



An Roinn Oideachais  
Department of Education

# Retention rates of pupils in second-level schools

## Entry cohort 2014

November 2021

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## Introduction

This report is the 13th publication of the annual retention rates covering the progression of the first year entry cohort through each academic year. The reports cover 23 years, beginning with the 1991 cohort, building a continuous time series recording the trend of retention rates in post-primary schools. The retention rates to the Leaving Certificate measure the percentage of pupils who entered the first year of post-primary schools in 2014 and who sat the Leaving Certificate examination in 2019 or 2020. Additionally, pupils were provided calculated grades in 2020 as a substitute for the Leaving Certificate examination.

The progression of pupils through the education system was measured by analysing the Department of Education'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 2020. 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 before the Leaving Certificate examination are regarded as early school leavers for the purposes of this report. If participation in alternative educational routes, as measured by completing the National Framework of Qualifications levels of 4, 5 and 6, were included, alternative retention measures could be compiled.

## Executive summary

- In 2014, there were 62,364 enrolments in the first year of the Junior Cycle programme in second-level schools. This initial cohort was adjusted for emigration and deaths (865) and pupils remaining in school for the 2019–20 academic year (351), giving an adjusted cohort of 61,161 pupils.
- Of these, 91.5 per cent received either a calculated grade in 2020 or sat the Leaving Certificate examination in 2019 or 2020 (November), while 97.6 per cent sat the Junior Certificate examination in 2017 or 2018.
- This retention rate to the Leaving Certificate of 91.5 per cent represents an increase of 0.3 percentage points on the 2013 cohort when it stood at 91.2 per cent. Most of the gains were on the female side; there was an increase of 0.8 percentage points (from 92.8% to 93.6%) for females, while the rate for males remained steady at 89.5 per cent.
- Accordingly, the gender gap between males and females has risen to 4.1 percentage points, up from 3.3 percentage points for the 2013 cohort.

- Voluntary secondary schools continued to have the highest retention rate with 93.1 per cent of pupils sitting their Leaving Certificate; community and comprehensive schools had a rate of 91.0 per cent, up from 90.0 per cent last year, while education and training board (ETB) schools stood at 88.9 per cent, up from 87.9 per cent.
- The retention rate for schools participating in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme increased to 84.8 per cent, a 1.0 percentage point increase on last year when it stood at 83.8 per cent. The gap in retention between DEIS and non-DEIS schools was 8.6 percentage points, an improvement on the 2013 cohort when it stood at 9.3 percentage points.
- In summary, the 2014 cohort have seen gains in retention from the previous year with increases in females from DEIS and ETB schools.

## Retention rates at educational milestones

The progression of the 2014 cohort through the education system is presented in Tables 1a and 1b. Of the adjusted (61,161) starting cohort, 59,664 sat their Junior Certificate, a loss of 1,497 pupils giving a retention rate to the Junior Certificate of 97.6 per cent.

Between the Junior Certificate and the start of the Senior Cycle, a further 1,234 pupils failed to return to school, giving a retention rate of 95.5 per cent for fifth year. Between fifth and sixth year, an additional 2,065 pupils did not return. Of the 56,365 pupils who did enter sixth year, a further 373 did not register for a calculated grade or failed to sit their Leaving Certificate in either 2019 or 2020.

When examined by gender, 1,914 female and 3,255 male students did not sit their Leaving Certificate. The highest number of early school leavers occurred between Senior Cycle Years 1 and 2 (fifth and sixth year) for both genders, with losses of 858 girls and 1,207 boys. For females 190 more students returned to sit the Leaving Certificate than were enrolled in sixth-year in state-aided schools as some students complete their education with non-aided providers.

Table 1a Retention rates, by milestones, by gender, 2014 Cohort

Milestone	Cohort progression			Retention rates (%)		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Entry Cohort	30,105	31,056	61,161	100	100	100
Junior Cycle Year 2	29,919	30,817	60,736	99.4	99.2	99.3
Junior Cycle Year 3	29,788	30,586	60,374	98.9	98.5	98.7
Junior Certificate	29,459	30,205	59,664	97.9	97.3	97.6
Senior Cycle Year 1	28,859	29,571	58,430	95.9	95.2	95.5
Senior Cycle Year 2	28,001	28,364	56,365	93.0	91.3	92.2
Leaving Certificate	28,191	27,801	55,992	93.6	89.5	91.5

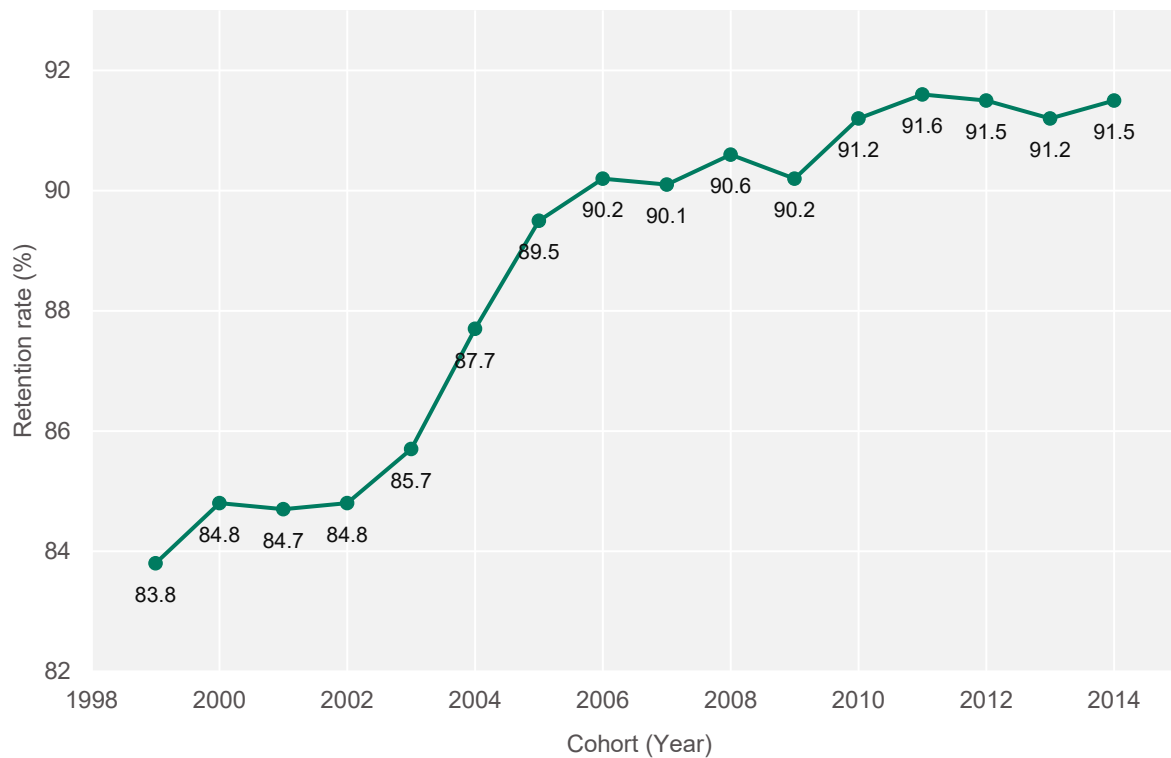
Table 1b Early school leavers, Retention rates, by milestones, by gender, 2014 Cohort

Milestone	Cohort progression			Retention rates (%)		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Junior Cycle Year 2	186	239	425	0.6	0.8	0.7
Junior Cycle Year 3	131	231	362	1.1	1.5	1.3
Junior Certificate	329	381	710	2.1	2.7	2.4
Senior Cycle Year 1	600	634	1,234	4.1	4.8	4.5
Senior Cycle Year 2	858	1,207	2,065	7	8.7	7.8
Leaving Certificate	-190	563	373	6.4	10.5	8.5
Total	1,914	3,255	5,169			

## Retention rates over time

Figure 1 presents the retention rate over time. The 1999 entry cohort had a retention rate of 83.8 per cent. Retention rates increased steadily, reaching a high of 91.6 per cent for the 2011 cohort, stabilising to 91.5 for the most recent cohort.

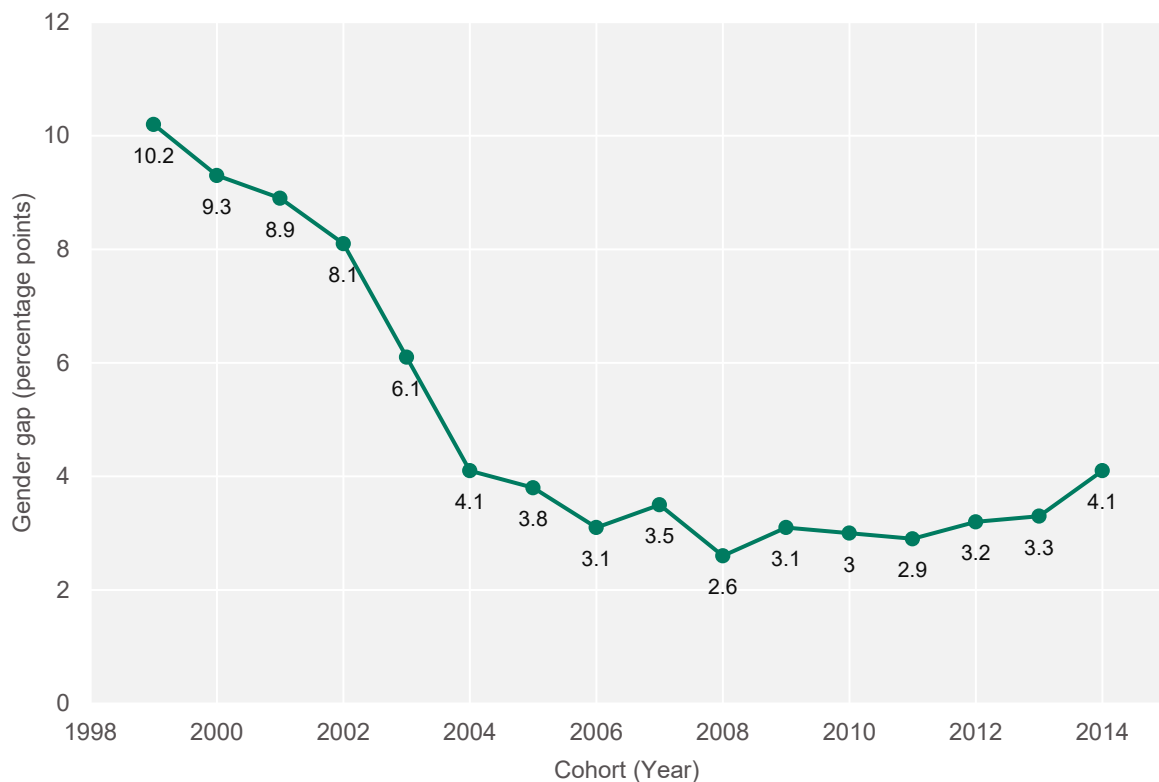
Figure 1 Retention rates, entry cohort 1999-2014



## Gender gap in retention rates

The retention rate for males for the 2014 cohort stood at 89.5 per cent, the same as the previous male cohort. Females increased by 0.8 percentage points to 93.6 per cent, increasing the gender gap from 3.3 to 4.1 percentage points. The gap in retention between males and females, as illustrated in Figure 2, narrowed steadily between 1997 and 2011. The gender gap has now returned to a level previously seen in the 2002 cohort.

Figure 2 Gender gap in retention rates, entry cohort 1999-2014





## 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 33,167 of the 61,161 pupils in the 2014 cohort. These schools are privately owned and managed, which can be fee-charging or part of the free scheme providing academic and practical subjects.

The second group, community and comprehensive schools, have boards of management broadly representative of local interests. They typically provide a wide range of academic and vocational subjects and accounted for 10,313 pupils in the 2014 cohort.

ETB 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. They accounted for 17,681 pupils in the 2014 cohort.

Table 2 Retention rates, by milestones, by school type, by gender, 2014 cohort

School type	Gender	Entry cohort	Leaving Certificate	Early school leavers	Retention rate (%)
Voluntary Secondary	Female	17,202	16,249	953	94.5
	Male	15,965	14,637	1,328	91.7
	Total	33,167	30,886	2,281	93.1
Community & Comprehensive	Female	4,872	4,547	325	93.3
	Male	5,441	4,838	603	88.9
	Total	10,313	9,385	928	91.0
Education & Training Board	Female	8,031	7,395	636	92.1
	Male	9,650	8,326	1,324	86.3
	Total	17,681	15,721	1,960	88.9

Table 2 shows the cohorts by school type, gender and retention rates. The retention rates for voluntary secondary schools stood at 93.1 per cent for the 2014 cohort, the highest of the three school types, 1.6 percentage points above the national average. The rate for females was 94.5 per cent and 91.7 per cent for males, a gender gap of 2.8 percentage points within voluntary secondary schools.

The retention rates for community and comprehensive schools stood at 91.0 per cent, 0.5 percentage points below the national average. The rate for females was 93.3 per cent, and for males was 88.9 per cent, a gender gap of 4.4 percentage points.

While ETB schools continue to have the lowest retention rate to the Leaving Certificate at 88.9 per cent, which is 2.6 percentage points below the national average, they also showed the most significant gains rising by 1.0 percentage points from the 2013 cohort (87.9%). The rate for girls increased by 1.4 percentage points (from 90.7% to 92.1%), while for boys, it rose by 0.7 percentage points (from 85.6% to 86.3%).

## Retention rates by DEIS status

In the 2019 academic year, there were 198 DEIS schools out of 723 total post-primary schools, with 75,960 students enrolled out of 371,455 total 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 2014 cohort that the retention rate to the Leaving Certificate of DEIS schools was 84.8 per cent, while for non-DEIS schools, it was 93.4 per cent, a gap of 8.6 percentage points. The comparable results for the 2013 cohort were 83.8 per cent for DEIS and 93.1 per cent for non-DEIS, with a gap of 9.3 percentage points.

When looked at by school milestones, the data shows the most considerable loss of pupils from the educational system appears between fifth and sixth year. This loss resulted in 644 pupils who attended DEIS schools and 1,421 who attended non-DEIS schools failing to return in 2018 or 2019. Some of these students will continue education through Youthreach, apprenticeships and further education.

Table 3 Retention rates, by milestones, by DEIS status, 2014 cohort

Milestone	DEIS		Non-DEIS		All Schools	
	Pupils	Retention rate (%)	Pupils	Retention rate (%)	Pupils	Retention rate (%)
Entry cohort	13,039	100	48,122	100	61,161	100
Junior Cycle Year 2	12,889	98.8	47,847	99.4	60,736	99.3
Junior Cycle Year 3	12,773	98.0	47,601	98.9	60,374	98.7
Junior Certificate	12,552	96.3	47,112	97.9	59,664	97.6
Senior Cycle Year 1	12,188	93.5	46,242	96.1	58,430	95.5
Senior Cycle Year 2	11,544	88.5	44,821	93.1	56,365	92.2
Leaving Certificate	11,063	84.8	44,929	93.4	55,992	91.5

Table 4 presents the DEIS analysis by gender and shows that retention for males in DEIS schools stood at 82.2 per cent for the 2014 cohort, and for females at 88.2. In non-DEIS schools the equivalent figures were 91.8 for males and 94.9 for females.

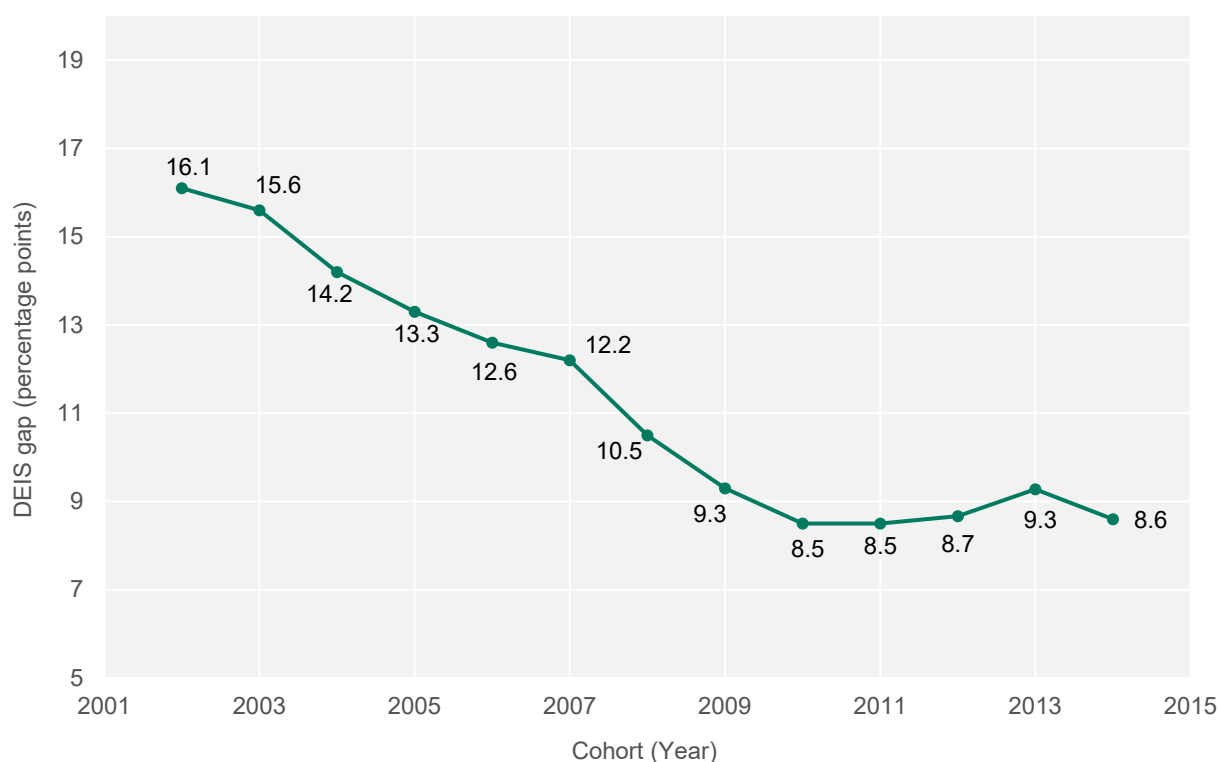
Table 4 Retention rates, by milestones, by DEIS status, by gender, 2014 cohort

Milestone	DEIS				Non-DEIS			
	Female		Male		Female		Male	
	Pupils	Retention rate (%)	Pupils	Retention rate (%)	Pupils	Retention rate (%)	Pupils	Retention rate (%)
Entry cohort	5,789	100	7,250	100	24,316	100	23,806	100
Junior Cycle Year 2	5,727	98.9	7,162	98.8	24,192	99.5	23,655	99.4
Junior Cycle Year 3	5,694	98.4	7,079	97.6	24,094	99.1	23,507	98.7
Junior Certificate	5,607	96.9	6,945	95.8	23,852	98.1	23,260	97.7
Senior Cycle Year 1	5,509	95.2	6,679	92.1	23,350	96.0	22,892	96.2
Senior Cycle Year 2	5,304	91.6	6,240	86.1	22,697	93.3	22,124	92.9
Leaving Certificate	5,107	88.2	5,956	82.2	23,084	94.9	21,845	91.8

## Gap in retention rates

The 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 16.1 percentage points to 8.5 percentage points. This year's results show a levelling in the DEIS gap to 8.6 percentage points for the 2014 cohort.

Figure 3 DEIS gap, by retention rate, entry cohort 2002-2014



## Retention rates by county

When examined by county (Table 5), the results show the highest retention rate to the Leaving Certificate was in Kilkenny at 93.7 per cent, followed by Limerick (93.6%) and Roscommon (93.5%). The lowest rate was found in Longford at 87.2 per cent. As the total cohort in some counties was small, the retention rate can fluctuate based on small changes from year to year.

Table 5 Retention rates, by milestones, by county, 2014 cohort

Administrative county	Entry Cohort	Junior Certificate		Leaving Certificate	
		Pupils	Retention rate (%)	Pupils	Retention rate (%)
Carlow	934	903	96.7	817	87.5
Cavan	881	842	95.6	783	88.9
Clare	1,513	1,465	96.8	1,392	92.0
Cork City	1,944	1,907	98.1	1,779	91.5
Cork	4,868	4,795	98.5	4,545	93.4
Donegal	2,318	2,279	98.3	2,122	91.5
Dublin City	5,093	4,984	97.9	4,557	89.5
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	2,423	2,376	98.1	2,257	93.1
Fingal	3,777	3,674	97.3	3,464	91.7
Galway City	963	934	97.0	859	89.2
Galway	2,347	2,287	97.4	2,138	91.1
Kerry	1,864	1,825	97.9	1,722	92.4
Kildare	3,262	3,176	97.4	3,009	92.2
Kilkenny	1,294	1,272	98.3	1,212	93.7
Laois	987	958	97.1	892	90.4
Leitrim	474	465	98.1	442	93.2
Limerick City and County	2,581	2,533	98.1	2,417	93.6
Longford	712	673	94.5	621	87.2
Louth	2,070	2,010	97.1	1,892	91.4
Mayo	1,695	1,663	98.1	1,574	92.9
Meath	2,687	2,609	97.1	2,491	92.7
Monaghan	826	810	98.1	748	90.6
Offaly	1,100	1,060	96.4	997	90.6
Roscommon	607	594	97.9	568	93.6
Sligo	786	781	99.4	730	92.9
South Dublin	3,893	3,761	96.6	3,479	89.4
Tipperary	2,292	2,243	97.9	2,116	92.3
Waterford City and County	1,526	1,497	98.1	1,414	92.7
Westmeath	1,469	1,434	97.6	1,344	91.5
Wexford	2,154	2,078	96.5	1,954	90.7
Wicklow	1,821	1,776	97.5	1,657	91.0

## International Comparisons

Table 6 presents results on the level of education for persons aged 20 to 24, by gender, for selected countries in the European Union (EU) as derived from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) Labour Force Survey for 2020. The data shows for the EU as a whole that 84.3 per cent of people were educated to at least upper secondary, while in Ireland, the comparable figure was 94.9 per cent, the joint third highest in the EU.

Table 6 Percentage of persons aged 20 to 24 with at least upper secondary education in the EU Member States, classified by gender, 2020

Geography	Upper secondary education (%)		
	Female	Male	Total
EU (27 countries)	87.1	81.5	84.3
Euro area (19 countries)	87.0	80.4	83.7
Croatia	97.8	96.7	97.2
Montenegro	96.2	96.1	96.1
Ireland	94.9	94.8	94.9
Greece	95.6	94.3	94.9
Slovenia	94.0	91.7	92.8
Lithuania	92.2	88.1	90.1
Poland	92.1	87.9	89.9
France	92.0	87.4	89.7
Slovakia	89.2	90.1	89.7
Finland	90.2	88.0	89.1
Latvia	91.0	85.1	88.0
Austria	89.7	82.6	86.1
Belgium	89.1	82.3	85.7
Portugal	90.6	80.1	85.3
Italy	86.3	80.6	83.3
Netherlands	86.2	80.1	83.1
Sweden	86.4	80.1	83.1
Romania	81.7	84.3	83.0
Norway	83.9	77.7	80.7
Germany	82.9	75.6	79.2
Spain	81.9	70.2	75.9
Iceland	75.5	61.2	68.1

Data sourced from Eurostat.

## Appendix: 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. Calculated grades were used as a substitute for the absence of Leaving Certificate examination in 2020. These collectively provided 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. 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 2014 (known as the school census) became the raw cohort for the academic year of 2014–15. The raw cohort was adjusted for deaths, emigration and pupils remaining within the schooling system by 2020 to become the entry cohort. This information was recorded by individual schools onto the P-POD retrospectively. Progression to the next year of the Junior Cycle was confirmed through the school census 2015–16 using the UPI or PPSN. The process was repeated for each year, recording the progression of a pupil until 2020. Throughout the progression of milestones, 6,902 pupils missed a milestone, but 1,733 returned at a later milestone to continue within the schooling system to the Leaving Certificate examination or provision of a calculated grade.

The SEC provided records of pupils' participation in the calculated grades process or 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 who did not sit the Leaving Certificate or did not receive a calculated grade 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 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 entering 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 or closed during the analysis period, from 2014 to 2020, their pupils were assigned to the newly created school or existing school.

### Students

A cohort of 351 pupils from the 2014 entry cohort remained in schooling at the end of the retention analysis period. Generally, these pupils had completed the Junior Cycle, Transition Year, and repeated at least one academic year. These pupils had not completed their second-level education by the end of the 2019–20 academic year and were excluded from the entry cohort. The raw cohort was also adjusted to exclude pupils who emigrated or were deceased during the analysis period. This information was available from the P-POD maintained directly by school administrators.

Pupils who entered after 2014, 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 2014 entry cohort were excluded from the analysis but included in the next entry cohort (2015).

### 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 restructuring has broken 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 retrospectively used the current DEIS school designation as a benchmark for pupils since the 2001\* entry cohort. Subsequently, the DEIS school designation was applied to pupils current DEIS school status in the latest final year.

\*Retention rates second level 1991-2004