of the 2018–19 academic year and were excluded from the adjusted cohort. The raw cohort was also adjusted to exclude pupils who emigrated or deceased during the period of analysis. This information was available from the P-POD maintained directly by school administrators.

Pupils who entered after 2013, either from non-state aided schools, through immigration, or for some other reason, were not included in the adjusted entry cohort. Pupils who repeated first year of the 2013 entry cohort were excluded from the analysis but will be included in the next entry cohort (2014).

Administrative city and county councils

In 2014, the City and County Councils in Limerick were amalgamated to form Limerick City and County Council, the City and County Councils in Waterford were amalgamated to form Waterford City and County Council, and the County Councils of North Tipperary and South Tipperary were amalgamated to form Tipperary County Council. This breaks the time series for these administrative county councils since 2014.

DEIS

The DEIS programme was introduced to selected schools in the 2006–07 academic year. Previous retention reports have used the current DEIS school designation retrospectively as a benchmark for pupils since the 2001* entry cohort. Subsequently, the DEIS school designation was applied to pupils relating to the current DEIS school status in the latest final year.

*https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/retention/stat_retention_rates_second_level_1991_2004.pdf