CSL

CHILDREN'S SCHOOL LIVES

National longitudinal cohort study of primary schooling in Ireland

CHILDREN'S SCHOOL LIVES: EQUALITIES IN CHILDREN'S SCHOOL LIVES: THE IMPACT OF GENDER

UCD SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, DUBLIN
REPORT NO. 8B
2024

Funded by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)

UCD DUBLIN

NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

CSL

CHILDREN'S SCHOOL LIVES

National longitudinal cohort study of primary schooling in Ireland

EQUALITIES IN CHILDREN'S SCHOOL LIVES: THE IMPACT OF GENDER

UCD SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, DUBLIN. REPORT NO. 8B 2024

This report can be referenced as:
Devine, D; Ioannidou, O; Sloan, S; Martinez-Sainz, G; Symonds, J; Bohnert, M; Greaves, M; Moore, B; Smith, K; Crean, M; Davies, A; Jones, M; Barrow, N; Crummy, A; Gleasure, S; Samonova, E; Smith, A; Stynes, H; Donegan, A (2024).

SUPPORTED BY

UCD DUBLIN

NCCA An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

CONTENT

INTRODUCTION

A central focus of the *Children's School Lives Study* is understanding the multiple factors that influence how children both experience and position themselves with respect to their learning. Learning is perceived as a social and relational process, embedded in wider societal patterns. These patterns: norms and expectations about how to behave and how to present oneself, influence how children both see themselves and others, shaping their sense of identity as learners and as social beings in their interactions in the world. Our previous report (8a) has highlighted how children's social background shapes their school lives, significantly influencing the educational trajectories and possibilities for children's learning and experience of belonging within society. It noted the impact of wider patterns of equality and inequality in society and how differing experiences of poverty and prosperity shape children's everyday lives from a young age.

In this report we delve further into this wider societal context, highlighting how patterns and norms within society in relation to gender and sexualities influence children's experience of primary school. Children's identity work – how they define and see themselves – is a core element of their agency in schools yet it is intricately bound to wider norms and expectations within society. Role modelling, societal changes in gender roles as well as family dynamics, all impact on how children learn to 'do' 'boy' and 'girl' in school. Their understanding of gender is enacted in the social dynamics of the classroom and the school yard; in the messages of the curriculum and pedagogies that frame classroom practice; as well as in the expectations that teachers and parents have for children's ways of acting and being in the world. Gender in this sense is understood as operating along a continuum of femininities and masculinities as children navigate their social worlds. Traditional gender binaries that demarcate essentialist characteristics of boys and girls sit alongside more expansive ideas of gender that cut across gender stereotypes. In other words, as active agents, children's 'doing' of gender can both reproduce traditional gender binaries as well as disrupt them, as children position themselves along the continuum of masculinities and femininities. Peer cultures are especially important here, establishing and/or disrupting boundaries over what is considered acceptable and normative for boys and girls in their interactions with one another in schools.

Children's out of school lives are also key to the formation of their gendered identities, in the role models that are present in their families and communities but also the spaces and places they inhabit in their out of school activities. Patterns related to social class, detailed in Report 8a, intersect with gender in terms of expectations, access to resources and opportunities for learning for both boys and girls in primary school. Differences both within and between girls and boys in levels of confidence, self-esteem, aspirations, as well as orientation to learning all impact on how children engage with their learning in primary school and the possibilities they see for themselves in their present lives as children as well as in their futures as women and men. The gender profile of the school as single-sex or co-educational can also influence the learning climate as well as opportunities for personal and social development that arise for both boys and girls in different school communities. Differences in school culture, disciplinary processes and the regulation of children's learning all convey subtle messages to children about their gendered identities and what it means to be a boy or girl. Sexualities and the expression of diverse gendered identities are increasingly to the fore in research with children in schools, as is the impact of school cultures and practices in recognising and supporting all forms of diversity in children's school lives.

In this report we consider these issues with respect to the experiences of children as they progress through primary schools in Ireland. Prioritizing children's voices, we consider how they think about gender and sexualities and the aspirations they hold for their futures, as well as what they think about being in single-sex or co-educational schools. We also explore the impact of gender and school profile (single-sex/co-educational) on children's engagement with learning in terms of both formal learning in the curriculum (especially literacy and maths) and informal learning

through engagement with extracurricular activities. Looking through the lens of gender, further context is provided to some of the analysis conducted in previous reports (e.g. Report 7) on academic expectations, self-esteem, and levels of anxiety as well as attentiveness and engagement with learning in the classroom. Viewed through the prism of norms and expectations around masculinities and femininities we consider how these influence children's sense of belonging and friendships in school, as well as their attitudes toward gender equality.

Key Findings

Gender profile in CSL primary schools

- The CSL sample reflects the population of primary schools nationally; 88% are co-educational, 6% are all-boys, and 6% are all-girls' schools.
- Similar numbers of boys and girls attend DEIS and non-DEIS schools. With respect to gender profile, there are more co-educational and all-girls' schools classified as non-DEIS, while more all-boys' schools are classified as DEIS, especially in cohort B.[1]
- Most children in primary schools are taught by a female teacher. 82% of teachers in the CSL study are female, compared to 18% males. Male teachers are more likely to be teaching children in cohort B.

Gender and sexualities in children's school lives

Gender identities and sexualities

- Children who participated in interviews in case study schools clearly differentiate between the attributes and behaviours of boys and girls. Girls are typically identified by all children as being more engaged with learning, less disruptive in class and more gentle in play activities than are boys.
- Children from both cohorts, associated being a 'good' boy with intelligence, ability in maths and being physically strong with an expectation to be good at sport.
- Children from both cohorts frequently associated a 'good' girl with niceness, kindness, caring and politeness.
- As children get older there was evidence of less gender stereotyping among girls especially, but more gender stereotyping among boys. In interviews, girls were more likely to comment on identities that cut across stereotypical gender boundaries ranging from 'girly girls' to 'tomboys'.
- Children across both cohorts were aware of diverse sexualities, informed by experiences in their families and communities.

[1] Cohort A tracked children from Junior Infants in 2019 through to 2nd class in 2023; Cohort B tracked children from 2nd class in 2019 through to 6th class in 2023.

- Teachers discussed the need for professional development to support them in their conversations with children about diverse sexualities in school.

Future aspirations

- Girls are more likely than boys to aspire to go to college/university. This difference is observed in both DEIS and Non-DEIS schools.
- There is a higher expectation by teachers for girls to attend higher education, in all school types.

Single sex and co-educational schools

- Children in case study co-educational schools in general did not express strong preferences about attending single-sex or co-educational schools, while children who attended case study single-sex schools tended to express stronger preferences for doing so.
- Teachers in case study schools expressed a preference for co-educational schools as a representative model of society and everyday life. Single-sex schools are perceived by most teachers interviewed to reinforce gender binaries.

Gender and children's engagement with learning

Liking school

- Across both cohorts and over time, girls consistently reflect more positive attitudes toward school than boys. Whether a child attended a single-sex or co-educational school did not influence these views.
- Girls are also more likely than boys to indicate they feel listened to in school, especially those in all-girls' schools in cohort A, with a narrowing gap as the children progress through the senior end of primary school.

Engagement with literacy

- Differences are also evident between boys and girls with respect to their engagement with curricular areas.
- Across both cohorts, girls are more likely than boys to be interested in literacy (reading and writing) and this was not influenced by whether or not they attended a single-sex or co-educational school.
- Conversely boys are more likely than girls to report feeling bored, worried or confused by literacy learning activities.
- In cohort B, more girls are placed in the highest ability group for reading across all waves. In addition, more boys tend to be placed in the lowest ability group for reading across all waves.
- When children were asked to rate themselves in their abilities in literacy, boys and girls were inclined to rate themselves similarly, in spite of girls' higher performance and engagement with literacy.
- A significant difference in the literacy attainment of boys and girls was identified in 2nd class and 4th class, but there was no significant gender difference by 6th class.

- In case study schools, literacy is frequently referenced by girls as a favourite subject, with some boys reporting they like reading in particular. In DEIS case study schools, some boys equated not being 'smart' in school with their struggles in literacy.

Engagement with maths

- Across both cohorts, boys are more likely than girls to be interested in maths although this is only significant for children in cohort B. This suggests that as children progress through primary school gender differences become more pronounced. These patterns are not influenced by the gender profile or DEIS status of schools.
- These gender differences in maths are also evident with respect to feeling worried, bored and confused. In cohort B (6th class), girls are more likely than boys to express worry/anxiety about their learning in school, especially for maths.
- There is a significant difference in how boys and girls rate themselves in maths. Boys rate themselves higher than girls rate themselves in their abilities in maths.
- In cohort B, more boys are placed in the highest ability group for maths in 5th and 6th class. A gap between boys and girls appears in 5th class and widens in 6th class, with more boys being placed in the highest and more girls in the lowest ability group for maths.
- These patterns intersect with children's social background with girls from poorer families most likely to be placed in the lowest ability group for maths (See Report 8a).
- There was no significant difference in the attainment scores of boys and girls in maths in cohort B.
- In our case studies, in interviews, there were references to girls not enjoying maths, although girls who were good at maths reported they loved it as a subject.
- Girls and boys mentioned boys' competency in maths, and commented on social expectations for boys to excel in the subject. Some boys explained that their interest in maths declined as they moved to senior classes.

Further curricular areas

- Across both cohorts, boys demonstrated higher interest in Physical Education and Social, Environmental and Scientific Education while girls had a higher interest than boys in Art, Drama, Music and Irish.

Extracurricular activities

- Boys are significantly more likely than girls to participate in team sports outside of school while girls are more likely to participate in music, dance and swimming activities.
- Case study interviews with children highlighted the emphasis by boys on playing sport (specifically football) and this was an important element of constructing their masculine identities. For girls, physical activity related to dancing was referenced along with other artistic pastimes.

Academic expectations

- Girls have a significantly lower academic self-concept than boys and this is not influenced by whether they attend a DEIS/non-DEIS school or single-sex or co-education school.
- When boys compare themselves to their peers, they indicate a higher academic self- concept than girls do, perceiving themselves to do better than their peers and better able to learn things more quickly in class. These gender differences begin in 2nd class and increase progressively through to 6th class.
- However, when asked questions related to their academic standing with teachers, there were no significant differences between boys and girls in cohort B when asked if they thought their teacher thinks they are smart.
- A gender difference was identified however in cohort A, with girls in all-girls' schools being significantly more likely to say that their teacher thought they were smart.

Anxiety

- Children's experience of anxiety was measured through questions that asked the extent to which they were worried about things, worried that something bad would happen to them and worried about what is going to happen. Girls were significantly more likely than boys to be anxious and this is not influenced by whether or not they attend a single-sex or co-educational school.
- Girls are significantly more likely to indicate they are worried about tests. This is not influenced by whether they attend an all-girls' or co-educational school.

Discipline

- In cohort B, girls were significantly more likely than boys to agree that the rules of school are fair. In cohort A girls were also significantly more likely than boys to agree that rules are fair, especially in all-girls' schools.
- Case study interviews with children highlighted gendered patterns of both behaviour and expectations for boys and girls. Being a 'good' girl was associated with obedience and good behaviour in class, especially among girls in cohort A. Conversely boys were associated with more disruptive behaviour.
- In case study interviews with cohort B, girls expressed concerns over requirements for uniforms, especially wearing skirts.
- Teachers in all school types report that girls and boys behave differently in class and in how they engage with their work.
- Case study interviews with teachers in junior classes in particular, suggest that girls were held to a higher standard of behaviour in class. In senior classes more negative words were used to describe girls' behaviours, while boisterous and at times aggressive behaviours between boys was normalised.

Observing gender dynamics in classrooms

- Gender differences in children's engagement behaviours in the classroom were identified through systematic observation. Girls were significantly more likely than boys in 2nd class and 6th class to be positively engaged in the classroom, whether they were working alone or co-operating with a friend and/or the teacher.

- Conversely boys were significantly more likely than girls to be disengaged demonstrating passive and active distraction and disruptive behaviour in 2nd, 5th and 6th class.
- There were no significant differences in observed behaviours between boys and girls in DEIS and non-DEIS schools.

Gender and relationships with peers

- Friendships are central to the experiences of boys and girls in schools. Over the time of the CSL study, complex gender dynamics were evident in children's friendships and these were influenced by gendered norms.
- In general girls were significantly more likely than boys to say other children care about their feelings in school, while boys were more likely to report that they make friends easily. These experiences were not influenced by whether a child was in a single-sex or co-educational school.
- Peer network analysis of children in 6th class showed that girls in all-girls' schools have stronger social connectivity (how tightly bonded they are with peers) within their classrooms than girls in co-educational schools. Girls in general have lower average popularity scores than boys across all school types.
- Conversely, boys in all-boys' schools have the lowest levels of social connectivity (being tightly bonded with a number of peers) but also the highest average popularity scores. This suggests that boys' peer networks are more likely than girls' peer networks to comprise a number of popular/socially prestigious boys, and this is especially the case in all-boys' schools.
- Girls in all-girls' schools had significantly fewer friends than children (boys and girls) in other schools, whereas boys and girls in co-educational schools had more friends than boys and girls in single-sex schools.
- There is a gradual overall decline in reported experiences of being bullied as children progress through primary school (see Report 7). Boys tended to report witnessing bullying more often than girls in 4th class, but by 6th class, this trend had reversed, as girls' reports of witnessing bullying increased steeply over time compared to boys' reports.
- These patterns were significantly influenced by the gender profile of the school. In cohort B, girls in girls' schools were significantly less likely to report being bullied across all waves, mirroring findings in relation to greater social connectivity and cohesion in these schools.
- In cohort B, over time girls in co-educational schools were most likely to report they had observed bullying behaviour (seeing children start fights with other children).
- In cohort A, girls in all-girls' schools in 2nd class in 2023 reported higher levels of being bullied than in any other school type. This is a reversal of the observed bullying behaviours of 2nd class children in 2019, where girls in all-girls' schools reported the lowest levels of bullying.
- Conversely, there was a noticeable decline in reporting of bullying of another child, especially among boys between 2nd class in 2019 and boys in 2nd class in 2023.

- Case study interviews highlight the value of friendships to all children and the support and fun enjoyed with peers. For boys, shared interests in sport, especially football was emphasised in their friendships with other boys. For girls, intimacy and closeness through for example sharing secrets was noted in friendships among girls.
- There was some evidence of mixed gender friendship groups in co-educational schools and of some girls joining 'boys' games. There was no evidence of boys joining 'girls' games.

Prejudice and bias

- Most children agreed that it is important to treat all people fairly with girls most likely to agree, especially those in 2nd class, while conversely boys in 2nd class were least likely to agree.
- Boys were significantly less likely than girls to agree with the statement 'boys and girls can do as well as each other at the same things'. Girls in all-girls' schools were significantly more likely to agree and boys in all-boys' schools were least likely to agree with the statement.
- Boys in all-boys' schools were significantly more likely than boys in co-educational schools to disagree that girls deserve as many good things as boys deserve.
- Case study interviews highlighted children's awareness of gender inequalities in addition to changing gender roles in society, with girls more likely to query gender stereotypes and binaries.

NATIONAL STUDY SAMPLE AND DATA COLLECTION

The Children's School Lives national study consists of two cohorts of primary schools (Cohort A and Cohort B), which were sampled and recruited during Autumn/Winter 2018. These schools were selected to ensure that each cohort was broadly representative of primary schools nationwide, based on specific characteristics, such as DEIS status, school size, and school gender mix. Data collection for cohort B started in 100 schools in Spring 2019, involving 2nd class children, their parents, class teachers, and school principals, continuing annually for five waves until the children reached 6th class in 2023. For cohort A, data collection began in Autumn 2019 in 84 schools with children who had just started Junior Infants, following them until they reached 2nd class in 2023. The number of participating schools and children in each wave is detailed in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Description of the national study waves, timing of data collection and sample size

COHORT A	CHILD AGE	DATA COLLECTION	SCHOOLS	CHILDREN		
			N	N	BOYS	GIRLS
Wave 1 (Junior Infants)	4–5 years	Autumn 2019	84	1,773	51%	49%
Wave 2 (Senior Infants)	6–7 years	Spring 2021	78	1,696	49%	51%
Wave 3 (1st Class)	7–8 years	Spring 2022	79	1,880	50%	50%
Wave 4 (2nd Class)	8–9 years	Spring 2023	78	1,641	48%	52%
COHORT B						
Wave 1 (2nd Class)	8–9 years	Spring 2019	100	2,114	49%	51%
Wave 2 (3rd Class)	9–10 years	Spring 2020	90	544	48%	52%
Wave 3 (4th Class)	10–11 years	Spring 2021	99	2,112	49%	51%
Wave 4 (5th Class)	11–12 years	Spring 2022	98	2,189	49%	51%
Wave 5 (6th Class)	12–13 years	Spring 2023	96	2,013	50%	50%

Each year, trained fieldworkers conducted school visits to administer questionnaires to children with parental consent and personal assent. For Junior and Senior Infants, questionnaires were administered individually or in pairs, whereas for 1st class and above, they were administered to the entire class. Fieldworkers read the questions aloud, and children completed the booklets independently, with assistance from school staff for those requiring additional support. Principals, teachers and parents also completed online questionnaires annually.

The questionnaires addressed themes such as equality, inclusion, school culture, wellbeing, engagement, learning outcomes, and school transitions (see www.cslstudy.ie; D'Urso et al., 2023; Jones et al., 2023; Martinez-Sainz et al., 2023; Tobin et al., 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the planned Spring 2020 data collection for 3rd class children in cohort B and Junior Infants in cohort A. Consequently, an online questionnaire was administered for cohort B (as cohort A children were deemed too young to participate in this way). This wave provides unique insights into remote learning experiences but is not comparable to other waves. Where data from this wave is used, the questions were amended to fit the remote teaching and learning context, for example, 'school' was replaced with 'home school'. Thus, the report primarily examines trends for cohort B during 2nd, 4th, 5th, and 6th class, and for cohort A during 1st and 2nd class. Despite such disruptions, the study retained a high proportion of the original sample, with 97% of cohort B schools and 93% of cohort A schools participating in the final 2023 wave.

Systematic observations of classroom interactions

During fieldwork with cohort B in 2nd class, 5th class and 6th class, children's behaviour during lessons was recorded at 30 second intervals using the Observational and Research Classroom Learning Evaluation (ORACLE) Pupil Record (Galton & Hargreaves, 2019). The observation order was determined by children's last names (sequential) and gender (alternating). Children's main behaviour at each interval was coded as one of five forms of engagement: cooperating alone, cooperating with friend, cooperating with teacher, cooperating on routine tasks (e.g., sharpening pencils), and waiting for the teacher; or three forms of disengagement: distracted passive, distracted active, horseplay/disruptive. Engagement and disengagement forms were summed to give overarching indicators of on task and off task behaviour. Fieldworkers observed selected children's behaviour during 10 time intervals.

Social network analysis

Social network analysis measures the number of peers children have in their friendship group as well as the number of peers who report that child to be their friend (Jones et al., 2023). Centrality is a measure of how socially prominent a child is within a classroom, with children having greater centrality being more popular among their peers. The current study uses two measures of centrality: levels of closeness/distance from other children in the network (betweenness centrality) and level of social prestige (the proximity to highly socially central children) in the network. Children responded to the prompt, "Could you please name your close friends in this class? You can name up to 10 people, but you do not have to name 10 people. Just list those people you are friends with." The average response was approximately 5.5 friend nominations. Friend nominations were analysed via the igraph package in R statistical software (Csardi & Nepusz, 2006; Jones et al., 2023).

CASE STUDY SAMPLE AND DATA COLLECTION

A particular strength of the Children's School Lives Study is the mixed methods design. This combined data collection across 189 primary schools with intensive immersion in 13 classrooms annually (with the exception of the period during COVID-19 school closures when data collection moved to remote methods (see Donegan, Devine et al., 2023) to capture everyday life in primary schools. This included a focus on 28 case study children (who were selected from each of the participating case study schools), and interviews with their parents annually, focus group work and participatory activities with the entire case study class, and extended periods of in-class observations, alongside interviews with class teachers and school principals annually. Interviews with principals, teachers and parents typically lasted from 50 – 75 minutes. The number and length of focus groups with children varied across cohorts and waves of data collection in response to children's evolving capacities. Research sessions varied from 20 mins – 60 mins and included multi-modal participatory methods such as roleplaying, play-based activities, graffiti walls, drawings and board games (see Martinez-Sainz, Devine et al., 2024).

TABLE 2: Case study sample

SCHOOL	DEIS	LOCATION	GENDER	BOYS	GIRLS	PRINCIPALS	TEACHERS	SNAS[2]	PARENTS	GRAND PARENTS
COHORT A										
A1	Non-DEIS	Urban	Co-Ed	8	18	1	7	1	3	-
A2	Non-DEIS	Rural Town	Girls	-	25	2	7	-	4	2
A3	Non-DEIS	Rural	Co-Ed	1	2	3	7	-	3	3
A4	DEIS	Urban	Boys	15	-	2	8	1	3	-
A5	DEIS	Urban	Co-Ed	7	9	1	9	1	2	1
A6	DEIS	Rural Town	Co-Ed	8	15	1	8	-	3	-
COHORT B										
B1	Non-DEIS	Urban	Girls	-	23	1	6	2	6	3
B2	Non-DEIS	Urban	Boys	28	-	2	7	1	4	1
B3	Non-DEIS	Rural Town	Co-Ed	11	16	1	7	2	4	3
B4	Non-DEIS	Rural	Co-Ed	5	3	1	6	1	3	1
B5	DEIS	Urban	Boys	16	-	2	7	1	3	-
B6	DEIS	Urban	Girls	-	21	1	6	2	4	3
B7	DEIS	Urban	Co-Ed	12	11	2	9	-	3	3
Total				111	143	20	94	12	45	20

Teachers, interviewed annually, include class teachers who often changed yearly as children transitioned from one classroom to another, in addition to Special Education teachers and Home School Community Liaison teachers in some schools. Principals were interviewed annually. In some instances, new principals were appointed to a case study school adding to the number of principals in the total sample. Case study children (28) were interviewed annually in addition to participatory focus group activities with all the children in each case study class. Over the five waves of the study 541 interviews were conducted in the case study schools.

[2] SNA's are Special Needs Assistants

GENDER PROFILE IN CSL PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Gender profile of children

The gender profile of primary schools in CSL indicates a consistent even split between boys and girls across all waves, with almost 51% of participants who are girls, and 49% who are boys. This applies across both cohorts of the study.

In order to capture children's self-identified gender, when the children were in 6th class (Cohort B, 2023), they were asked an open question 'What is your gender?' Of the 2549 who responded, 5 children (0.2%) indicated they identified as 'Other gender'.

Gender profile of schools

To ensure that our sample is representative, we analysed national data. Our analysis showed that 88% of the primary schools in Ireland are co-educational; of the remaining 12%, 6% are all-boys and 6% are all-girls' schools, aligning with national patterns (European Commission, 2024). This distribution is also reflected in the CSL sample as illustrated in Figure 1; in cohort B, 89 out of 99 (89%) primary schools sampled are co-educational, while in cohort A, this stands at 75 out of 83 (90%).

FIGURE 1: Number of Co-educational and Single-Sex schools (Cohorts A & B)

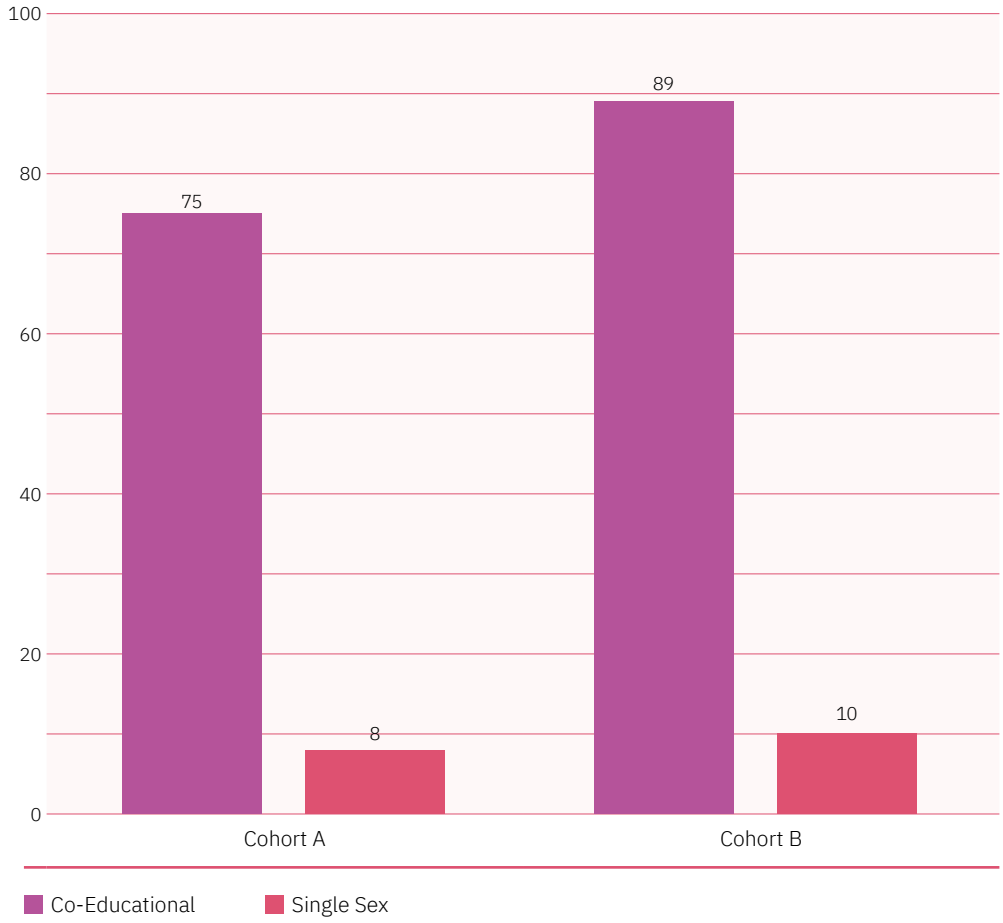
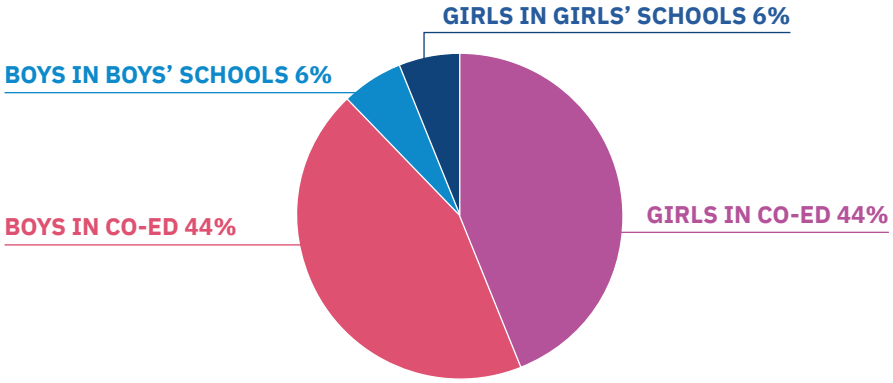


Figure 2 shows the gender profile of schools by DEIS/non-DEIS. Of note are the higher number of all-boys' schools that are classified as DEIS, five of whom are in cohort B.

FIGURE 2: Gender profile of school by DEIS status (Cohorts A & B)

With respect to single-sex schools, of the total CSL sample of children, 6% are in all-boys' schools, and 6% are in all-girls' schools. Figure 3 shows the distribution of girls in the CSL study in all-girls' and co-educational schools, and the distribution of boys in all-boys and co-educational schools.

FIGURE 3: Aggregate percentage of children sample by school type



Tables 3 and 4 show the number of children in each school type and across each wave for cohort A and B. There are slightly higher numbers of children in single-sex schools in cohort B than in cohort A but the majority of children in both cohorts are in co-educational schools.

TABLE 3: Children survey sample[3] (Cohort A)

	2019 A JUNIOR INFANTS		2021 A SENIOR INFANTS		2022 A 1ST CLASS		2023 A 2ND CLASS	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
GIRLS	859		825		934		826	
Girls in girls' schools	85	10%	93	11%	73	8%	66	8%
Girls in Co-Ed	774	90%	732	89%	861	92%	760	92%
BOYS	904		868		934		776	
Boys in boys' schools	121	13%	111	13%	103	11%	92	12%
Boys in Co-Ed	783	87%	757	87%	831	89%	684	88%
TOTAL	1,763	100%	1,693	100%	1,868	100%	1,602	100%

TABLE 4: Children survey sample (Cohort B)

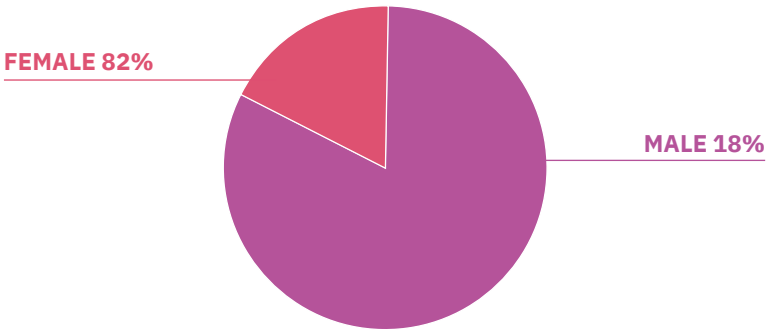
	2019 B 2ND CLASS		2020 B 3RD CLASS		2021 B 4TH CLASS		2022 B 5TH CLASS		2023 B 6TH CLASS	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
GIRLS	1,071		281		1,077		1,117		1,010	
Girls in girls' schools	160	15%	27	10%	151	14%	163	15%	109	11%
Girls in Co-Ed	911	85%	239	90%	926	86%	954	85%	901	89%
BOYS	1,041		261		1,034		1,067		989	
Boys in boys' schools	137	13%	26	10%	154	15%	147	14%	128	13%
Boys in Co-Ed	904	87%	228	90%	880	85%	920	86%	861	87%
TOTAL	2,112	100%	542	100%	2,111	100%	2,184	100%	1,999	100%

[3] **Note:** Percentages do not always add up to 100 due to missing or 'other' responses in all tables

Teacher gender profile

The gender profile of teachers surveyed annually in CSL schools highlights the predominance of female (82%) over male (18%) teachers (Figure 4).

FIGURE 4: Teacher gender (Cohorts A & B)



As Table 5 shows, 7% teachers in cohort A were male and 93% were female, with the proportion of males increasing in 2nd class:

TABLE 5: Teacher survey sample[4] (Cohort A)

	2019 A JUNIOR INFANTS		2021 A SENIOR INFANTS		2022 A 1ST CLASS		2023 A 2ND CLAS	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Women	99	94%	82	98%	60	91%	52	84%
Men	5	5%	2	2%	5	8%	10	16%
TOTAL	105	100%	84	100%	66	100%	64	100%

For cohort B, there were a higher proportion of males than in cohort A, with 76% female teachers and 24% male teachers, with the number of male teachers greater in 6th class than any other class level:

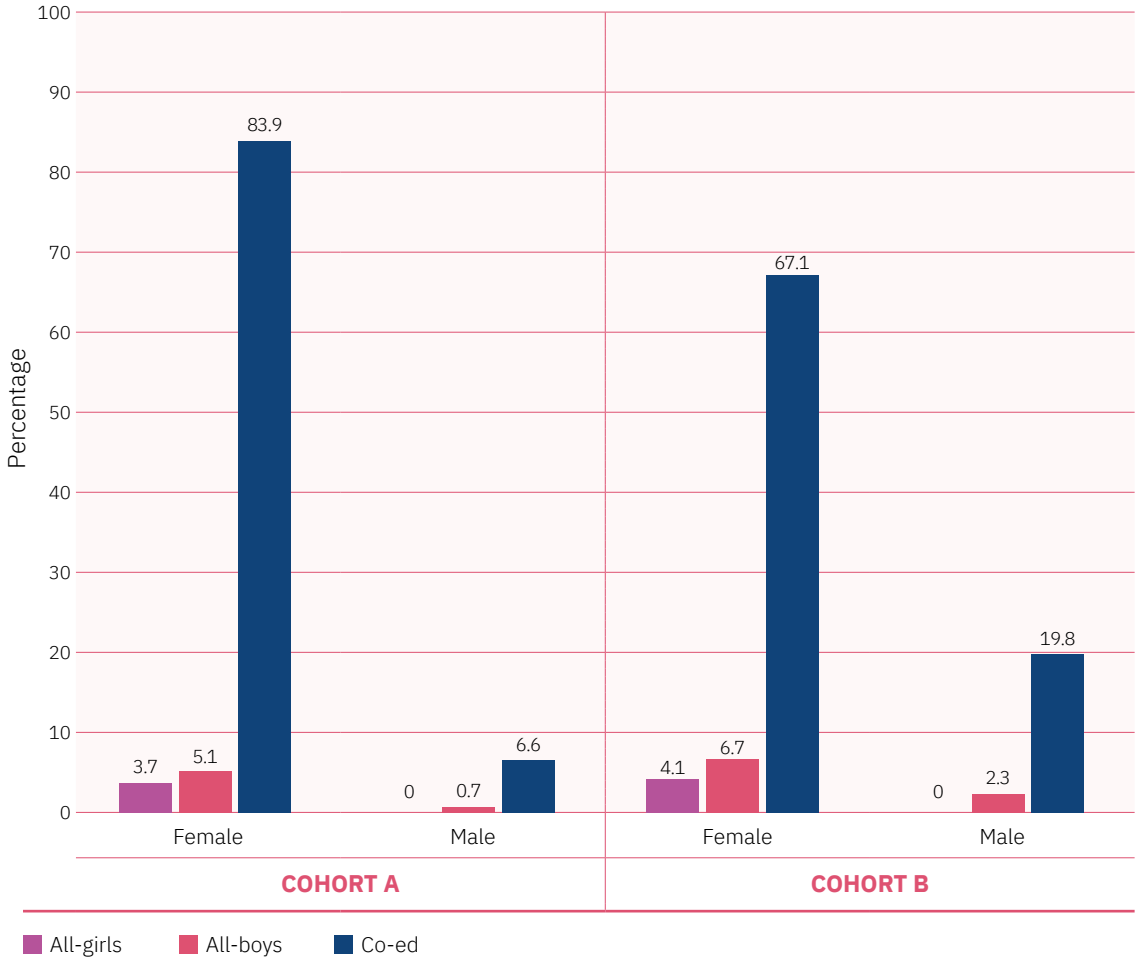
TABLE 6: Teacher survey sample (Cohort B)

	2019 B 2ND CLASS		2020 B 3RD CLASS		2021 B 4TH CLASS		2022 B 5TH CLASS		2023 B 6TH CLASS	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Women	70	90%	67	80%	68	75%	52	73%	45	70%
Men	8	10%	17	20%	23	25%	19	27%	19	30%
TOTAL	78	100%	84	100%	94	100%	72	100%	68	100%

[4] **Note:** percentages do not always add up to 100% due to missing or 'other' responses
Note: The prevalence of female teachers in the sample reflects the ratio of female to male teachers in primary education in Ireland: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c97fbd-teacher-statistics/

Figure 5 shows the representation of teachers by gender and school type across the study, with the greater relative proportion of females in all school types and cohorts, and the greater proportion of males in cohort B rather than in cohort A. The figure shows that most male teachers taught in co-educational schools with a smaller proportion of male teachers in all-boys' schools; and no male teachers in all-girls' schools in both cohorts.

FIGURE 5: Teacher sample by gender and school type (Cohorts A & B)



GENDER AND SEXUALITIES IN CHILDREN'S SCHOOL LIVES

The impact of gender in children's school lives needs to be considered in the wider context of gender in society. In this section we explore how children are constructing ideas of gender through our discussions with them in the CSL case study schools, as well as responses provided in the national study questionnaires. We detail children's ideas about gender, and their education and career aspirations, situating this also in the context of teacher narratives around gender. We also consider attitudes toward single-sex and co-educational schooling. The children's responses provide a lens into how they understand gender, what it means to be a girl or boy, and how gender relates to their own and other children's experiences of school.

Gender Identities and Sexualities

In their discussions children clearly differentiate between both the expected attributes and behaviours of boys and girls. Girls across both cohorts and each class level, are typically described by children, both boys and girls, as being more engaged in their learning, less likely to be disruptive in class, and gentler in their play and activities. Boys are generally typified by all children as engaging in more rough play and more likely to get in trouble in school:

> Girl: *Boys are a bit crazier and a bit more rough.*
> Interviewer: *Okay. And is this in the playground or in the classroom?*
> Girl: *Playground and the classroom.*
> (Girl, 1st class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Rural)

> Boy: *The boys will probably mostly get in trouble, because they'd be talking more in lessons.*
> (Boy, 4th class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Rural Town)

Children from both cohorts were also more inclined to associate the ideal type of 'good' boy with their traits including intelligence, being hardworking and an expectation to be good at sport. Evident here is masculinity associated with performance in academics, sports, work ethic. An ideal type of 'good' girl was more typically associated with how girls behave and/or respond towards others including good behaviour in class, politeness, deference, and being caring towards others – evident here are femininities that stress relationships with others.

> *'What would make a good boy? An intelligent boy.'*
> (Boy, 2nd class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Rural)

> Interviewer: *What do you think is a good boy?*
> Boy: *Well, first of all, probably like saying nice things and listening and being smart, obviously the football, being good at football.*
> (Boy, 2nd , Non-DEIS, All-boys, Urban)

> Interviewer: *What makes a good boy?*
> Boy 1: *Not do what we want to do.*
> Boy 2: *Like, if you…*
> Interviewer: *Yeah, so what does that look like?*
> Boy 1: *Someone who doesn't…*
> Boy 2: *Someone who doesn't give out to people and doesn't get annoyed. I don't know. I think in sport, probably like, doesn't get in trouble a lot, listens to people.*
> (Boys, 6th class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Rural Town)

> Interviewer: *What do you think makes a good girl?*
> Girl: *Like being kind, being generous, being thoughtful for other people.*
> (Girl, 2nd class, Non-DEIS, All-girls, Urban)

> Interviewer: *How would a girl be good?*
> Girl: *If someone is alone outside, you go up to them and say do you want to play with us?*
> (Girl, 2nd class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

> Interviewer: *So what would make a good girl then? If a girl was good.*
> Boy: *A good girl is a girl who is not sassy.*
> (Boy, 2nd class, Non-DEIS, All-boys, Urban)

> Boy: *It's mostly girls that help you.*
> Interviewer: *Mostly girls that help you?*
> Boy: *Yeah. Some boys just, if you hurt yourself in football, they play on.*
> (Boy, 6th class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

> Girl: *I feel like… like a good girl, when you're talking about like to older people, like parents and stuff, like a good girl is someone who's quiet, gets good grades, doesn't stand out too much like, you know?'*
> (Girl, 6th class, All-girls, Rural town)

While these accounts reflect stereotypes in relation to gender, we also found evidence of the children disrupting gender stereotypes and binaries, affirming that boys and girls are similar rather than different. This was more likely in our discussions with younger children and with girls across both cohorts:

> Girl: *Yeah, that would be okay, with boys dancing and girls playing football, because it's normal for girls to play football and boys playing football.*
> (Girl, 1st class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

> Girl: *Boys and girls are equal. They're not better than each other.*
> (Girl, 1st class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

> Interviewer: *So, how would you describe girls then?*
> Girl 1: *They are nice.*
> Girl 2: *Some girls are rough because girls can fight if they want basically.*
> Girl 3: *Some girls are rough.*
> Girl 1: *Some people in class are good.*
> Interviewer: *Girls or boys?*
> Girl 1: *Girls and boys.*
> (Girls, 2nd class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Rural town)

> Interviewer: *What makes a good girl?*
> Girl 1: *Helpful.*
> Interviewer: *Okay.*
> Girl 1: *Friendly.*
> Girl 2: *I guess confident, because if you're confident and going into like a friend group then you won't let someone boss you around.*
> Girl 1: *Fair enough.*
> (Girls, 6th class, All-girls, Non-DEIS, Rural town)

> Girl: *Stereotypical [good girl] would be like, smart, listens, likes wearing dresses and stuff like that, but then I think, if they have a good personality, if they're not like mean to anyone, if they have passion that they do whatever they want and they don't like affect anyone or aren't racist, homophobic, anything like that, I think that makes a good girl or like a good boy, it doesn't really matter, just unless they're just kind.*
> (Girl, 6th class, Non-DEIS, All-girls, Rural Town)

The greater flexibility in gender positioning among girls was also evident in their discussion of 'girly girls' and 'tomboys' – the latter girls who more aligned with their idea of 'boys':

> Girl: *I don't know much things about boys.*
> Interviewer: *Okay.*
> Girl: *Or tomboys. I know a little bit of stuff about this, because I'm a tomboy.*
> (Girl, 1st class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Rural Town)

Interviewer: *And like the girls who are not girly girls, then, what are they like?*
Girl 1: *They're tomboys.*
Interviewer: *Tomboys.*
Girl 1: *They can just be mixed, like sometimes they can like, they can like pink and they can like do football like me....*
Interviewer: *What's better, being a girly girl or being a tomboy?*
Girl 1: *Girly girl.*
Girl 2: *I think yes.*
Interviewer: *Okay.*
Girl 1: *My sister's a tomboy but I kind of wish like I wasn't a tomboy as well because tomboy always get dirty and all but girly girls stay clean and kind of stay out of trouble and they love going to cinema I think they like [having] a boyfriend*
(Girls, 2nd class, DEIS, All-girls, Urban)

We did not explore in depth issues of sexualities with the children although it did emerge in the context of our discussions with them about name calling in school (See Section on prejudice and bias). Our interviews with teachers highlighted the diverse families represented in their classes and an ease of reference by children to this in their everyday conversations:

Teacher: *I've a child in the class with two mams ... she's really easy going about it...and then the other children in the class ... they'll mention it but it's never a topic of conversation.*
(Female teacher, 2nd class, Non-DEIS, All-girls, Urban)

Teacher: *I know there's a child in my class that has family members that are in the LGBT community ... so I know the girls would hear her talk about it a lot. And they're actually quite open to it ... I do think it's good that these conversations are happening ... especially as they get older, I think it's important.*
(Female teacher, 2nd class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

Teachers reported that discussions around gender identities and sexualities were more evident as children progressed to the senior end of primary school:

Teacher: *That has come up with one or two children ... one child was naming their work with a different name, a boy's name ... I have heard other children refer to that child as them, as opposed to her. So, very clued in.*
(Female teacher, 6th class, Non-DEIS, All-girls, Rural Town)

Teacher: *I'd hear just conversations about [sexualities], if they're talking or you know if it's like pride month or something, someone will say something about that, just kind of like a casual conversation.*
(Female teacher, 6th class. Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

> Teacher: *I wouldn't have heard it myself but whether there would be comments maybe quietly among themselves in the yard.*
> (Female teacher, 6th class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Rural).

Teachers recognised that issues around sexuality were being discussed by children, and emphasised that sexualities needs to be addressed within the primary school curriculum, in an age-appropriate manner but also in a context where teachers themselves are appropriately supported through professional development:

> Teacher: *Yeah, well I think it's very important that children are [taught] to move with the times, so I think it would be very important to obviously be as inclusive as possible, and to do lessons around accepting everybody for who they are.*
> (Female teacher, 2nd class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

> Teacher: *Sexuality wise, I do think it would be important to touch upon early on. Like make it more common, normalise it.*
> (Male teacher, 2nd class, DEIS, All-boys, Urban)

> Teacher: *But definitely something that I've been thinking about that I should cover but don't know how to go about because I've never gone to any training about it.... I wouldn't know where to start ... I've more of a scientific view on growing and changing adult puberty ... boys should know as much about the girls' stuff and the girls should know as much about the boys' stuff.*
> (Female teacher, 6th class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

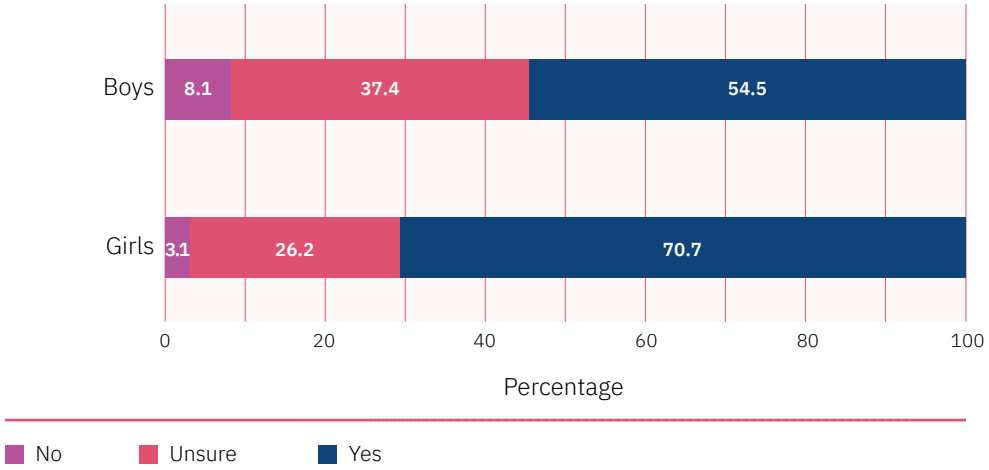
> Teacher: *I pulled out all the books and was looking at it and making notes and everything ... I wanted to make sure that I just gave what they needed or what they should learn rather than me bringing in things ... which would be wrong ... I was very, very nervous.'*
> (Female teacher, 6th class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Rural)

In this wider context of both stability and change, we also wanted to explore the extent to which children's gender identities influenced their ideas of the future and what they may do in their adult lives.

Future aspirations

We explored the long-term educational aspirations of children. We asked children in 6th class if they planned to attend college/university after post-primary school. As Figure 6 shows, the majority of girls (71%) indicated they plan to attend college/university after post-primary school, while almost half of boys (45%) were either unsure or responded negatively to the question. These responses were not influenced by whether a child attended a DEIS school or a single-sex or co-educational school.

FIGURE 6: "Do you plan to attend college/university after post primary school?" (Cohort B, 2023)



In our discussions with children in the case study schools, across both cohorts, we see a mirroring of these patterns. When children talked about their futures, girls were more likely than boys to aspire to go to college:

> Girl 1: *Well, I'm going to be in college for a long time. I want to be a doctor.*
> Interviewer: *You're going to be a doctor, what about you [Girl]?*
> Girl 2: *I want to be in college for probably a long time.... Because I want to be a vet.*
> Interviewer: *Fantastic.*
> Girl 2: *And because I'm going to have to practise on fake animals and things like that.*
> (Girls, 2nd class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Rural Town)

> Girl: *I have to go to college.*
> Interviewer: *You have to? Says who?*
> Girl: *My Ma. There's no choice. I don't even get a gap year. Straight out of secondary school to college.*
> (Girl, 6th class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

Our case study interviews also highlighted how children's expected choice of career and their future aspirations was influenced by the role models in their lives, in school and in the media:

> Girl 1: *You're going to take your Mam's dancing.*
> Girl 2: *Yeah.*
> Interviewer: *Does your Mom do dancing as well?*
> Girl 2: *Yeah, my mam's a dance teacher.*
> (Girls, 2nd class, DEIS, All-girls, Urban)

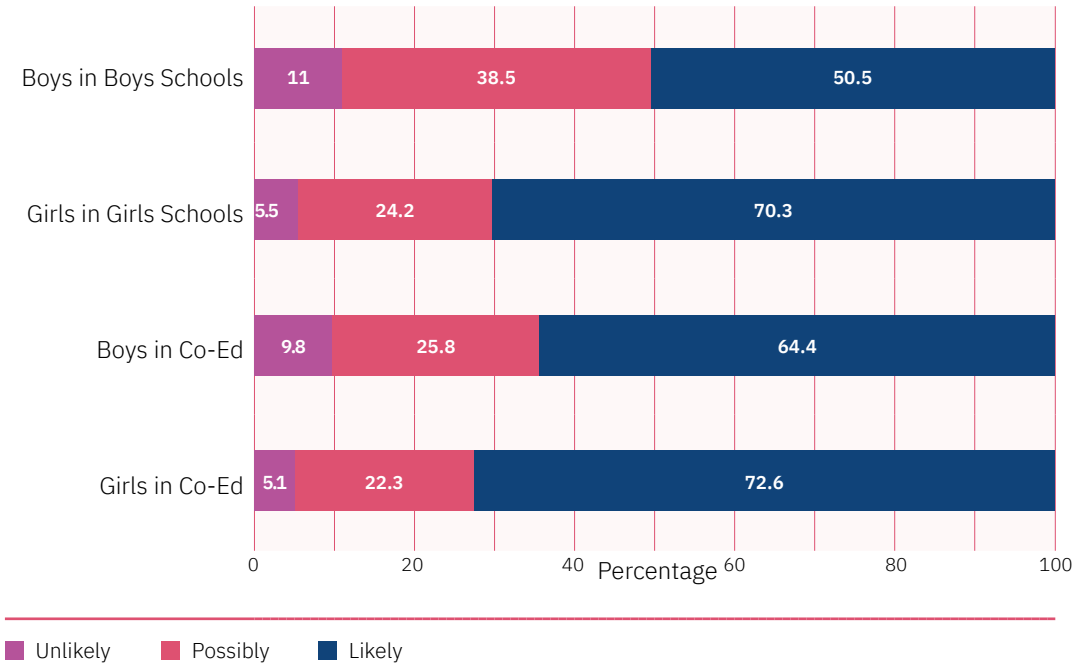
> Girl: *I want to be an animator.*
> Interviewer: *An animator, okay.*
> Girl: *My auntie's friend went there and she animates things from children's programmes.*
> (Girl, 6th class, Non-DEIS, All-girls, Rural town)

> Boy: *Probably my dad's work or.... He works to fix computers.*
> (Boy, 6th class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Rural town)

> Interviewer: *What's your Dad do?*
> Boy: *He sells.*
> Interviewer: *He sells?*
> Boy: *Vans.*
> Interviewer: *Oh brilliant.*
> Boy: *Vans and tools.*
> Interviewer: *Okay. So, is that what you want to do then?*
> Boy: *Yeah, but I'm going for my apprenticeship first.*
> Interviewer: *Okay.*
> Boy: *As a heavy goods trucker mechanic.*
> Interviewer: *Is that what you want to do? How do you know you want to do that?*
> Boy: *Because my brother is doing it already.*
> (Boy, 4th class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

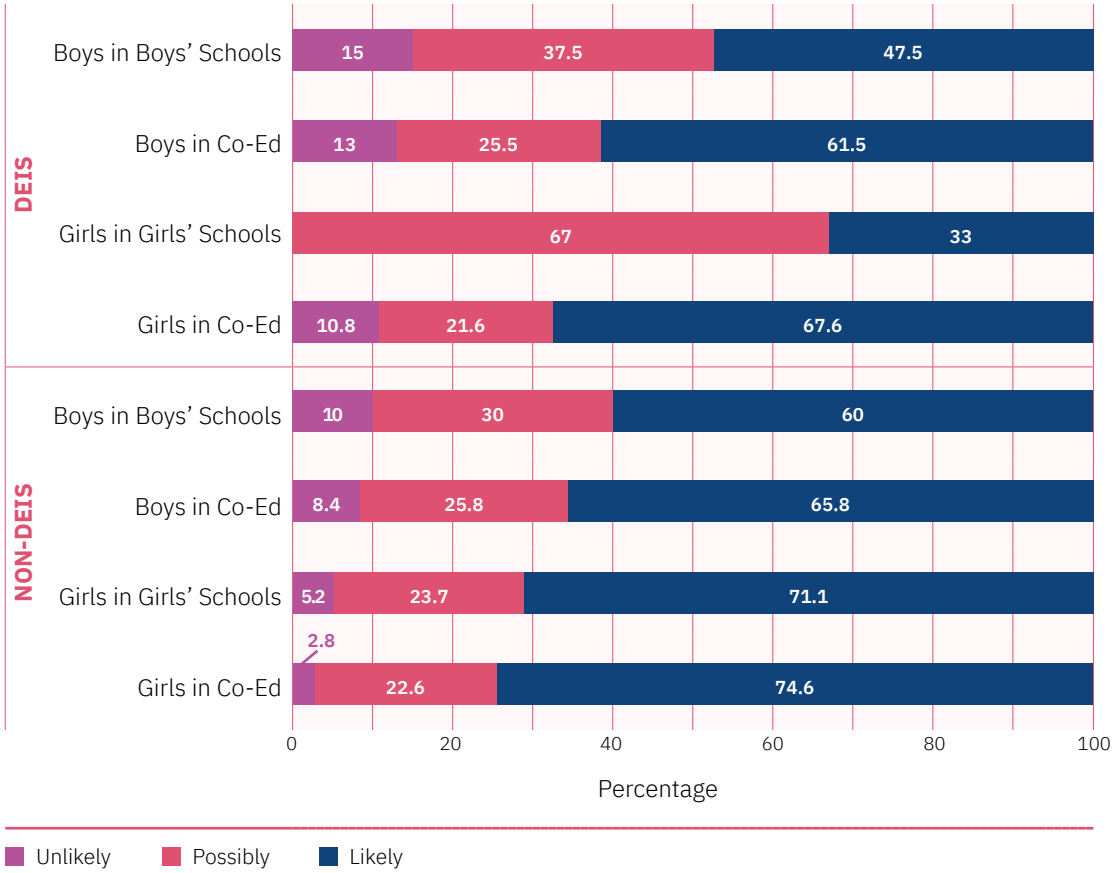
We also asked teachers what their expectations were regarding the future trajectories of children in their classrooms. As Figure 7 shows, for teachers in 6th class, girls are more likely to be expected to attend higher education than boys, and with respect to type of school, the percentage of boys in boys schools characterised by teachers as 'unlikely' to attend higher education is almost double (11%) compared with girls in the same category (5.5%).

FIGURE 7: "How certain are you that this child will attend higher education?" (Cohort B, 2023)



Report 8a showed the impact of social background on expectations in relation to further education. When we connect this to gender, there is a higher expectation for girls in co-educational schools and girls in all-girls' schools to attend higher education, while boys in all-boys' schools, most of whom in cohort B are DEIS, are the least expected to attend higher education.

FIGURE 8: "How certain are you that this child will attend higher education?" by DEIS status and School Profile (Cohort B, 2023)[5]



[5] Please note the numbers involved in the all-girls' DEIS school are very small (9).

Single-sex and co-educational schools

We were also interested to see if the gender profile of a school was something that mattered to children and if so in what way. Children in co-educational schools in general did not express strong preferences about attending single-sex or co-educational schools, while children who attended single-sex schools tended to express stronger preferences for doing so, wary of the impact of attending a co-educational setting, and drawing on some of the gender stereotypes noted earlier:

> Interviewer: *Do you like going to an 'all-girls' school or would you prefer to go to a 'co-ed'* school?
> Girl: *Girl's school.*
> Interviewer: *You'd like to go to a girls school, why [name]?*
> Girl: *Boys cause trouble.*
> (Girl, 1st class, DEIS, All-girls, Urban, Catholic)

> Interviewer: *What is it like to be in a school with girls, do you think?*
> Boy 1: *Well my, the girls would be like mostly if it was this school with girls, they would be mostly 'emosh', I don't think a lot of them would play soccer....*
> Boy 2: *Well, I don't think it will be that bad because like you know ... it doesn't kill you.'*
> (Boys, 2nd class, Non-DEIS, All-boys, Urban)

> Girl: *No. I don't really want [to attend co-educational] ... boys will mess around with you a lot. Especially, sometimes when you're a girl because they just feel like they're better than you.*
> (Girl, 2nd class, Non-DEIS, All-girls, Urban)

> Interviewer: *Do you think it's good to go to an all-girls' school?*
> Girl: *Yeah...because the boys always get in trouble. And the boys cause chaos.*
> (Girl, 4th class, Non-DEIS, All-girls, Rural town)

For children in sixth class, the gender composition of their new school was something they had thought about as they planned their transition into post-primary education. In these discussions, girls and boys were keen to consider or remain in co-educational schools, indicating a preference for a co-educational experience as they grew older. Their views also highlight ideas around both femininity (romance relationships) and masculinity (toughness) in framing their preferences:

> Interviewer: *Did that cross your mind when you were picking [secondary school], that you were going to go to a school which would be no boys?*
> Girl: *A bit. Like, I remember my friend telling me that I might regret it or something.*
> Interviewer: *Your friend said that if you went to the girls' school you might regret it?*
> Girl: *Yeah, because there's no boys. ...You can't have a boyfriend.*
> (Girls, 6th class, DEIS, All-girls, Rural town)

Boy 1: *I would hate to go to an all-boys school.*
Boy 2: *Yeah, but like with [School] my dad went there and there was like, a lot of fights, but like so my dad like got in a few fights but if you win them no one else is going to come after you.*
(Boys, 6th class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

Female and male teachers working in co-educational and single-sex schools, explained they would prefer to work in co-educational schools. They suggested that co-educational environments are reflective of society in general and in their view provide a more realistic experience of life for children. Teachers observed that as Irish society and schools have become more diverse, with a focus on inclusivity, co-educational schools offer opportunities for children to engage with different gender perspectives and experiences and believed this is an advantage for the children in these schools:

Teacher: *I personally think anyhow it's better when it's mixed you know there's more, you just got that balance that yin and yang, you know the male point of view and the female point of view, not that it's black and white but I think it's just I think it's a healthy balance, a healthy mix.*
(Female teacher, Junior infants, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Rural)

Teacher: *I think it's normal to be mixed, isn't it, it's just part of society.*
(Female teacher, 2nd class, DEIS, All-girls, Urban)

Teacher: *And I would have preferred mixed. I'd be very pro-co-educational. It's the way [life] works.*
(Male teacher, 6th class, DEIS, All-boys, Urban)

Teachers who work in single-sex schools, observe that they reinforce oppositional perspectives/binaries between girls and boys; that boys or girls become a 'mystery' or a 'nuisance' to one another, rather than having opportunities to grow and learn about each other, together in school:

Teacher: *Mystery, it's pure mystery I think yeah and you see it … as they get to sixth class as well they're just so eager to get the lads attention and stuff yeah, all the talk about in breakfast club would be about … hang around and see if we bump into any of the lads because they don't see them at all.*
(Female teacher, 2nd class, DEIS, All-girls, Urban)

Teacher: *I feel that particularly because we're an all-girls' school it would be nice … for them to see different perspectives…maybe if they got along with a man in the school they wouldn't be giving out about the brothers as much.*
(Female teacher, 2nd class, Non-DEIS, All-girls, Urban)

> Teacher: *But an all-boys it's very hard to tell ... that masculinity can come out in a mixed environment, so my worry is when they're put in a situation like the sixth class when they go to a mixed school next year, how to be around and how to talk to girls.*
> (Male teacher, 2nd class, DEIS, All-boys, Urban)

> Teacher: *I think it's important that the boys and girls mix because if they go to a mixed secondary school they'll be like, [confused]... I love teaching all-boys as well it's just funny if the girls' school walk past they're like, you know, oh my God.*
> (Male teacher, 5th class, DEIS, All-boys, Urban)

However, some teachers commented that they enjoyed working in single-sex schools, explaining that they felt it was easier to teach girls, or if they had a preference for nurturing and supporting boys:

> Teacher: *I mean if you were to ask me the educational environment that I've taught in that was most enjoyable, it would be a fairly high-achieving all-girls' secondary school.... Purely, because the children were all highly motivated.... So, you didn't have to spend half your time in a disciplinary context.... Now if I was in that environment for a lot longer than six weeks I might change my mind, okay.*
> (Male teacher, 5th class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Rural Town)

> Teacher: *Yes. Well, I would never teach girls.... Boys can be a handful but boys can be very, very gentle and boys can be extremely emotional. And their emotions come out sometimes in a lot of frustration.*
> (Female teacher, 1st class, DEIS, All-boys, Urban)

These wider constructs, perceptions, experiences of gendered identities and contexts permeate children's experiences of their school lives, influencing how they engage with their learning as well as engage with one another in classrooms and schools.

GENDER AND CHILDREN'S ENGAGEMENT WITH LEARNING

Liking school

Across both cohorts and over time, girls consistently reflect more positive attitudes toward school than boys. Despite a general decline over time for all children, girls are more likely to report than boys that they look forward to going to school, and these views did not vary by whether a boy or girl attended a single-sex or co-educational school. The differences between boys and girls were statistically significant in 2nd, 4th and 6th class. As previously reported (Report 8a) attitudes toward going to school were not influenced by whether or not children attended a DEIS school.

FIGURE 9: "I look forward to going to school" (Usually/Always) (Cohort A)

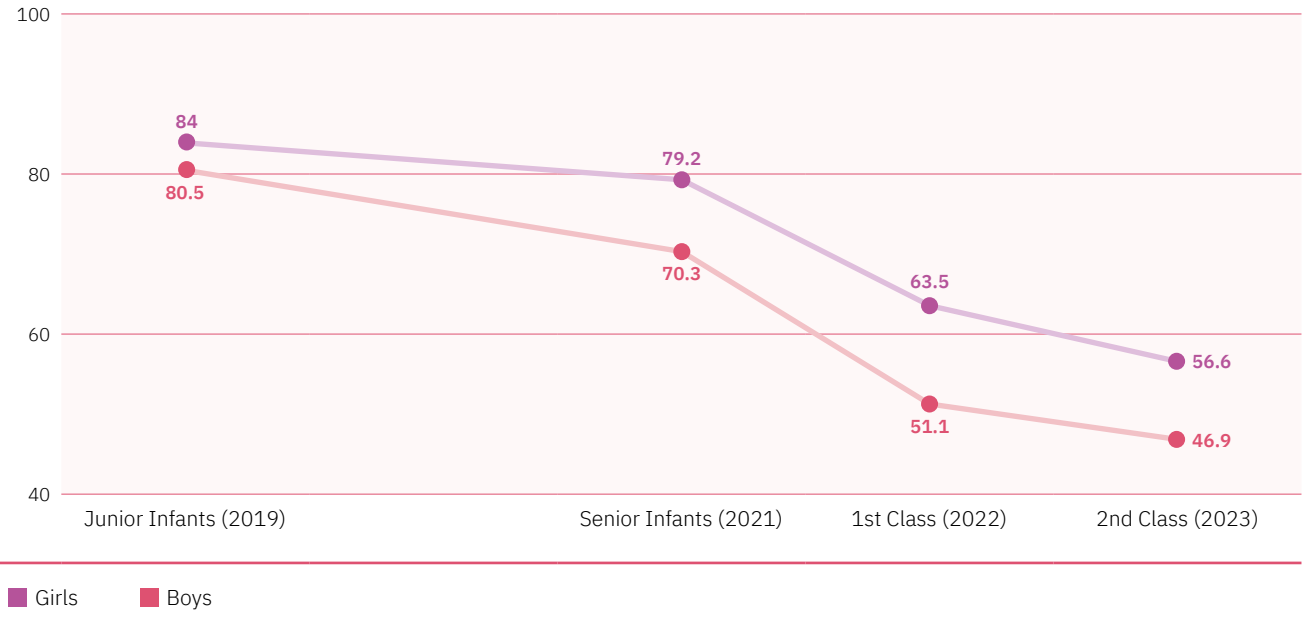


FIGURE 10: "I look forward to going to school" (Usually/Always) (Cohort B)

Similarly, girls in cohort B are more likely to agree with the statement 'I like many things about school' across all waves and it remained consistently higher compared to boys throughout the waves.

FIGURE 11: "I like many things about school" (Usually/Always) (Cohort B)

Our case study children's narratives reflect these findings, with girls emphasising their enjoyment of socialising, being with friends and learning, while boys tended to focus on being with friends as well as playing sports:

> Interviewer: *And why do you feel good coming into school?*
> Girl: *Because I get to play with all my friends.... I feel excited because there's new things you can do in school, like you can learn more things.*
> (Girl, 2nd class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Rural)

> Girl 1: *There's six of us [in a friendship group], two best friends, two best friends, and then me and [Girl] are best friends.*
> Girl 2: *So, it's never really a fight, because no matter what we say, [Girl]'s like always my best friend. They know that. I know [Girl] and [Girl] are best friends, and [Girl] and [Girl] are best friends.*
> (Girls, 6th class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

> Interviewer: *Why do you feel happy coming into school [Boy]?*
> Boy: *Because I get to see my friends*
> Interviewer: *Anything else?*
> Boy: *It's sometimes fun learning.*
> Interviewer: *What's the best fun thing that you learn?*
> Boy: *Learning how to play football outside.*
> (Boy, 2nd class, Non-DEIS, All-boys, Urban)

Interviewer: *What do you like most about them though why do you like them being your friends?*
Boy: *I don't know, they're funny and like they're relatable.*
Interviewer: *What do you mean relatable?*
Boy: *Like we have a lot of the same things in common and yeah.*
Interviewer: *Tell me about some of the things you have in common.*
Boy: *Like we all like the same kind of sports, we all like, there's a few things.*
(Boy, 5th class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Rural)

As the children got older, views became more circumspect, including among girls:

Interviewer: *Do you like coming here?*
Girl: *Yeah, I do, yeah.... But not all the time.*
Interviewer: *Why? What makes you not like coming here?*
Girl: *Walking into school and knowing you're going to do work all day long.*
(Girl, 6th Class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

Interviewer: *Do you like coming here every day?*
Girl: *A bit.... I think it's good when you get there, but going ... the thought of going in the morning, it's like 'No.'.., but like I just go anyway, and it gets better as the day goes on.*
(Girl, 6th Class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

Interviewer: *How has it been going to school here for the last year?*
Boy 1: *It's kind of like, we've kind of learned....*
Boy 2: *From junior infants to like 4th class it's all been really boring, learning the same stuff slightly different. But from last year to this year, it's been like....*
Boy 1: *It might be because of [Class Teacher].*
Boy 2: *Probably more interesting.*
(Boys, 6th Class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

Interviewer: *Would you say girls are easier to hang out with?*
Girl 1: *No.*
Girl 2: *No, I don't, some girls can be a bit like...*
Girl 1: *Annoying or rude.*
Girl 2: *Yeah.*
Girl 1: *How do you say it... it's easier, if you're a boy, to get along with someone, and it's like, oh well I hate you, but they're joking, and if you said that to a girl, they'd take it too literally, and get offended.*
(Girls, 6th class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

However, our case study interviews highlighted an intersection between gender and social class in the views of boys in DEIS schools, building further on some of the findings in Report 8a. Boys toward the senior end of primary school from socially disadvantaged communities in our case study schools more frequently voiced feelings of apathy towards attending primary school. One boy for example shared how he hated school, and another expressed how his negative feelings towards schooling was increasing. These boys spoke of school days dragging on, particularly if their teachers 'made' them work all day, or gave them rote learning activities to complete at the end of the school day:

> Interviewer: *I'm going to ask [Boy] what's your feeling on this [Being in School]?*
> Boy: *I hate it.*
> Interviewer: *Is there nothing you like about school?*
> Boy: *I absolutely hate being in school.*
> Interviewer: *You haven't liked school for a while, right?*
> Boy: *No.*
> Interviewer: *Has it gotten worse?*
> Boy: *A bit.*
> (Boy A, 6th class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

> Boy: *I stayed in bed the other day.*
> Interviewer: *On a school day?*
> Boy: *Yeah, on Monday. I came in at half one.*
> Interviewer: *Why?*
> Boy: *Because my dad made me.*
> Interviewer: *Really? Were you sick?*
> Boy: *No.*
> Interviewer: *So, why did he make you stay in bed?*
> Boy: *No, he made me go to school.*
> (Boy B, 6th class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

> Interviewer: *How do you feel about having to do everything [the teacher] says?*
> Boy: *Sometimes I don't like it but it's part of school isn't it.*
> Interviewer: *What do you mean, it's part of school?*
> Boy: *So, she's saying, 'Take out your copy and do like word today', oh that's the worst ... she makes you ... look up in the dictionary, do the meaning and then write a sentence about it.*
> (Boy, 5th class, DEIS, All-boys, Urban)

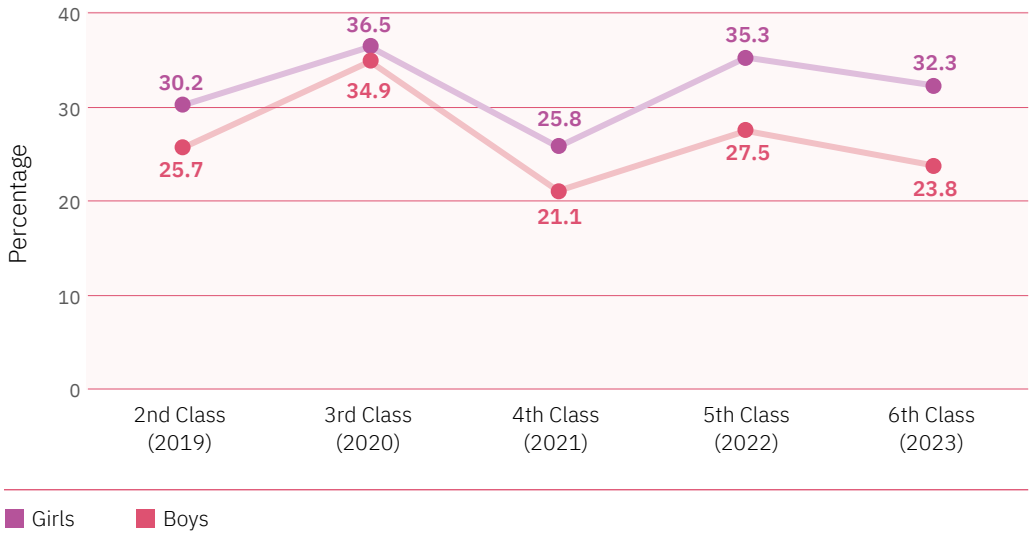
> Boy: *I used to be the best at maths in my class and then I just kind of got bored of it.*
> Interviewer: *So, you stopped trying?*
> Boy: *Not stopped trying but I stopped... I still do my work, but I don't do it as good as I can.*
> Interviewer: *Why is that, [Boy]?*
> Boy: *Like it's just the same story, like...*
> (Boy, 6th class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Rural Town)

Girls' more positive orientation to school is also evident in their views on being listened to and having a voice in schools. Girls are also more likely than boys to agree with statements such as agreeing they are allowed to make decisions, feeling listened to in school and their ideas being used to change things in school.

FIGURE 12: "Children's good ideas are used to change things in school" (Usually/Always) (Cohort B)

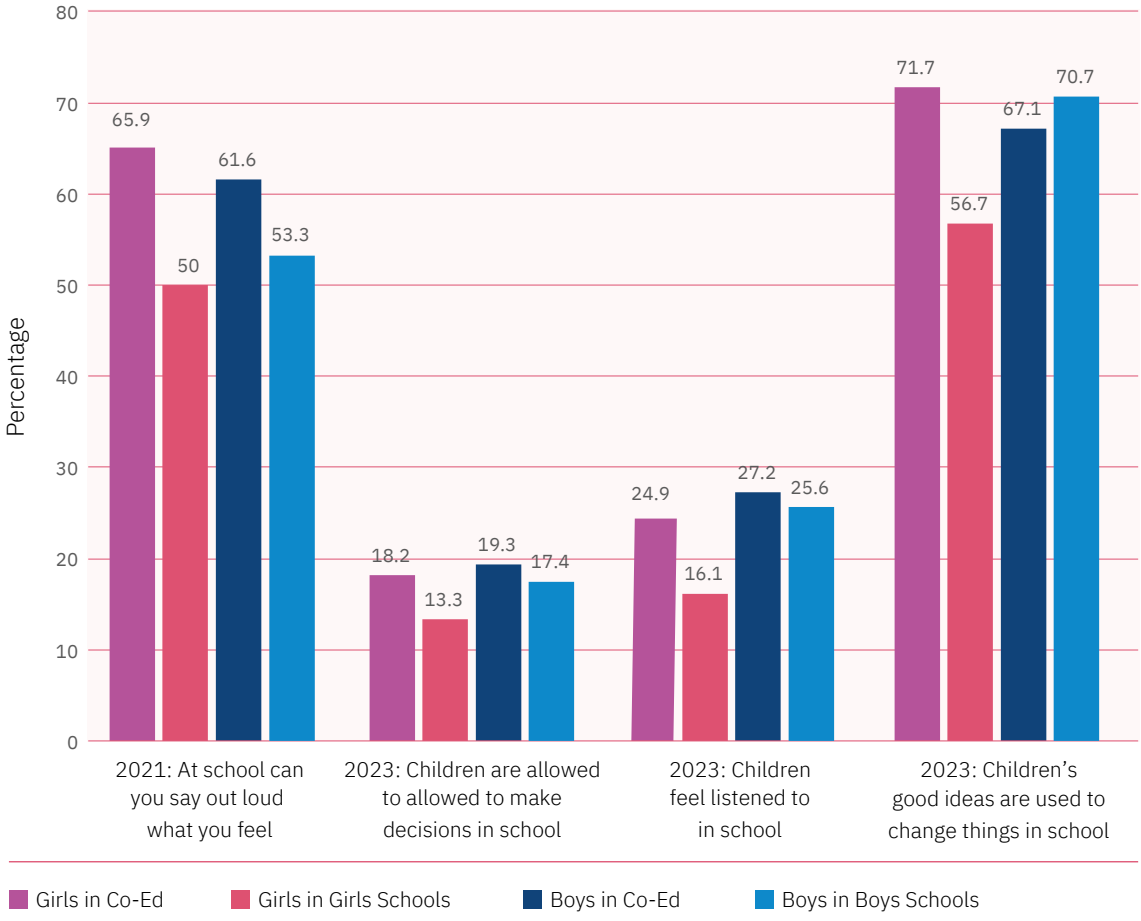
Although more than half of boys in 2nd class (Cohort B) felt that children are usually or always allowed to make decisions, only one in four boys held this view from 3rd to 6th class. Girls' responses remained more stable across all waves with approximately one in three girls agreeing with the statement across all waves.

FIGURE 13: "Children are allowed to make decisions" (Usually/Always) (Cohort B)



While attending a single-sex or co-educational school did not significantly influence the responses of boys and girls, in cohort A, girls in girls' schools were less inclined to agree they had a voice and were listened to in school. As Figure 14 shows, in cohort A senior infant girls (66%) and boys (62%) in co-educational schools are more likely to agree that they can say out loud what they feel. Similarly, in 2nd class girls and boys in co-ed schools are more likely to agree that 'Children are allowed to make decisions in school', 'Children feel listened to' and 'Children's good ideas are used to change things in school'. However, girls in girls' schools are less likely to agree with these statements across senior infants and second class.

FIGURE 14: Views on 'children's voice' by school type (Cohort A)



Our case study work highlighted some differences in the climate and culture of all-girls' schools, with a higher expectation for girls' behaviour in these schools (see also section on Discipline), that was also reinforced among the children themselves regarding being 'good' and well behaved:

> Interviewer: *If someone is a good girl, what does she do?*
> Girl: *When the teacher says hands on knees, you put your hands on knees and stop everything.*
> Interviewer: *Hands on knees, stop everything. What else does a good girl in school do?*
> Girl: *Listen.*
> (Girl, 2nd class, DEIS, All-girls, Urban)

> Teacher: *I have been so lucky with the Senior Infant group, with the girls I have had, they have been really good, and I don't feel like I get cross … if I have to discipline them I say 'I'm disappointed' and how I expected more of them.*
> (Female teacher, Senior Infants, Non-DEIS, All-girls, Urban)

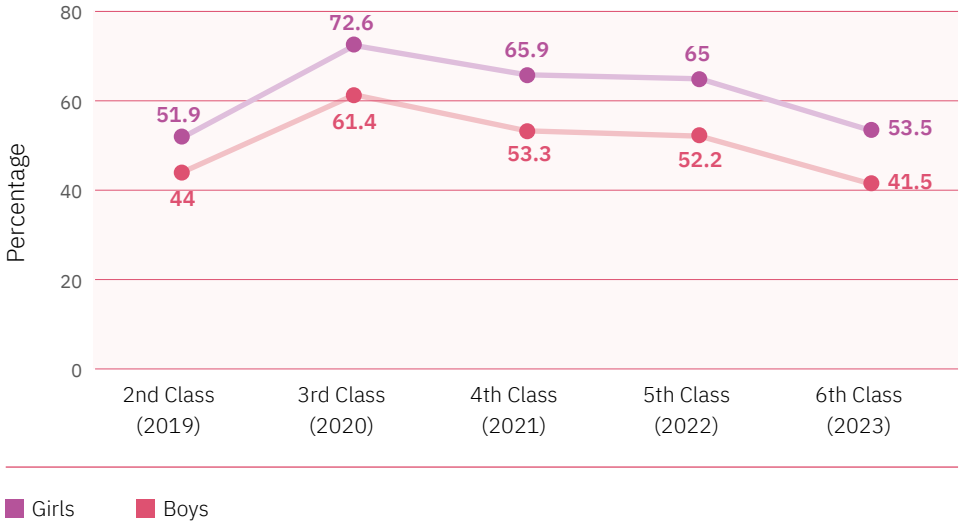
> Teacher: *Maybe it was a thing with all-girls' … a lot of these girls … want it to be perfect because I'll just be like say for somethings, I'll say you can't use a rubber, I just want them to kind of quickly assess them and a lot of them kind of freak out at that.*
> (Female Teacher, 2nd class, DEIS, All-girls, Urban)

Engagement with literacy

Consistently across both cohorts, girls express stronger interest in literacy learning than do boys and this is not influenced by either school type (single-sex/co-education) or DEIS/Non-DEIS. As seen in Figure 15, almost 70 % of girls and 60 % of boys are interested in reading and writing from Junior Infants to 2nd class. As we previously noted in Report 6, children reported being the least interested in reading and writing in 2nd (Cohort A and B) and 6th class (Cohort B). Despite the overall decline of interest levels for both girls and boys, these gender differences are also evident in cohort B.

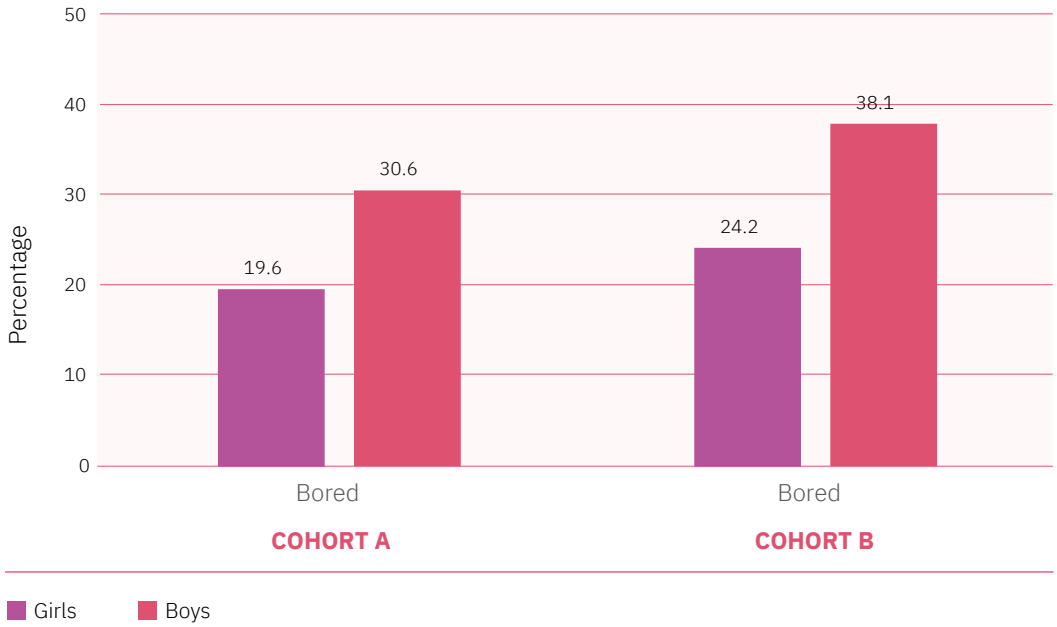
FIGURE 15: "I am interested in reading/writing" (Usually/Always) (Cohort A)

FIGURE 16: "I am interested in reading/writing" (Usually/Always) (Cohort B)



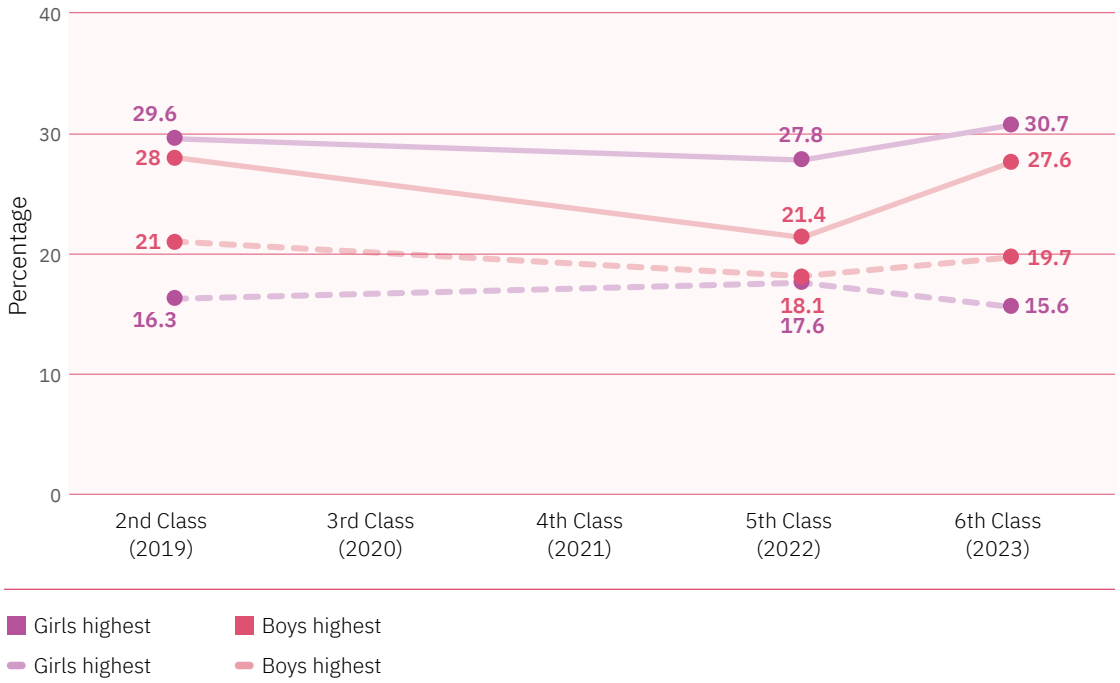
Similarly girls were less likely than boys to report feeling bored by literacy learning activities.

FIGURE 17: "I feel bored when I am learning reading/writing" (Agree/Strongly Agree) (Cohorts A & B)



This higher engagement consistently by girls with literacy is also reflected in their greater allocation to higher ability groups for reading. In cohort B, girls are significantly more likely to be placed in the highest ability group for reading across all waves. These differences are statistically significant in 2nd and 6th class. In addition, more boys tend to be placed in the lowest ability group for reading across all waves.

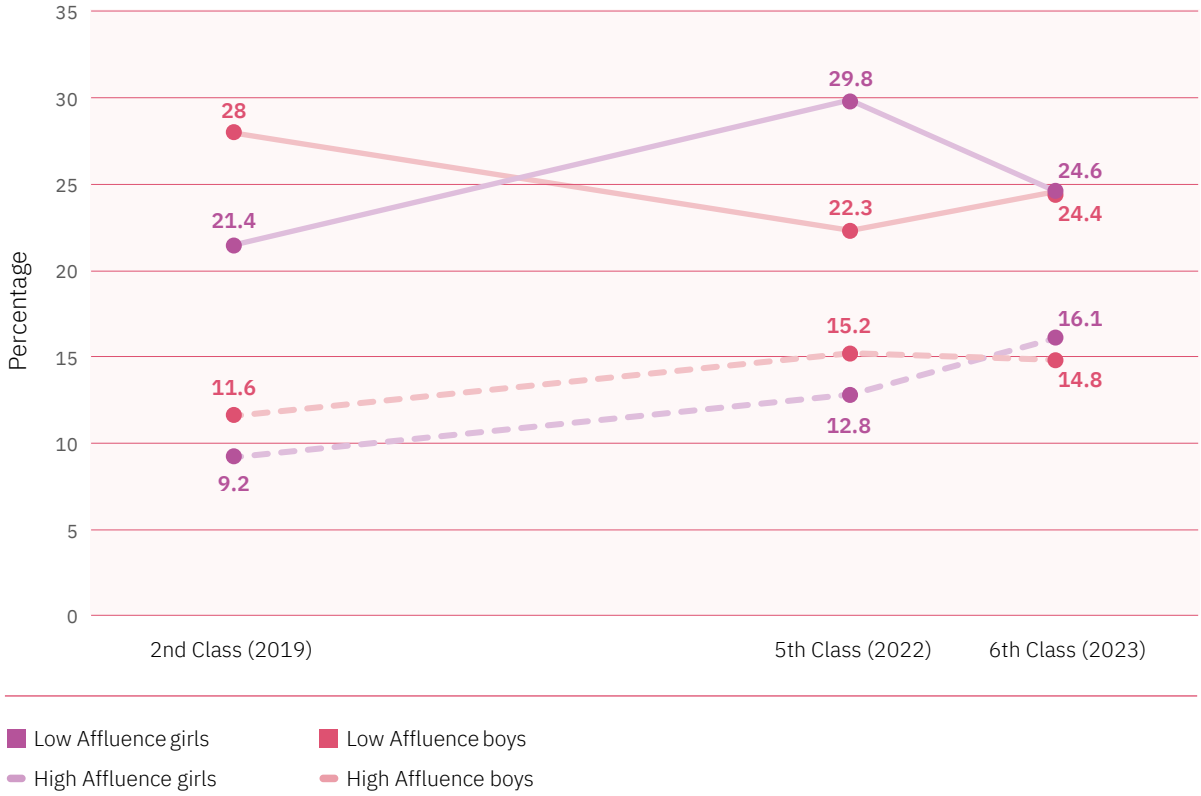
FIGURE 18: Ability grouping in Reading (proportion in highest and lowest ability group) (Cohort B)



Our previous report (Report 8a) on social background highlighted the impact of levels of wealth and poverty (family affluence) on children's engagement with schooling.[6] When we consider the intersection between gender and family affluence with respect to literacy learning, we see that both boys and girls from poorer families are more likely to be placed in the lower ability literacy groups. In second class, boys from poorer families are most likely to be placed in lower ability groups but by 6th class girls are equally likely to be. Conversely boys and girls from more well-off (affluent families) are least likely to be placed in low ability reading groups.

[6] As noted in Report 8a, socio-economic status of participating children in the Children's School Lives study was measured in two ways – through the DEIS classification of the school and through a family affluence scale (FAS). As noted in Report 8, the short version of the FAS scale used in the study consists of five items: 1) Do you have a dishwasher at home? 2) Do you have your own bedroom to yourself? 3) Does your family own a car, van, or truck? 4) How many bathrooms are in your home? 5) How many computers does your family own?. The FAS indicators were calculated based on children's responses and were measured in waves 3 and 4 for cohort A and in waves 3, 4 and 5 for cohort B. For the purpose of this analysis, children were grouped in high, medium and low affluence based on their scores in the most recent wave where FAS was measured (Chzhen et al, 2022), taking account of strengths and limitations as a scale (Corell et al 2021). This categorisation allowed us to capture the distribution of social class within the CSL sample.

FIGURE 19: Ability grouping in Reading by family affluence (proportion in lowest ability group) (Cohort B)



Our previous reports (5 and 6) have highlighted the impact of children's sense of competency in their subject preferences. Children were asked to rate how they felt they were doing in reading and mathematics compared to their peers, on a 5-point scale from 5 ('a little bit better') to 1 ('struggling a lot'). When children were asked to rate themselves in their abilities in literacy (reading and writing), boys and girls were inclined to rate themselves similarly, in spite of girls' higher performance and engagement with literacy. At each time point, there was no statistically significant difference between boys and girls in their self-ratings (Figure 20 and Figure 21).

FIGURE 20: "Compared to other children in your class, how well do you think you do in reading?" (Struggling a little/ Struggling a lot) (Cohort A)

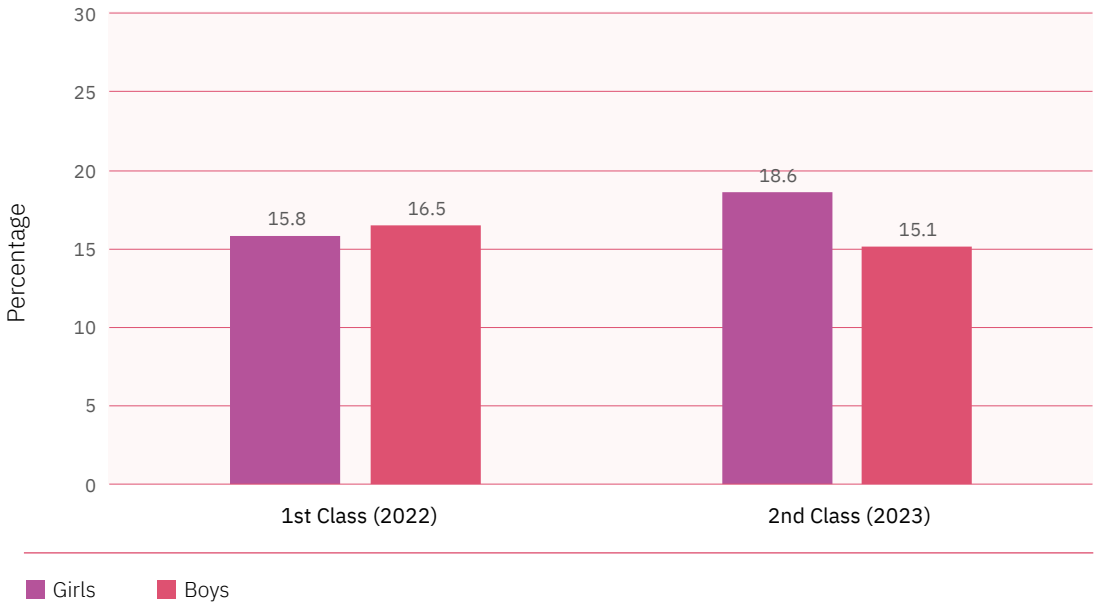
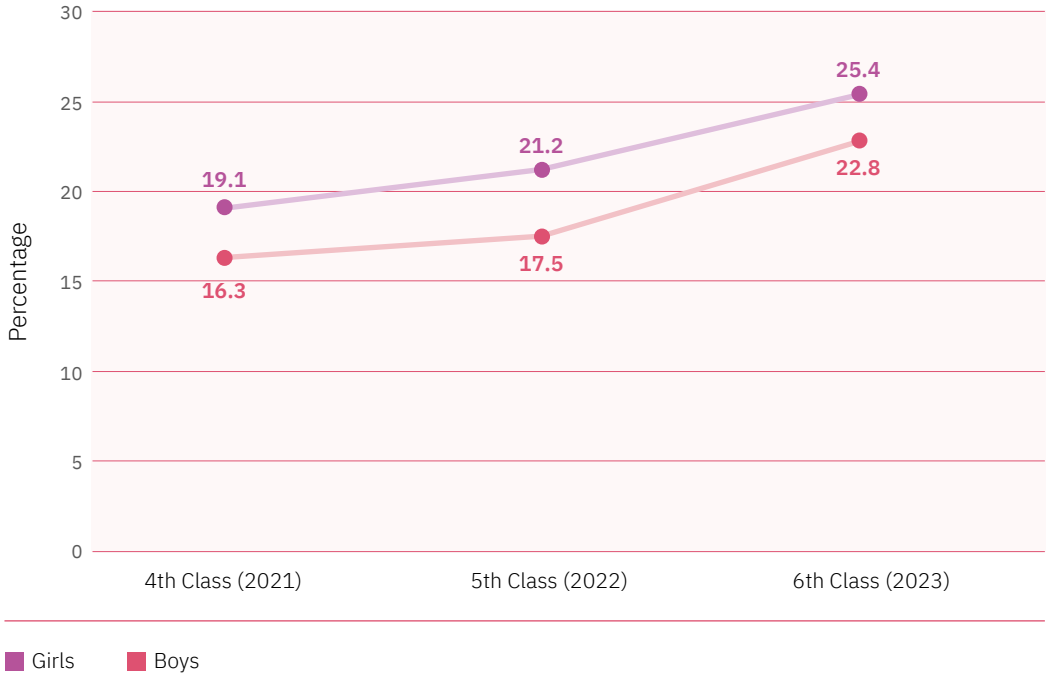
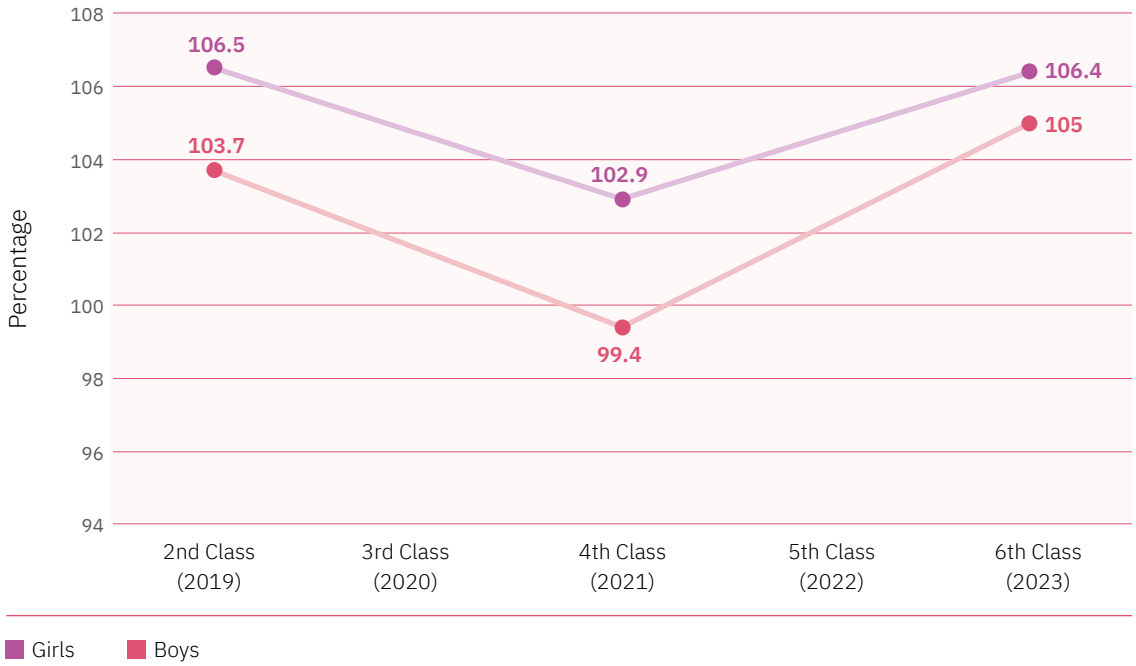


FIGURE 21: "Compared to other children in your class, how well do you think you do in reading?" (Struggling a little/Struggling a lot) (Cohort B)



Our preliminary analysis of literacy attainment of children in cohort B (Figure 22) confirms significant gender differences for 2nd class and 4th class, with girls attaining higher literacy scores than boys, and the gap declining by 6th class.

FIGURE 22: Average reading attainment standard score (Drumcondra Reading and Micra-T) by gender, (Cohort B)



Our interviews with the children in the case study schools highlighted their experiences of engagement with literacy. Reading for example is frequently mentioned by girls as a favourite subject, particularly enjoying the creative aspect of writing stories and reading:

> Girl: *I read all the books.... There were always books around. There were always books around, they were too babyish.*
> Interviewer: *Really? The ones that you use in school.*
> Girl: *No.*
> Interviewer: *Or at home?*
> Girl: *At home.*
> Interviewer: *At home, yeah. And would you like to have more books then?*
> Girl: *Yeah.... that is why we sometimes bring home books.*
> (Girls, 1st class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Rural)

> Girl: *Because we were reading more and the more you read, the more you know, the stronger you grow, the....*
> Girls: *[All class interject with a poem]. The more you read, the more you know. The more you know, the smarter you grow. The smarter you grow, the stronger your voice for speaking your mind or making a choice.*
> (Girls, 1st class, Non-DEIS, All-girls, Urban)

> Girl: *My favourite subject would probably be English, because I like to write. Yeah, I think English is a good subject, because usually when [Class teacher] ... like, we do English, she's like, oh you can write your own story, and we can do it by ourselves.*
> Interviewer: *And why is that?*
> Girl: *Because, sometimes when the teacher is like explaining it, and then everyone is like, I get it, but I don't understand.*
> Interviewer: *So, writing English creatively is nice because....*
> Girl: *I can do it by myself.*
> (Girls, 6th class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

Some boys also mentioned that they enjoyed reading. However boys in DEIS case study schools were more likely to mention their struggles with different aspects of literacy such as reading and spelling, and to connect this with not being smart in school:

> Boy: *No, I'm not one of the smartest.*
> Interviewer: *How do you know that?*
> Boy: *I don't really get high marks in tests.... I'm not too strong on reading and I'm not too strong on spelling.*
> Interviewer: *Okay. Why do you think that is?*
> Boy: *In my old school, I used to have to go out for reading classes.*
> (Boys, 6th class, DEIS, All-boys, Urban)

> Interviewer: *So, what about English?*
> Boy: *Not too good.*
> (Boy, 5th class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

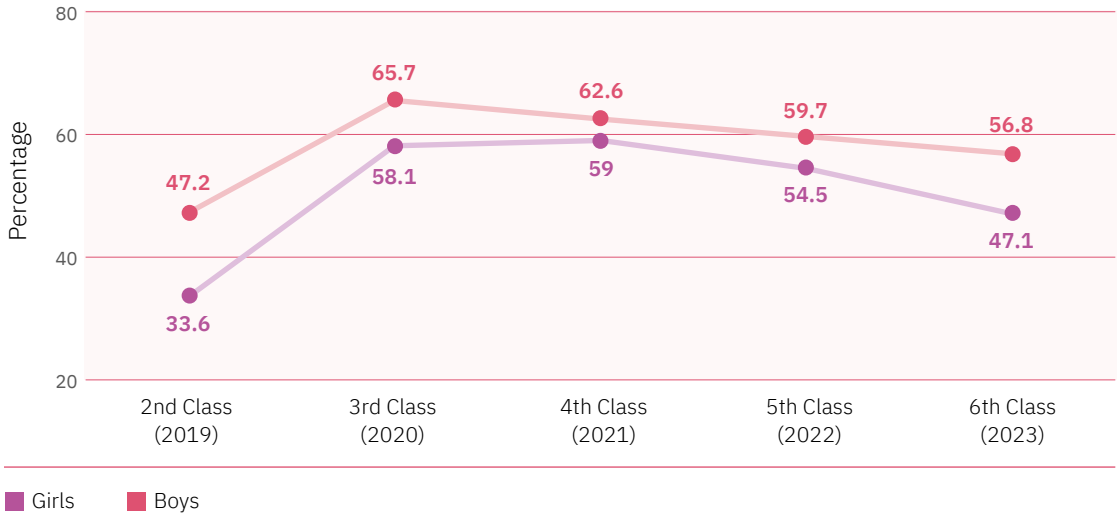
> Boy: *Sometimes ... English is, I sometimes be like daydreaming and I forget about it.*
> (Boy, 5th class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Rural Town)

Engagement with maths

We see some of the patterns observed in children's engagement with literacy learning being reversed with respect to children's engagement with maths. In cohort A, while more boys than girls express an interest in maths, the differences are not significant. However, as the children progress through primary school, gender differences in interest in Maths become significantly different with girls consistently expressing lower interest than boys. These patterns are not influenced by attending a single-sex school or a DEIS/Non-DEIS school.

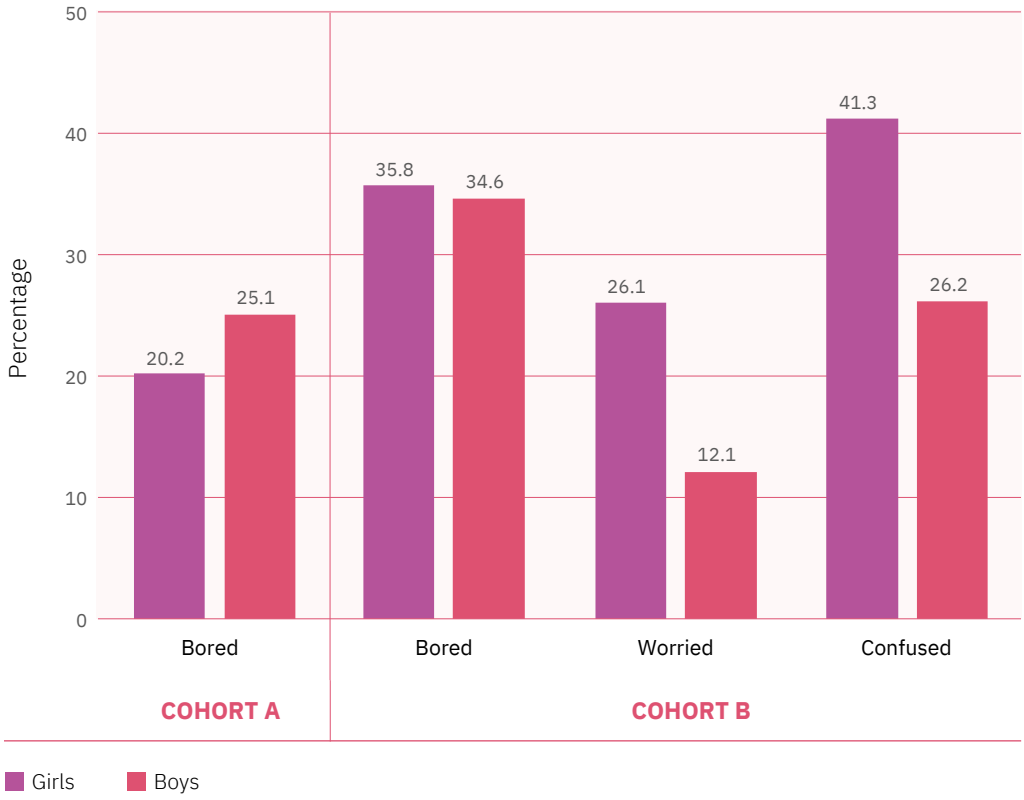
FIGURE 23: Cohort A, "I am interested in Maths" (Usually/Always)

FIGURE 24: "I am interested in Maths" (Usually/Always) (Cohort B)



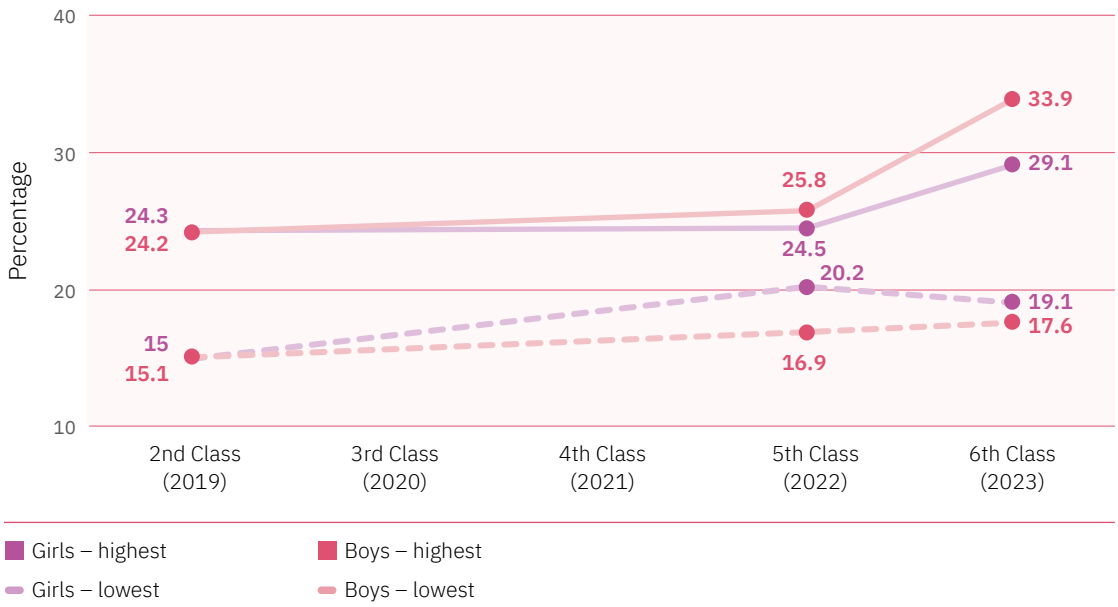
These gender differences in maths are also evident with respect to feeling worried, bored and confused.

FIGURE 25: "I feel bored/worried/confused when I am learning Maths" (Agree/Strongly Agree) (Cohorts A & B, 2022)



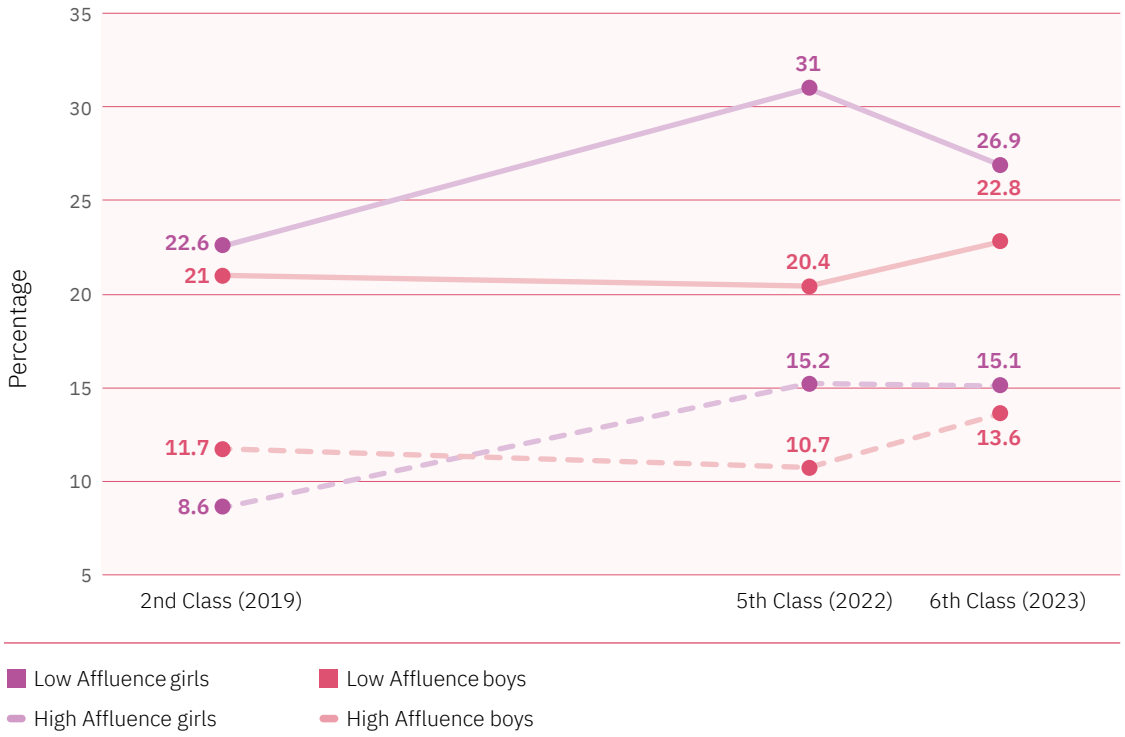
This higher engagement by boys with mathematics is also reflected in allocations to ability groups by teachers. Here we see that in cohort B, there are no significant differences between boys and girls in 2nd class. A gap between boys and girls seems to appear in 5th class and widens in 6th class, with more boys being placed in the highest (34%) and more girls in the lowest (19%) ability group for maths.

FIGURE 26: Ability grouping in Maths (Proportion in highest and lowest ability group) (Cohort B)



These patterns are not influenced by being in a single-sex/co-education school or DEIS/non-DEIS school. However, ability grouping seems to be linked with levels of poverty and wealth as girls from poorer families are consistently placed in lower ability groupings from 2nd to 6th class (See also Report 8a). Figure 27 shows the percentage of boys and girls from low and high family affluence backgrounds placed in the lowest ability grouping for cohort B in 2nd, 5th and 6th class.

FIGURE 27: Ability grouping in Maths by family affluence (proportion in lowest ability group) (Cohort B)



As with literacy, children were also asked to rate how they were doing in mathematics. Although there was no change in ratings over time, at each time point, boys rated themselves as higher than girls. In 4th class, the mean score for boys was 3.31 compared to 2.95 for girls. This pattern was repeated in 5th class and 6th class.

FIGURE 28: "Compared to other children in your class, how well do you think you do in Maths?" (Struggling a little/ Struggling a lot) (Cohort A)

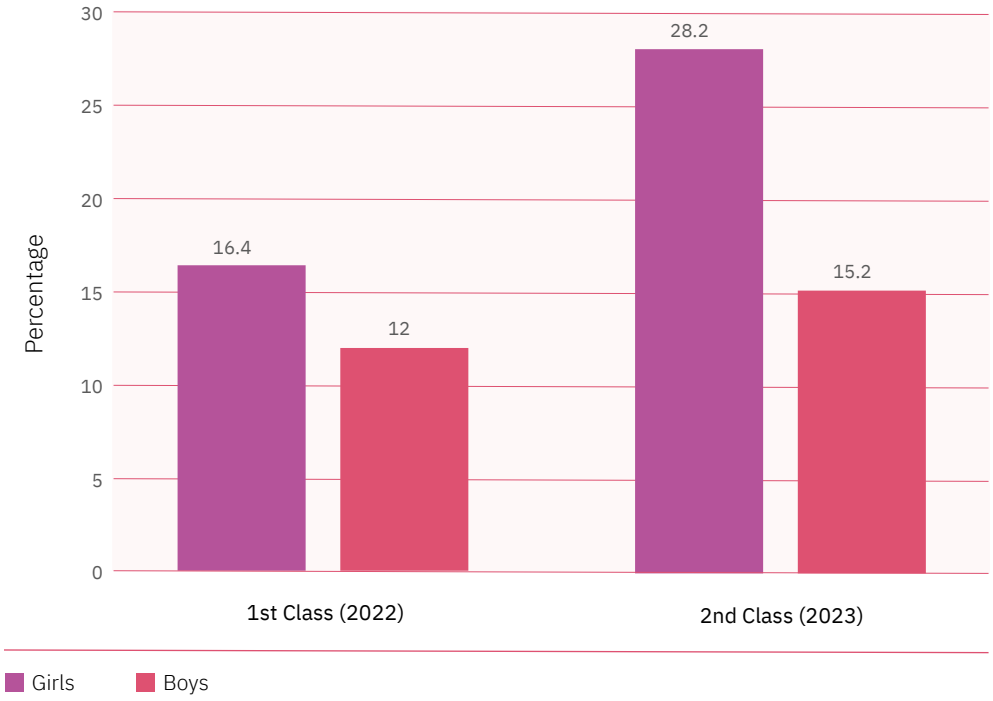
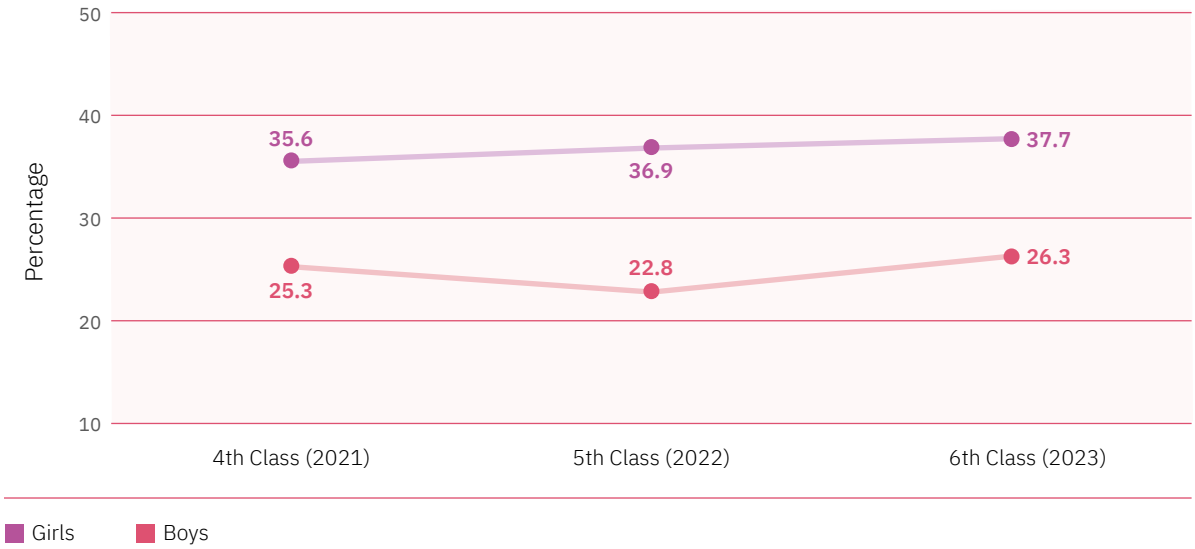


FIGURE 29: "Compared to other children in your class, how well do you think you do in Maths?" (Struggling a little/ Struggling a lot) (Cohort B)



Preliminary analysis of children's attainment in mathematics in cohort B shows there are no significant gender differences (Figure 30).

FIGURE 30: Average mathematics attainment standard score (Drumcondra Maths and Sigma-T) by gender (Cohort B)

In our interviews with children in the case study schools about their experiences of the curriculum, we found very mixed views on attitudes toward mathematics: some children listed it as one of their favourite subject areas, while others indicated more negative views. Evident was a clear association between being 'smart' and being good at maths, and both girls and boys talked about boys' competency in maths, and commented on social expectations for boys to excel in the subject:

> Interviewer: *Who would you say is the best boy in your class?*
> Girl 1: *Actually, [boy].... Because [boy] is really good at maths*
> Interviewer: *Okay.*
> Girl 2: *And I only know some times.*
> Interviewer: *Okay, whereas he always knows. Okay. So, there's a bit of a difference.*
> (Girls, 2nd class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

> Interviewer: *Who helps you most [boy] with your maths? How do you find maths?*
> Boy: *I do all of it by myself, because I'm a big boy.*
> (Boy, 2nd class, Non-DEIS, All-boys, Urban)

> Boy: *Like I feel pretty confident in my math skills, I feel like I could do a bit of sixth class maths.*
> (Boy, 5th class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Rural)

> Girl: *You need maths to get a good job because it's probably beat into him by parents, and parents don't tend to do that with girls.*
> (Girl, 5th class, Non-DEIS, All-girls, Rural town)

While there was some reference to girls not enjoying maths, there were others who reported that they love maths as they are good at it and get high marks in their tests.

> Girl: *I am really bad at maths.*
> Interviewer: *Are you really? I thought you were in the red group.*
> Girl: *I am not bad, but I think I am bad.*
> Interviewer: *Why do you think you are bad?*
> Girl: *Because I feel I am.*
> (Girls, 2nd class, DEIS, All-girls, Urban)

> Interviewer: *Girls, in second class is there anything you think you should be doing more of?*
> Girl: *I think maths.*
> Interviewer: *You should be doing more maths. Why [Girl]?*
> Girl: *Because it is good for your brain.'*
> (Girls, 2nd class, DEIS, All-girls, Urban)

> Interviewer: *And what subjects drag?*
> Girl: *For me, Irish and maths. Like, sometimes I just sit in maths staring at the back of the wall.*
> (Girl, 6th class, Non-DEIS, All-girls, Rural Town)

However, some boys did explain that although they enjoyed maths, they were less engaged with it as a subject, as they progressed through school:

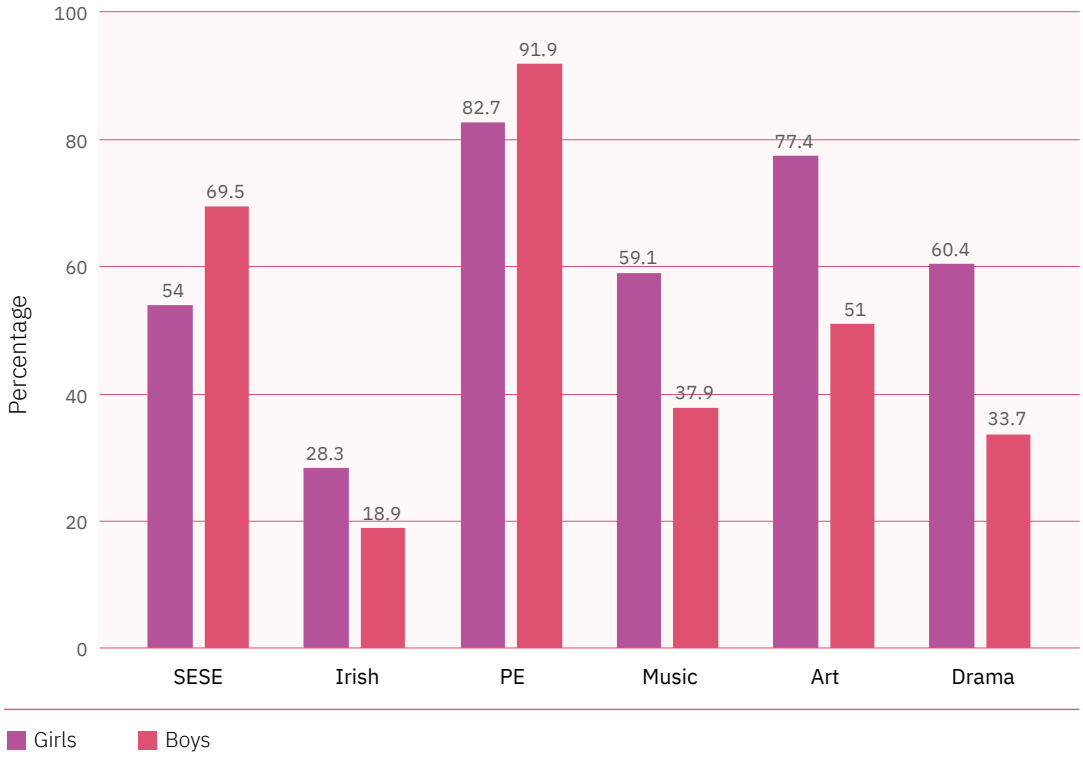
> Boy: *I used to be the best at maths in my class and then I just kind of got bored of it.*
> Interviewer: *So, you stopped trying?*
> Boy: *... I still do my work, but I don't do it as good as I can.*
> (Boy, 6th class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Rural Town).

Further curricular areas

We also found gendered differences in children's preferences for other subject areas as noted in Report 6. In both cohorts A and B across all waves, girls are more likely to report that they are interested in Irish, Art, Music and Drama. In addition, boys demonstrate higher levels of interest for PE and SESE. These differences are not influenced by being in a single-sex or co-educational school.

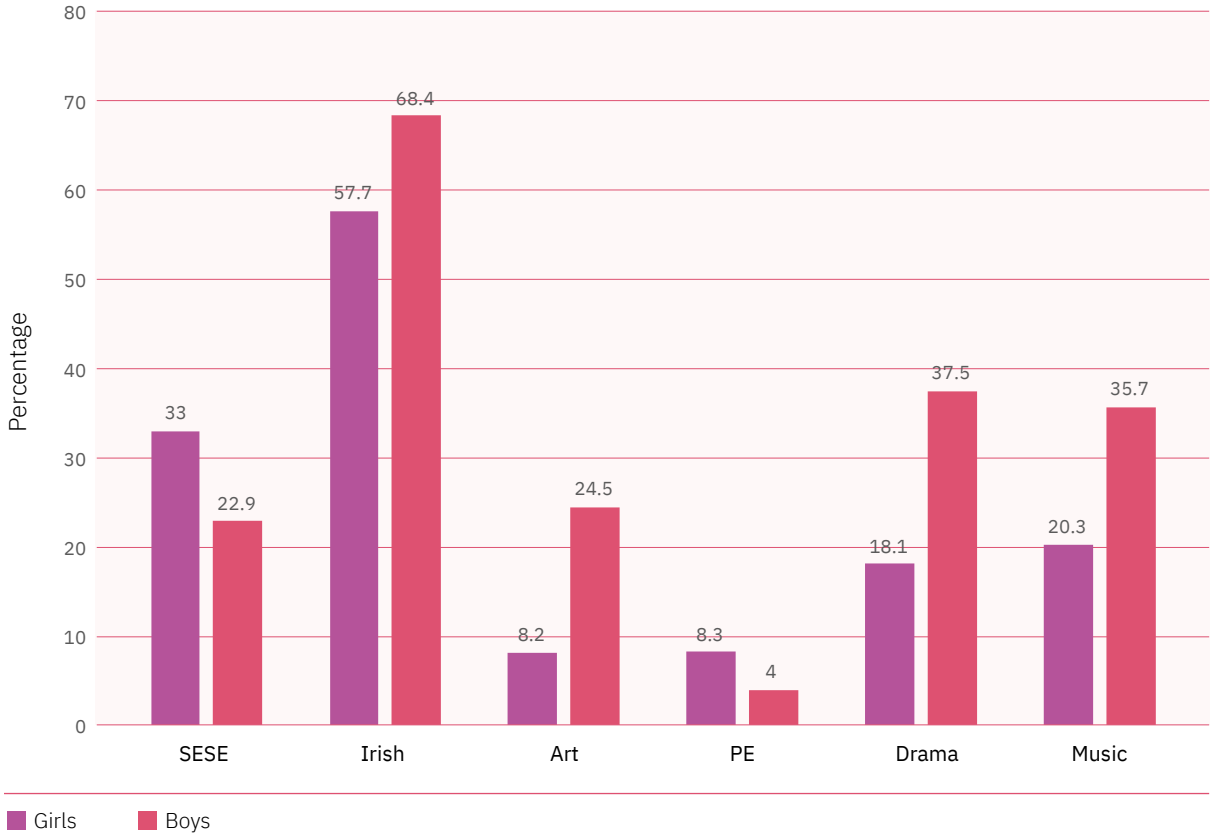
FIGURE 31: "I am interested in..." (Usually/Always) (Cohort A, 2023)

FIGURE 32: "I am interested in..." (Usually/Always) (Cohort B, 2023)



For older children in cohort B, more negative views – e.g. being bored learning a subject, confirmed these differences between boys and girls. Compared to girls, boys in 6th class indicate that they feel bored when learning Irish (68%), Drama (37%) and Music (36%).

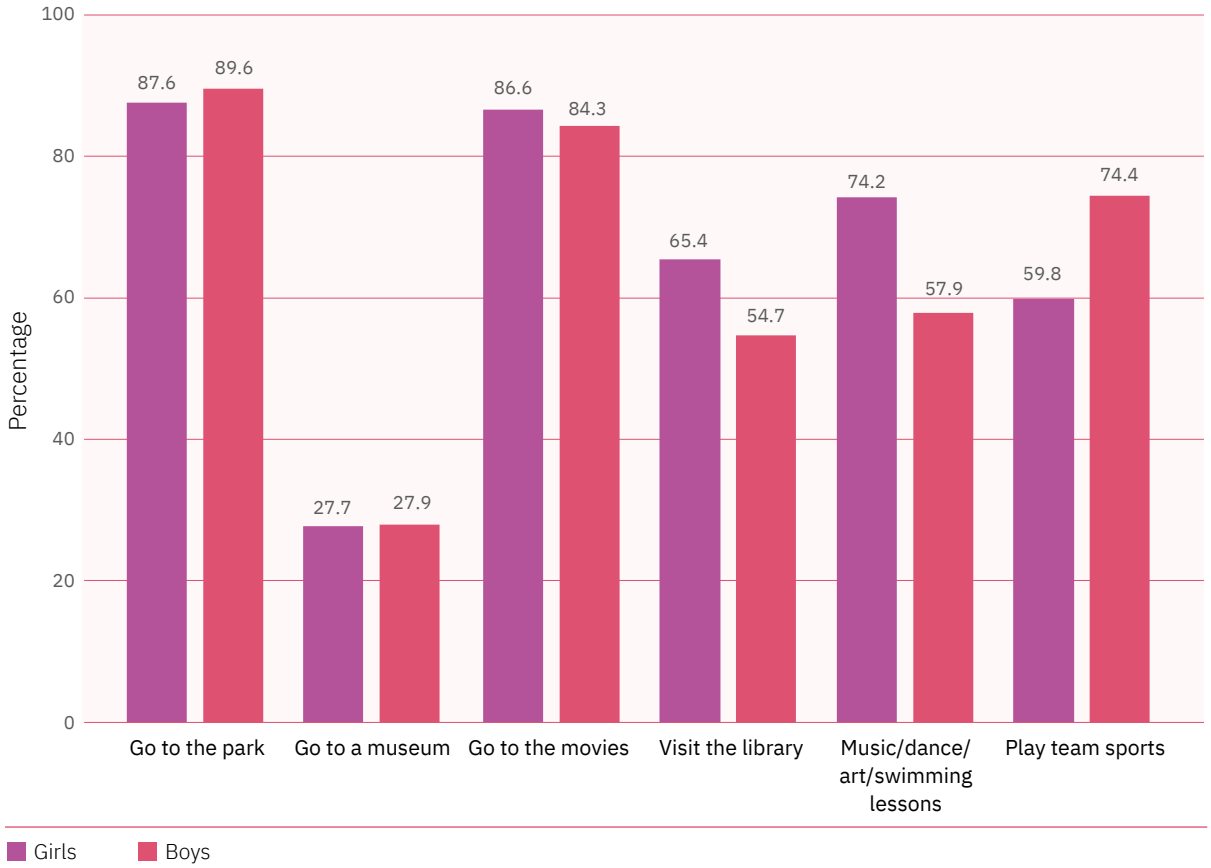
FIGURE 33: "I feel bored when I am learning..." (Agree/Strongly Agree) (Cohort B, 2023)



Extracurricular activities

Children's interests in curricular areas are both reinforced and supported by the kinds of activities they engage with outside of school. Report 8a considered this with respect to social background. When we look at this by gender, we also find significant differences, with boys in 2nd class more likely to participate in team sports, while girls are more likely to attend music, dance and swimming lessons.

FIGURE 34: "How often do you...?" (Sometimes/Often) (Cohort B, 2019)



Our case study work with the children highlighted the clear associations children drew between their gender identities and participation in different kinds of activities, especially outside of school, that were demarcated along arts/dance/drama and particular sporting activities, reflecting patterns in the national study. Football is classified by the children as a masculine activity and an interest/strength in this an important element of being a boy, including narratives among younger boys especially about their relative superiority in terms of football to girls:

> Boy: *Yeah, like boys are better at football than girls.*
> (Boy, 1st class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Rural town)

Boy 1: *My sister goes to soccer every Tuesday and like when we go to them they always scream like and … say the ball comes to them, they don't even … they just kick it and then it just goes over like….*
Boy 2: *Yeah, and like they [girls] wouldn't know how to take throw-ins.*
Interviewer: *Would they not?*
Boy 2: *No.*
Interviewer: *Why?*
Boy 2: *They wouldn't be very well, well I mean first of all they probably wouldn't know every single rule in football like, handball and you know like penalty and free kick.*
(Boys, 2nd class, Non-DEIS, All-boys, Urban)

Interviewer: *What does a girl do that you wouldn't do as a boy?*
Boy 1: *Ballet.*
Interviewer: *Ballet. Okay. Can boys do ballet?*
Boy 1: *No.*
Boy 2: *Not really.*
Boy 3: *I can.*
(Boys, 2nd class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

We also found some evidence in our case study interviews of younger girls who were excited to talk about their participation in GAA teams, in and outside school, with one teacher querying if girls get the same recognition for sport in a co-educational school:

Girl 1: *Harder GAA.*
Girl 2: *I want to play more football.*
Girl 1: *Like matches.*
(Girls, 2nd class, DEIS, All-girls, Urban)

Teacher: *And the fact as well I think is really nice about being in an all-girls' school, is that the girls' GAA team are brilliant, and all the sporty older children are really recognised for their talent. Whereas maybe if there was a mixed school, maybe they wouldn't get as much recognition for all the brilliant talent that they have.*
(Female teacher, Senior Infants, DEIS, All-girls, Urban)

Similarly for older children, boys reported liking sport, while girls spoke about other extracurricular activities, that are linked to more artistic expressions; 'Anime' and dancing:

> Girl: *It's just really hard to study now ... because like me and [Girl], we have a dance show coming up in March ... and we have to Irish dancing for the Céilí and all. And it's just really stressful thinking about that stuff.*
> (Girl, 6th class, Non-DEIS, All-girls, Rural Town)

> Boy 1: *Our class loves football.*
> Boy 2: *Yeah.*
> Interviewer: *Why? Why does your class love....*
> Boy 1: *I don't know, we just do, we always play it.... So we had a football team about two years ago, we were in fourth, and then COVID happened.*
> (Boys, 6th Class, DEIS, All-boys, Urban)

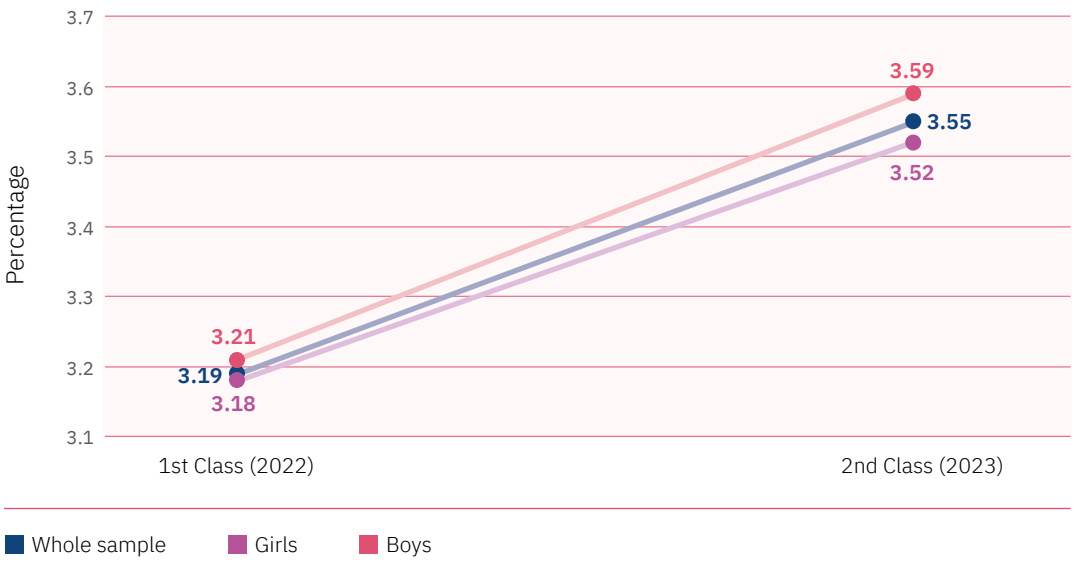
> Boy: *That's what our class is all about really, just football, like [for] the boys.*
> (Boy, 6th class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Rural Town)

Academic expectations

Our analysis thus far highlights how there are differences in how boys and girls position themselves with respect to their learning and how this aligns with particular constructs of both femininity and masculinity. We noted for example gender differences with respect to engagement with literacy and maths both in terms of preferences as well as perceived strengths. We also noted gendered differences with respect to engagement with the arts and/or sports. These patterns interlink with our previous overview of how children actively construct gender, defined and typified by 'doing' boy and 'doing' girl in particular ways. We also saw in Report 5 how children's experience of the curriculum is influenced by their growing sense of competency. We explored these gendered positionings further with the children through their ideas of being 'smart'.

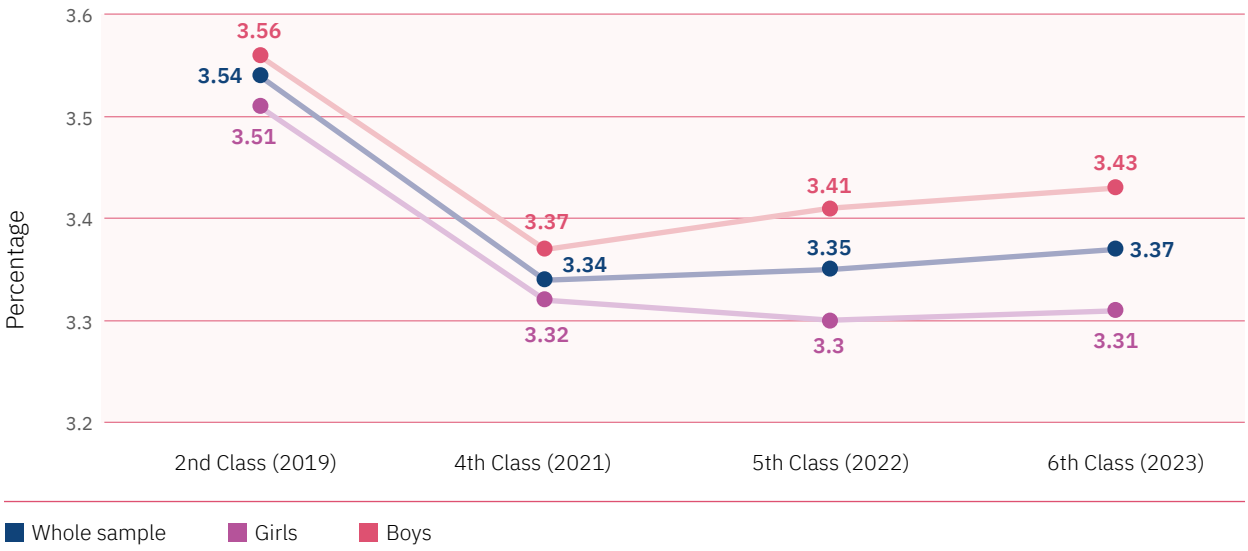
In the national study we measured the overall academic self-concept of children and across both cohorts, also noted in Report 7. Of note in cohort A, is the gender gap in self-concept that begins to occur when the children progress into 2nd class, when boys show a significantly higher academic self-concept than girls.

FIGURE 35: Children's academic self-concept (Cohort A)



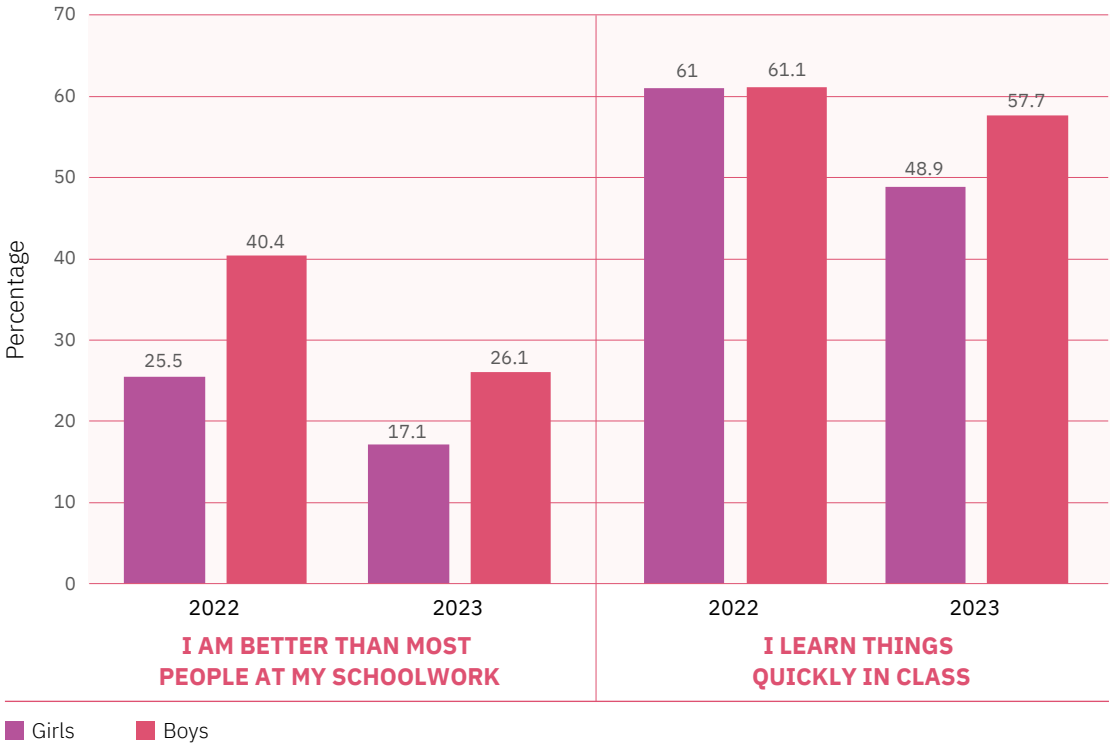
In cohort B, the gap remains and increases as the children progress from 4th – 6th class.

FIGURE 36: Children's academic self-concept (Cohort B)



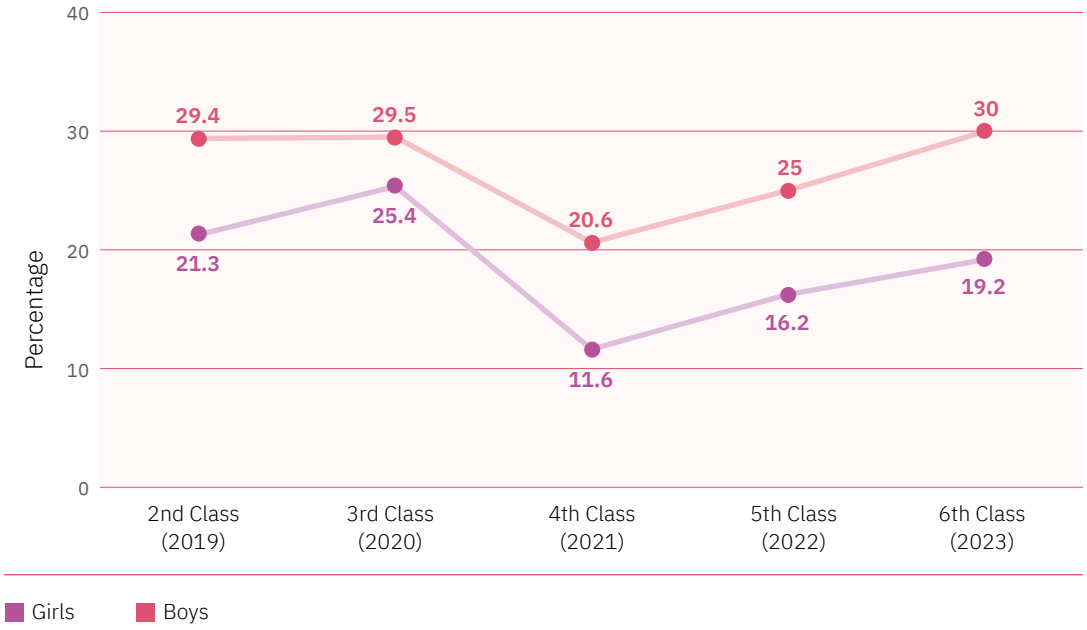
Delving further, children were asked to rate how well they thought they were doing relative to their peers in class. When the children were asked to rate their competency, boys in both cohort A and cohort B consistently indicated they were better than most people at their classwork highlighting how higher performance than others is an element of their masculine identities. As figure 37 shows, for children in cohort A boys are significantly more likely than girls to say they are better than most people at their school work, especially in 1st class, while they are also more likely than girls in 2nd class to say they learn things quickly in class.

FIGURE 37: "I am better than most people at my classwork" and "I learn things quickly in class" (Usually/Always) (Cohort A)



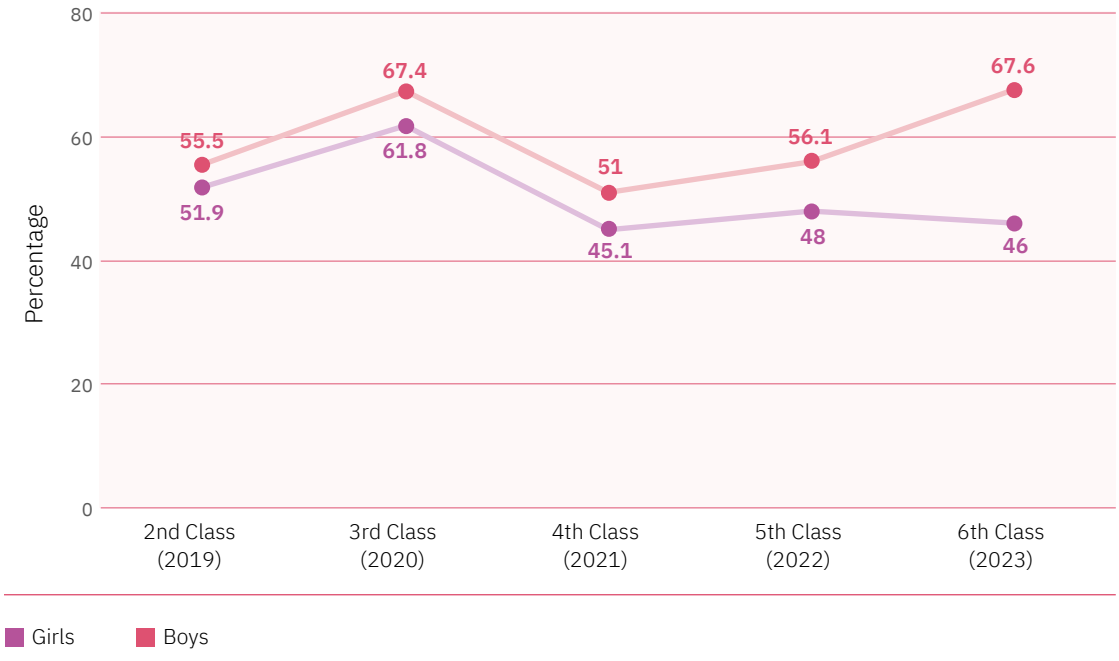
As Figure 38 shows, in cohort B boys tend to think that they are better than most people at their classwork consistently across all the waves. Attending a single-sex versus co-educational school did not influence these views:

FIGURE 38: "I am better than most people at my classwork" (Usually/Always) (Cohort B)



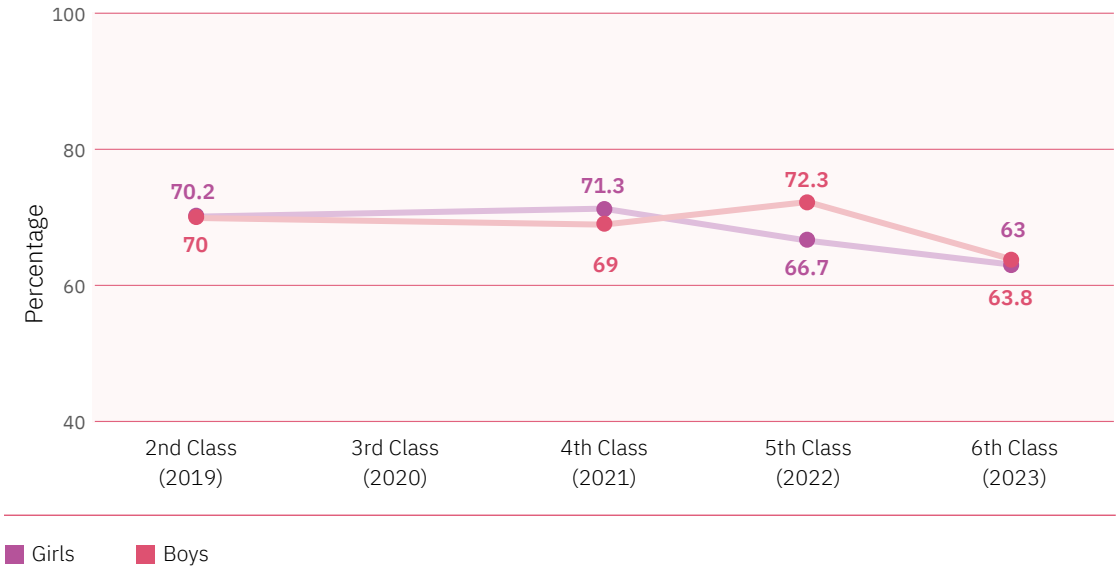
In contrast, girls were significantly less likely to indicate they were better than most people at their classwork, aligning with our previous analysis of girls being more inclined to question themselves and be worried about how they were doing. In Figure 39 we see how girls in cohort B are significantly less likely than boys to say they learn things quickly in class and this gender gap widens considerably as the children progress through primary school:

FIGURE 39: "I learn things quickly in class" (Usually/Always) (Cohort B)



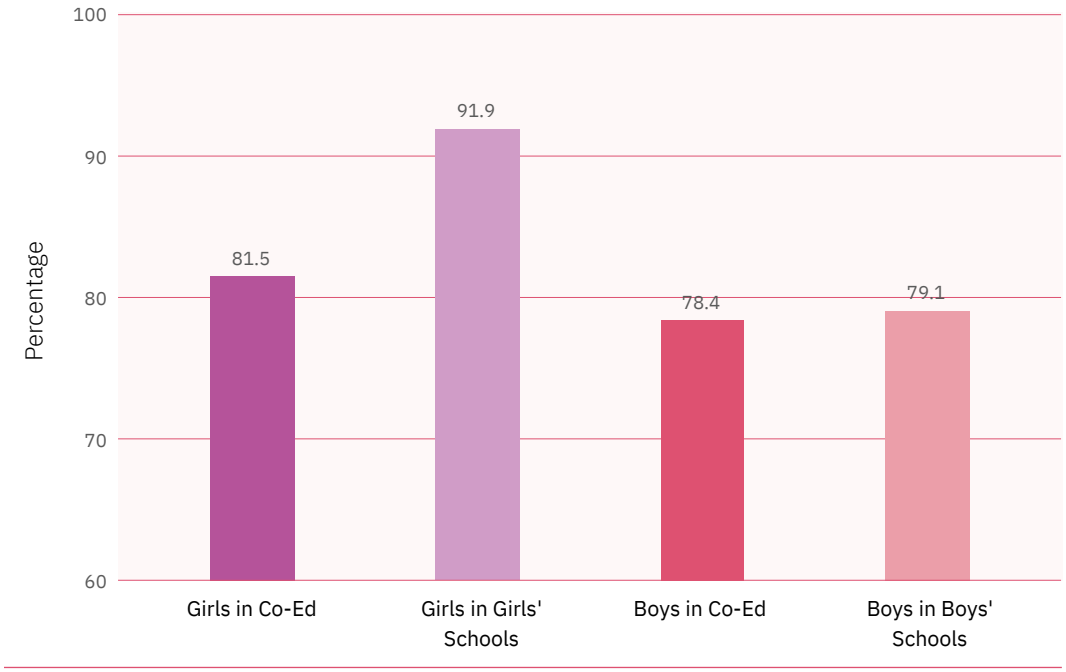
However, when asked questions related to their academic standing with teachers, there were only marginal differences between boys and girls in cohort B when asked if they thought their teacher thinks they are smart:

FIGURE 40: "My teacher thinks I am smart" (Usually/Always) (Cohort B)



In cohort A when the children were in 2nd class, a significant difference was identified. Girls in all-girls schools are more likely to agree that their teachers thought they were smart, relative to girls in co-educational schools and boys in all school types. As figure 41 shows, in cohort A more girls than boys tend to agree that their teacher thinks they are smart. This is more evident for girls in girls' schools in 2nd class (92%).

FIGURE 41: "My teacher thinks I am smart" (Usually/Always) (Cohort A, 2023)



Our case study interviews provided further nuance to these perspectives. We found evidence of both boys and girls speaking confidently about their smartness, while others were highly attuned to the struggles they were encountering in school.

> Girl: *I am not <u>really</u> good at reading, but I can read little books, so I think I am good at reading … I think I get a load of ticks in maths.*
> (Girl, 1st class, DEIS, All-girls, Urban)

> Girl: *I don't get a good score, like not a horrible score, but not a good score … like 16 out of 20 or something like that, and then like I already feel kind of sad, like 'Oh no … I'm not that smart compared to my sister and my mum and my dad.*
> (Girl, 6th class, Non-DEIS, All-girls, Rural Town)

> Interviewer: *And why do you think you're not smart?*
> Boy: *Well, I am but like.*
> Interviewer: *You are smart okay.*
> Boy: *But like you know I'm not like the smartest in the world.*
> Interviewer: *Okay. And what does being smart mean?*
> Boy: *Well, you usually get everything right and you're good at work and yeah.*
> (Boy, 2nd class, Non-DEIS, All-boys, Urban)

> Interviewer: *Do you think you're smart?*
> Boy: *Yeah, I'd say I'm pretty smart. If I'm good in fifth class, I'll definitely do good in sixth class.*
> (Boy, 5th class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

Anxiety

Our previous analysis (Report 7) on children's wellbeing highlighted increasing reported levels of anxiety, especially among girls in school. With respect to feeling worried about things, Figure 42 below highlights the greater level of reporting worry by girls across both cohorts. These patterns are not influenced by whether or not girls are in an all-girls' or co-educational school.

FIGURE 42: Worry/Anxiety (Usually/Always) (Cohort A, 2023)

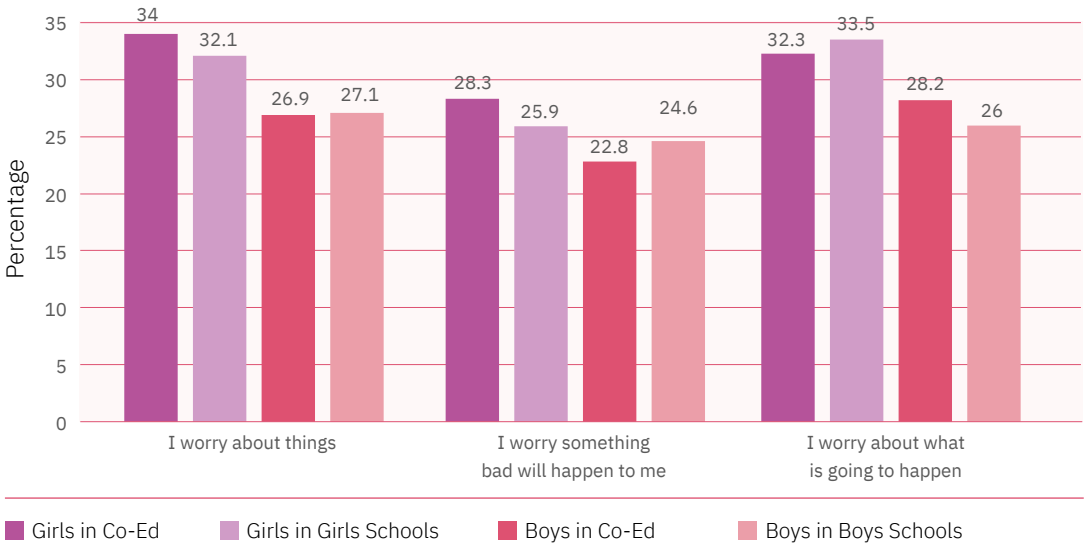
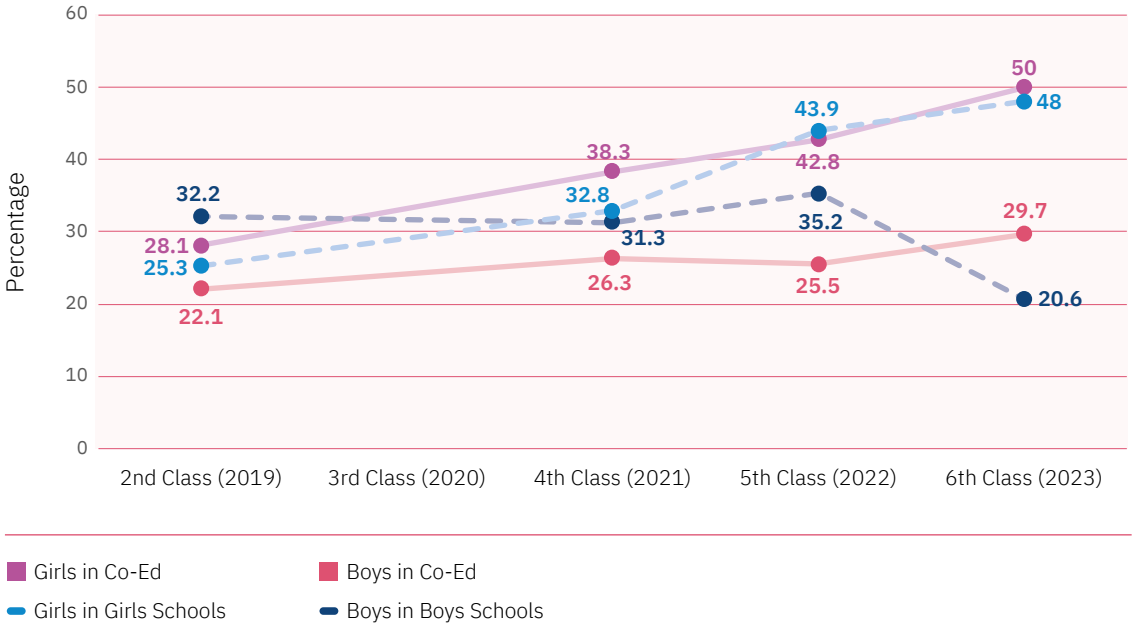
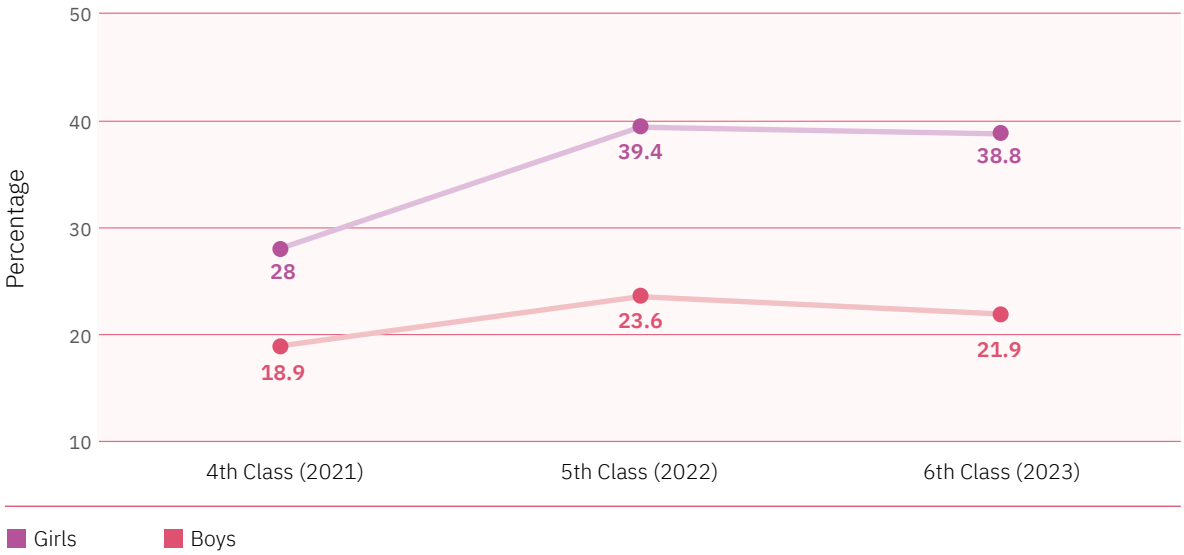


FIGURE 43: "I worry about things" (Usually/Always) (Cohort B)



We also previously reported on levels of anxiety over testing among children in primary school (Report 6), with approximately one third of children who did not typically feel anxious about testing, another third who typically felt anxious sometimes and a further third who always felt anxious. When we consider these responses by gender we find that girls in cohort B are significantly more likely to indicate they are worried about tests often or always. This is not influenced by whether or not they attend an all-girls or co-educational school.

FIGURE 44: "Before I take a test, I am worried I will fail" (Often/Always) (Cohort B)



Discipline

Given girls are more likely to be positively disposed to school than boys, we also find gender differences in attitudes toward school rules. Girls in general are more likely than boys to agree that rules are fair, although as girls get older they are less inclined to do so. The gender profile of the school is not an influential factor (being single-sex or co-educational) in cohort B. However, for the younger cohort A, while girls are again more likely than boys to agree that school rules are fair, this is especially the case in all-girls schools. This reiterates our findings earlier in relation to a stronger culture of expectation regarding behaviour in these schools.

FIGURE 45: "The rules of the school are fair" (Usually/Always) (Cohort A, 2023)

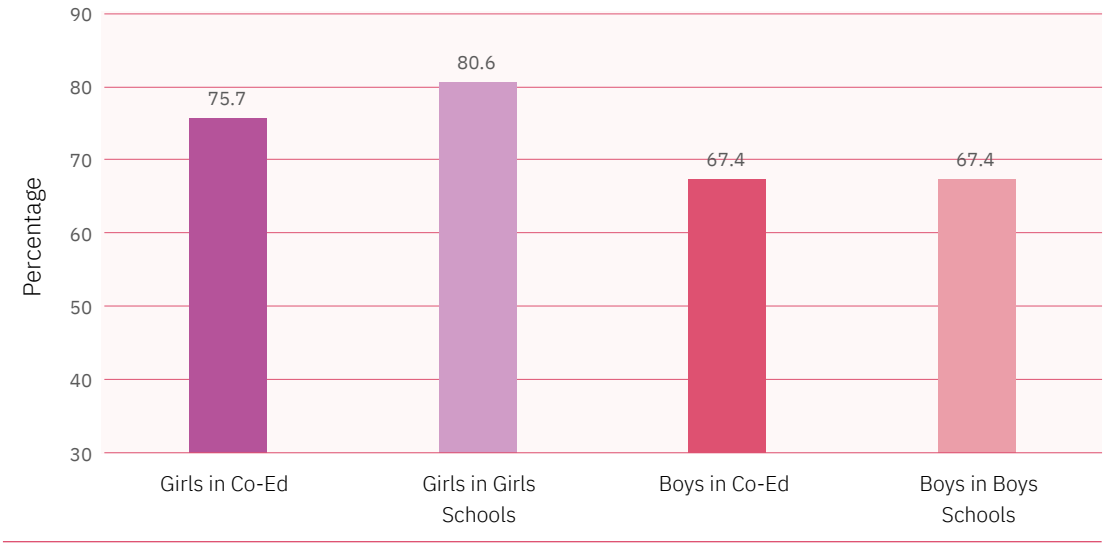


FIGURE 46: "The rules of the school are fair" (Usually/Always) (Cohort B)

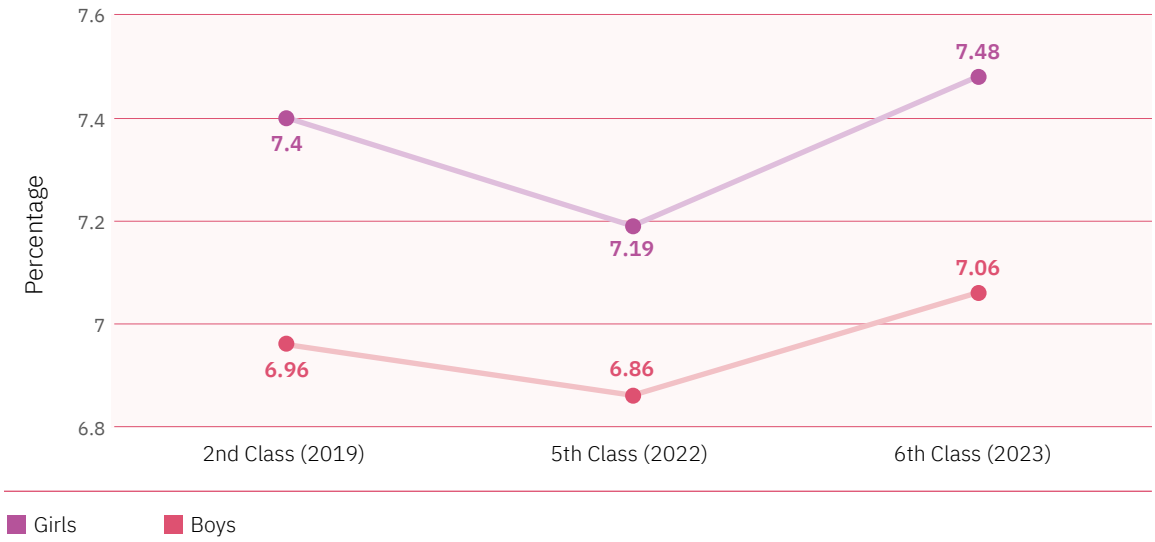
Our previous Report 8a highlighted the intersection of some of these patterns with social background, with teachers identifying greater behavioural challenges in DEIS schools, especially in cohort B, and interviews highlighted a greater disengagement by some boys in DEIS case study schools.

Observing gender dynamics in classrooms

Our systematic observations of classroom interactions provide an illustration of gendered patterns and perspectives in action in primary school classrooms. During fieldwork with cohort B in 2nd class, 5th class and 6th class, children's behaviour during lessons was rated using the ORACLE[7] observation tool. Fieldworkers observed selected children's behaviour during 10 time intervals. Five behaviours were coded as 'engagement' behaviours: co-operating alone, co-operating with a friend, co-operating with a teacher, co-operating with routine tasks and waiting for the teacher. If children displayed any of the engagement behaviours during each observation interval, they received a score of '1'. Engagement behaviours were summed to generate a total score for each child that could range from 0 to 10 (higher scores reflected more time spent engaging).

As Figure 47 below shows, girls were observed spending slightly more time engaging with their learning compared to boys at all three time points. The gender difference was significant in 2nd class and 6th class, but not in 5th class.

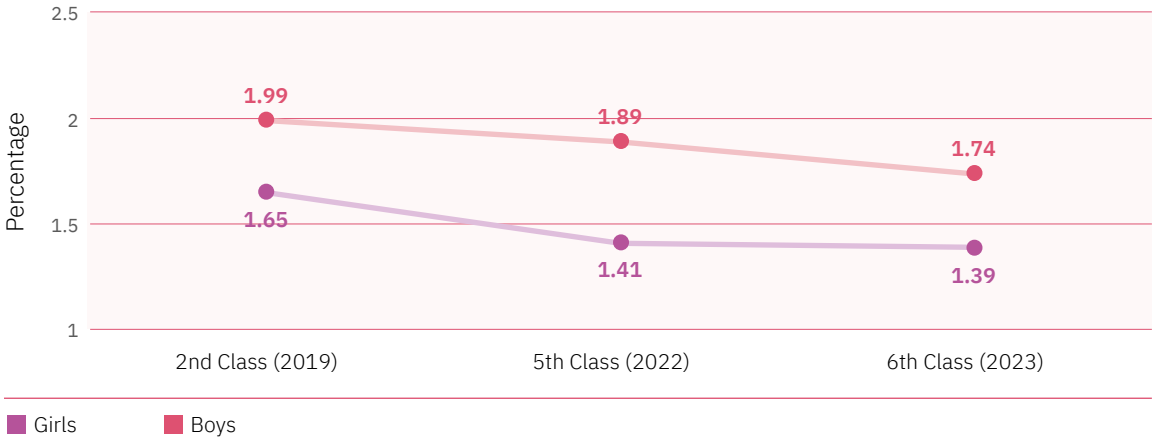
FIGURE 47: Observed engagement behaviour by gender (Cohort B)



Conversely, children's disengagement was also recorded – through behaviours that measured their level of attentiveness and distraction of others during the observation period (distracted passive, distracted active and disruptive). Disengagement behaviours were summed to generate a total score for each child that could range from 0 to 10 (higher scores reflected more time spent disengaged). Boys were observed spending slightly more time disengaging compared to girls at all three time points (Figure 48). The gender difference was significant at all time points (2nd class; 5th class; 6th class).

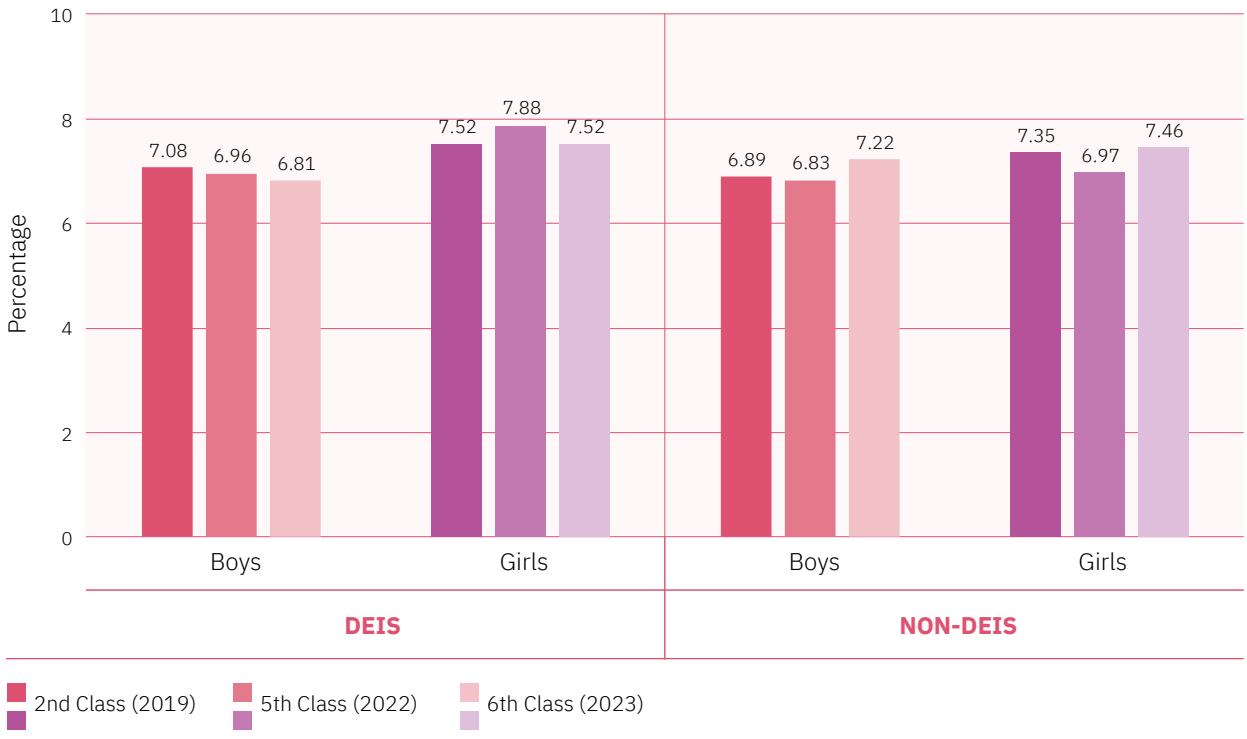
[7] During fieldwork with Cohort B in 2nd class, 5th class and 6th class, children's behaviour during lessons was recorded at 30 second intervals using the Observational and Research Classroom Learning Evaluation (ORACLE) Pupil Record (Galton & Hargreaves, 2019).

FIGURE 48: Observed disengagement behaviour by gender (Cohort B)



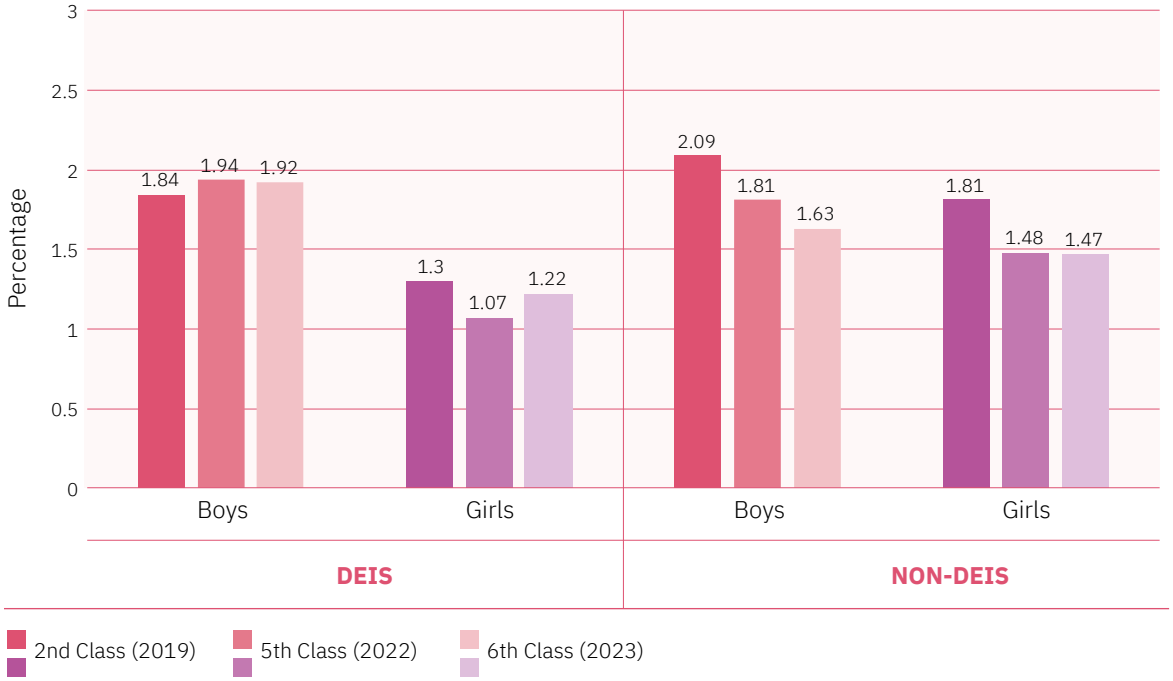
We also looked at these patterns with respect to gender and being in a DEIS/non-DEIS school. No significant differences were identified with respect to levels of engagement of boys and girls in DEIS and non-DEIS schools.

FIGURE 49: Comparison of engagement and gender by DEIS (Cohort B)



Similarly, while disengagement between boys and girls differed slightly depending on whether they were in a DEIS or non-DEIS school, these differences are not significant.

FIGURE 50: Comparison of disengagement and gender by DEIS (Cohort B)



In our research in case study schools, gendered constructions of discipline, rules and the engagement behaviour of boys and girls were in evidence both in relation to children's own narratives as well as in how teachers referred to boys and girls in class. For younger children, in cohort A, both boys and girls associated being a 'good' girl with how they behaved towards others, including being attentive and 'well-behaved' in class.

> Interviewer: *What's a good girl?*
> Girl: *Well, she could always be listening, or something, to the teacher and stuff.*
> (Girl, 2nd class, Non-DEIS, All-girls, Urban)

> Girl 1: *I would like to be [Girl].*
> Girl 2: *Yeah, [Girl]'s a golden child, like [Girl] doesn't do anything wrong.*
> Girl 1: *So, like say, [Girl] is the golden child and [Girl] is like a golden child, she's like, she knows like everything.*
> Interviewer: *She knows everything.*
> Girl 2: *Nobody knows everything.*
> Girl 1: *But she's like, she never be's like bad or rude or anything.*
> (Girls, 2nd class, Non-DEIS, All-girls, Urban)

While both girls and boys across both cohorts tended to report that boys were more disruptive in class, across our interviews with the children in 4th, 5th and 6th class, they also commented on what they perceived as a greater tolerance/leniency for boys. This included stereotyping boys in terms of misbehaviour but also referring to the allocation of 'movement' breaks (for children with additional support needs, in this case boys):

> Girl: *They [boys] get brought out and everything and the behaviour doesn't stop, they just get brought out every time and it's like it's not helping anything. So, they do kind of get rewarded or they get brought out if they're doing something bad. A lot of the girls said that none of the girls get brought out, it's always the boys and the boys always get the dojo points and stuff.*
> (Girl, 4th class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

> Boy 1: *The only people that get marked down for movement breaks are boys, no girls*
> Boy 2: *I mean boys are expected to do sports.*
> Boy 1: *I'm not even meant to go on movement breaks anymore and I used to have to go.*
> Interviewer: *Do you like movement breaks?*
> Boy 1: *Yes, they're fun, I get to go to the sensory room.*
> (Boys, 6th class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

> Boy: *Boys get in more trouble than girls but because [Girl] is over there in the corner of the room screaming her head off and I'm just sitting there, say one word '[Boy] be quiet!*
> Girl: *It's sad, sad for you.*
> Boy: *Stereotypes.*
> (Children, 6th class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

Children then are sensitive to any perceived difference in the application of 'rules', often interpreting this in terms of gender. In Report 8a we also referred to this in the context of quieter children who may feel relatively 'invisible' in the classroom, especially where behavioural challenges exist. In the following excerpt, it is two girls who suggest they 'do not stick' out:

> Girl: *Like my whole time here, I've never gone past a verbal warning. I've gotten two verbal warnings my whole....*
> Interviewer: *So you've never had a yellow card, you've never had....*
> Girl: *No, never had a red card, a suspension, a warning one, or a warning two. I got two verbal warnings, one in third class and one in fourth.*
> Interviewer: *Okay, but still you're not getting taken out for good behaviour?*
> Girl: *No.*
> Interviewer: *Why aren't you getting picked more?*
> Girl: *I don't know, because we don't really act out like.*
> Interviewer: *So you don't actually know, it's not clear.*
> Girl: *Like most of the teachers I've met, they don't even remember me. Yeah.*
> Interviewer: *Ah....*
> Girl: *It's like we don't really stick out in the class.*
> Interviewer: *Like neither in a good way, nor a bad way?*
> Girl: *Yeah.*
> (Girls, 6th class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

Rules based stereotyping was a concern for girls with respect to the wearing of uniforms. Girls in 6th class in a number of our 'co-educational' schools, reported that the requirements for boys' uniforms are not as stringent as they are for girls. They also commented on the fact that issues concerning uniforms, for example, girls having to wear skirts, continues to be an area of gender-based tension in their transition to secondary schools:

> Girl: *Yeah, I went into a school with girls and boys, because my mom said I might have to go to [School], which is like a tragedy for me.*
> Interviewer: *Why would that be a tragedy?*
> Girl: *Because there's only girls and you have to wear uniforms, with skirts, and I do not like wearing skirts.*
> (Girls, 4th class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

> Girl: *Because ... I don't know if they're sexist ... so, the girls in [secondary school] for their uniform, have to get specific runners, and they're not cheap. Have to get specific trousers, and they're not cheap either. And they get you tops anyways, but the boys can buy their shoes from, I don't know, the cheap [supermarkets] or whatever, and they can buy their trousers, but the girls can't.*
> (Girl, 6th class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Rural)

> Interviewer: *Do you get a choice whether you wear a skirt or trousers?*
> Girl 1: *No.*
> Interviewer: *You have to wear a skirt.*
> Girl 1: *You have to....*
> Girl 2: *No, trousers for PE.*
> Girl 1: *... leggings, you're not allowed to wear leggings for PE.*
> Girl 2: *You would be murdered.*
> Girl 1: *My god, I want to wear leggings, I don't wear tracksuit bottoms.*
> (Girls, 6th class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Rural)

In their narratives, teachers continually referred to girls and boys as essentially different while also being conscious of not reinforcing gender stereotypes. At times teachers normalised very different sets of behaviour for girls and boys in school, similar to the observations of the children themselves. In our younger cohort, teachers explained that they usually found girls to be calm, co-operative and engaged in their work in class, while boys are described as being more loud, boisterous, casual in their approach to work, wanting to get tasks over with so they can get on with playing/talking to friends:

> Teacher: *I don't want to be pushing any gender norms on them, but I do think that maybe girls at that age are usually a little bit better at sitting and doing a certain amount of work, and doing it independently.... I know boys are lovely as well ... any bits of subbing I've done; it's a base level of noise is so much louder. And there's so much more fidgeting.*
> (Female teacher, Senior Infants, DEIS, All-girls, Urban)

> Teacher: *This feels a bit gender stereotyped, but I feel like girls are all about neat, tidy, everything has to look really well kind of neat, I'm going to have everything organised, whereas boys are more like, I'm going to get the answer done and I feel like boys like want to play football, want to have banter, want to just be with their mates.*
> (Female teacher, 1st class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban).

> Teacher: *Often boys can be a bit more nearly offended by the groupings that you put them in. So, girls will just sit in their group and be kind of like, you know, I'll chat to whoever. Sometimes boys can be a bit more like, 'How come there's two boys that are allowed to sit beside each other over there?' They'll kind of challenge you more...*
> (Female teacher, Senior Infants, DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

> Teacher: *But I would find with the boys that they tend to push and shove each over a little bit more than I would imagine girls would, but then they are over it.... So, it can be a little loud and it can be a little boisterous.*
> (Female teacher, Junior Infants, Non-DEIS, All-boys, Urban)

In all school types, it was evident that girls were held to a higher standard of behaviour, and in more negative terms were described as 'secretive' and 'dramatic', while for boys, more aggressive behaviour was to some extent normalised by teachers, most especially in all-boys' schools:

> Teacher: *I think boys are more vocal, they'll say it as it is, you'll hear it, we'll sort it, move on, they'll have their little tiff and a few minutes later they're back friends, I think girls sort of kind of do it almost ... that the teacher can't see or no one else is aware of what's going on.*
> (Female teacher, 1st class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

> Teacher: *In fourth and fifth we'd a lot of drama, but they are kind of over that now.*
> (Female teacher, 6th class, Non-DEIS, All-girls, Rural town)

> Teacher: *Exclusion is a big one with girls in terms of bullying I find. That someone will be deliberately left out of a group or left out of a game and they think they're being subtle about it ... I would say it's more sophisticated, the type of bullying amongst the girls as opposed to the boys.*
> (Male teacher, 5th class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

> Teacher: *I can tell you who the ... key kingpins here are ... There's one boy in particular who doesn't even want to share with his own teammates, because ... you know, he is so good at [football]. Some parents then are worried because their son isn't playing football and he should because he's a boy.... It definitely causes issues in the yard.*
> (Female teacher, 1st class, Non-DEIS, All-boys, Urban)

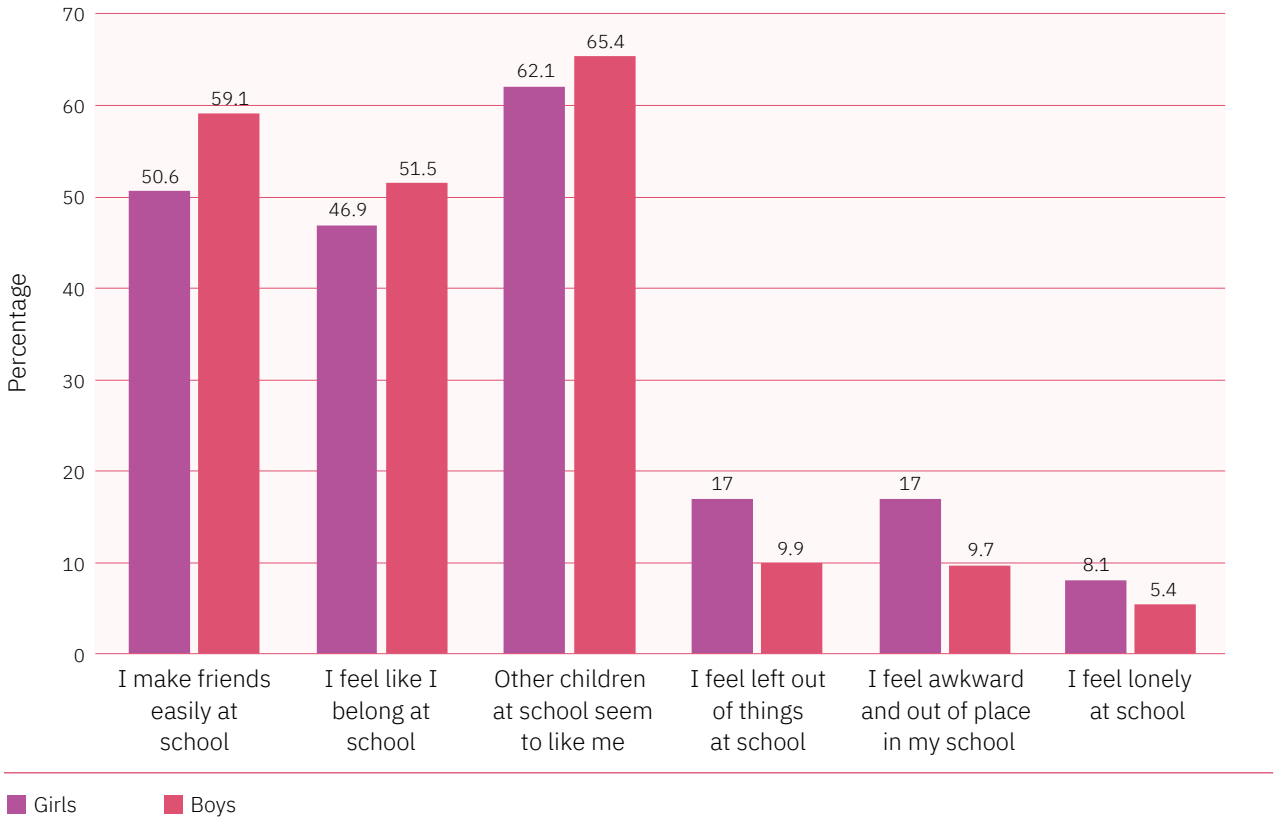
> Teacher: *Now ... they can rile themselves up and like you've the usual kind of things like the lads fighting before school...I suppose there's always a benefit of it being an all-lads school as well, in that like when they say sorry and shake hands and whatever like that, they kind of forget about it. So, I suppose it kind of has its benefits and it has its downfalls as well.*
> (Male teacher, 4th class, DEIS, All-boys, Urban)

> Teacher: *Boys can be a handful, but boys can be very, very gentle and boys can be extremely emotional ... and if they have never been taught how to show their feelings and their emotions, it comes out in aggressiveness. And you've got to take a step back and say, now hang on, I know he doesn't mean this. What has set this off?*
> (Female teacher, 1st class, DEIS, All-boys, Urban)

GENDER AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEERS

Gender influences how children interact with one another in school. While girls in general are more likely than boys to indicate that other children care about their feelings (see Report 7), boys more than girls tend to experience a stronger sense of social belonging in school, evident in making friends more easily, feeling like they belong and less inclined to be left out of things (Figure 51). These experiences were not influenced by whether a child was in a single-sex or co-educational school.

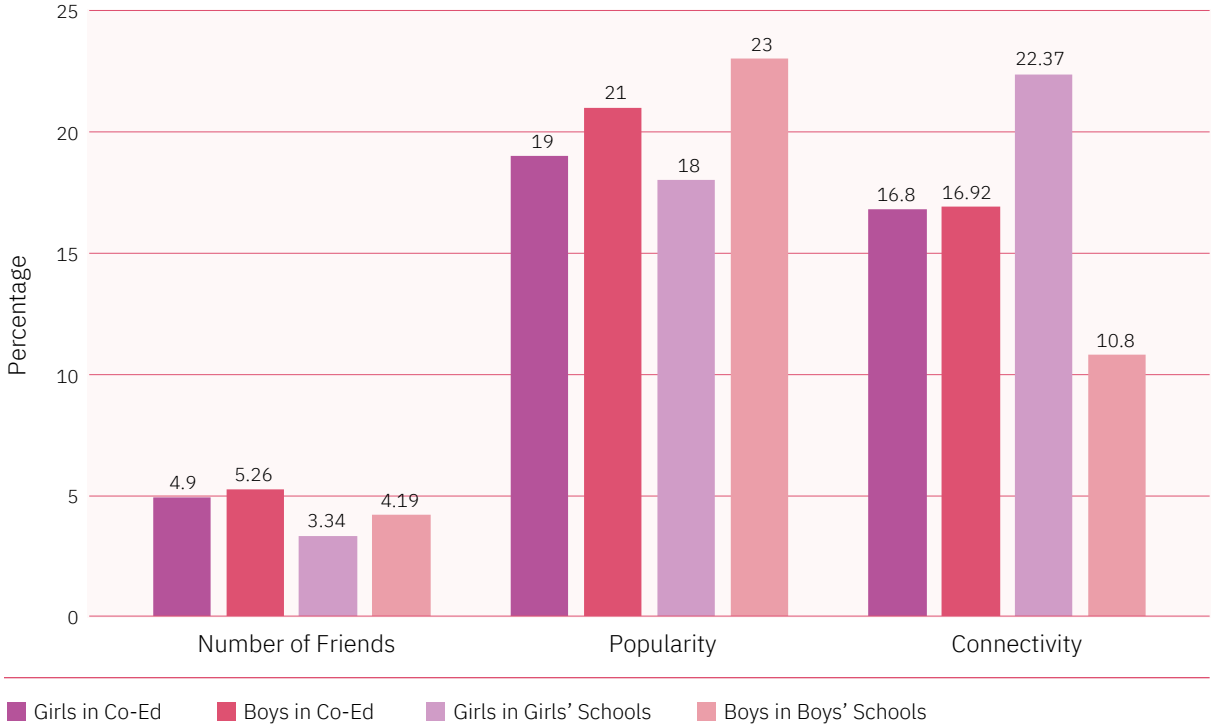
FIGURE 51: School belonging (Agree/Strongly Agree) (Cohort B, 2023)



Peer networks and friendships

These findings are further supported by our exploration of the kind of social networks children have and how these vary by gender and across different school types. Our analysis shows that in co-education schools, children generally have higher numbers of friends (average of 5.08 in co-educational schools compared to 3.77 in single-sex schools). Girls in all-girls' schools have stronger social connectivity (how tightly bonded they are with peers) within their classrooms – reaffirming the findings in Figure 52 around their higher social belonging. Girls also have the lowest average popularity scores (i.e. lower numbers of children who are singled out as popular/socially prestigious). Girls in all-girls' schools had significantly fewer friends than children (both boys and girls) in other schools – suggesting smaller and tighter networks, whereas boys and girls in co-educational schools had more friends than boys and girls in same sex schools.

FIGURE 52: Number of friends, popularity and connectivity by school type



Our research with the children in the case study schools highlighted some of the gender dynamics at play in children's interaction with one another. Irrespective of gender, all children valued their friendships, a key element of their liking school as detailed in Reports 5 and 7. Evident as the children progressed through school was the changing nature of child cultures – the 'rules' of engagement between children that signalled loyalty, status, popularity as well as care and support. For girls, the intimacy of friendship groups, signalled also in our national study data (Figure 52), was emphasised both in terms of dynamics of inclusion as well as exclusion. It was girls for example who would refer to the sharing of secrets, breaking of promises and or keeping their network close and tight, and sticking together:

> Girl: *I think friends are important in school because they stick together.*
> (Girl, 2nd class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

> Interviewer: *Everybody in school is very friendly.*
> Girl: *But sometimes [Girl] runs away from us and tells [Girl] secrets, not us.*
> (Girl, 4th class, Non-DEIS, All-girls, Rural town)

Girl: *I think making friends is easy, but then again if one of your friends has too many friends, they might forget about you.*
(Girl, 4th class, Non-DEIS, All-girls, Rural town)

Interviewer: *Having best friends is helpful?*
Girl: *Yeah.*
Interviewer: *Okay.*
Girl: *Like we have a small enough circle, but it's a circle of like good people.*
(Girl, 6th class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

Girl: *I had a fight once with that person and then it was so weird, because I already forgot about it, like I still remembered it but I thought that we could be friends … and after a few days she still hadn't been friends, so then that person was still mad at me for a year.*
(Girl, 5th class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

While boys also emphasised the importance of support from friends, also noted was shared interests especially around football and sport, slagging/being funny with some isolation for boys who did not align with these more normative masculine behaviours:

Boy: *Me and [Boy] have a talk about football a lot and it's funny because he supports a different team so when they lose I always slag him and when our team loses he always slags me, but I never really get slagged, my team never loses.*
(Boy, 6th class, DEIS, All-boys, Urban)

Interviewer: *Why do you like them being your friends?*
Boy: *I don't know, they're funny and like they're relatable.*
(Boy, 5th class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Rural)

Boy: *They're friends but then like it gets out of hand and they start to fight but like after a fight they're just friends again.*
(Boy, 6th class, DEIS, All-boys, Urban)

Interviewer: *Okay, and then is there anybody that you think wouldn't want to be friends with you?*
Boy: *I don't really know. I'd say a few probably.*
Interviewer: *And why do you think that is?*
Boy: *I don't know.*
Interviewer: *You don't know.*
Boy: *Probably because I play for a football team, but I don't go training that much and they probably think that I'm a bad football player.*
(Boy, 4th class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

In co-educational case study schools, our observations provided evidence of mixed gender friendship groups that included playing games together in the school yard, especially among children in the younger cohort A. For older children, these mixed gender groups invariably involved a number of girls joining boys' games rather than the other way around. This suggests greater flexibility and openness for girls in their 'doing' of gender, and conversely less so for boys. Simultaneously it also highlights the 'othering' of girls, affirming stereotypes noted previously on girls as 'less than' or passive in sport:

> Interviewer: *And do the boys ever play with the girls?*
> Boy: *Sometimes.*
> Girl: *Because when we were playing that thing where you jump over, I was trained in with the boys.*
> Interviewer: *I saw that actually, yeah.*
> Girl: *There's supposed to be spinners.*
> Boy: *It's mostly the girls that play with the boys ... like the girls join in the boys' games, but the boys don't really join in the girls.*
> (Children, 2nd class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

> Girl: *Yeah. There's one more thing that I like about school, it's that girls and boys play together. In some schools, even that it's girls and boys, always there's teams like girls against boys or boys against girls, and I don't really like it because I don't think that they should be.*
> (Girl, 2nd class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

> Interviewer: *Do you feel is it very different ... like do boys and girls get treated differently here in the school?*
> Girl 1: *I wouldn't say so.*
> Girl 2: *No.*
> Girl 1: *... some of the boys in the class would say 'Can we swap out some of the girls for the boys.'*
> Girl 2: *Yeah, but that's ... like with the kids, I'd say they don't treat the girls as well, but with the staff I'd say everyone is treated well.*
> Interviewer: *Okay so the [other] children don't treat the girls as well?*
> Girl 1: *Yeah.*
> Interviewer: *What does that mean?*
> Girl 1: *... like with PE, if there's like two boys and four girls, they'd be like 'No, this team is bad. We're swapping the girls out for boys' and stuff like.*
> (Girls, 6th class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

As the children got older they queried some of these gender dynamics in their relationships – both reiterating dominant ideas of masculinity and femininity as well as disrupting them, as noted previously in the section on gender and sexualities:

> Boy 1: *Because boys are so much more straightforward, and the girls are always so complicated.*
> Boy 2: *Yeah, some girls can be a little rude, and like....*
> Interviewer: *Are you guys complicated?*
> Boy 1: *Not really.*
> Boy 2: *No. I wouldn't think so!*
> Interviewer: *And you don't think boys would do that in the same way?*
> Boy 1: *No, because....*
> Boy 2: *I don't think they would do that.*
> Boy 1: *What happens is, they're like girls, and there's like ... you know the way trios, they never work out when they're girls, because it's always one friend that's more likely to be a better friend to one of them than the other.*
> (Boys, 6th class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

> Girl 1: *I think people say that girls are more emotional, so I'd say that maybe.... That's one of the many things that makes us more superior to boys.'*
> Girl 2: *So, since they say that girls are more emotional, then like it would be different from boys to girls, because like they say like 'Oh yeah, boys are tough. Like they don't cry.'*
> Girl 1: *Hmm, well when they're sad, what do they do?*
> Girl 2: *I've seen my baby brother cry.*
> Girl 1: *Well that's 'cause he's a baby.*
> Girl 2: *I've seen my older brother cry, and my older brother is 20.*
> (Girls, 6th class, Non-DEIS, All-girls, Rural town)

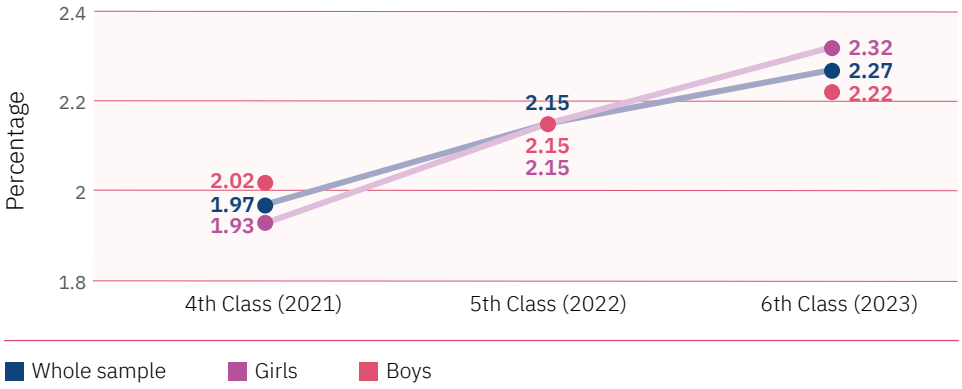
> Boy: *I have a good few girlfriends.*
> Interviewer: *You've a good ... do you mean girlfriends, or girlfriends?*
> Boy: *No, girlfriends like. Friends that are girls.*
> (Boy, 5th class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

> Interviewer: *Do the boys and girls play together in yard?*
> Boy 1: *They do play together.*
> Boy 2: *I play with the girls. There's like a game where [Boy]....*
> Girl: *Oh, hold on!*
> Boy 1: *... There's a game that me and the girls used to play and [Boy] used to play it with us.*
> Girl: *Oh, that's a good game.*
> Boy 1: *Most of the time [Girl] and [Girl] play with the boys as well.*
> (Children, 2nd class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

Bullying in School

Children in cohort B in 4th to 6th class, were asked how often different types of bullying behaviours happened in their school (talking behind each other's backs, excluding children from play, children purposely ignoring other children, fighting, verbal aggression, threatening behaviour). Children were asked to rate the frequency of such experiences on a 5-point frequency scale from 'never' (1) to 'several times a week' (5). Our previous reports have highlighted a gradual overall decline in reported experiences of being bullied as children progress through primary school (see Report 7, page 42), as well as patterns in terms of gender differences. Girls' reports of witnessing bullying increased more steeply over time compared to boys' reports (Figure 39). Boys tended to report witnessing bullying more often than girls in 4th class, but by 6th class, this trend had reversed, with girls indicating they had witnessed more bullying:

FIGURE 53: Children's reports of bullying frequency in school (Cohort B)



When we consider the gender profile of the school however, some gender differences are also evident, with experiences of being bullied significantly less likely to be reported by girls in all-girls' schools across all waves in cohort B (see Figure 54). Similarly, it is girls in all-girls' schools who are significantly less likely to report seeing fights among children in school (see Figure 55). Conversely it is girls in co-educational schools who are most likely to report negative incidences of bullying behaviours in school:

FIGURE 54: "How often have you been bullied at school in the last couple of months?" (Once a week or more) (Cohort B)

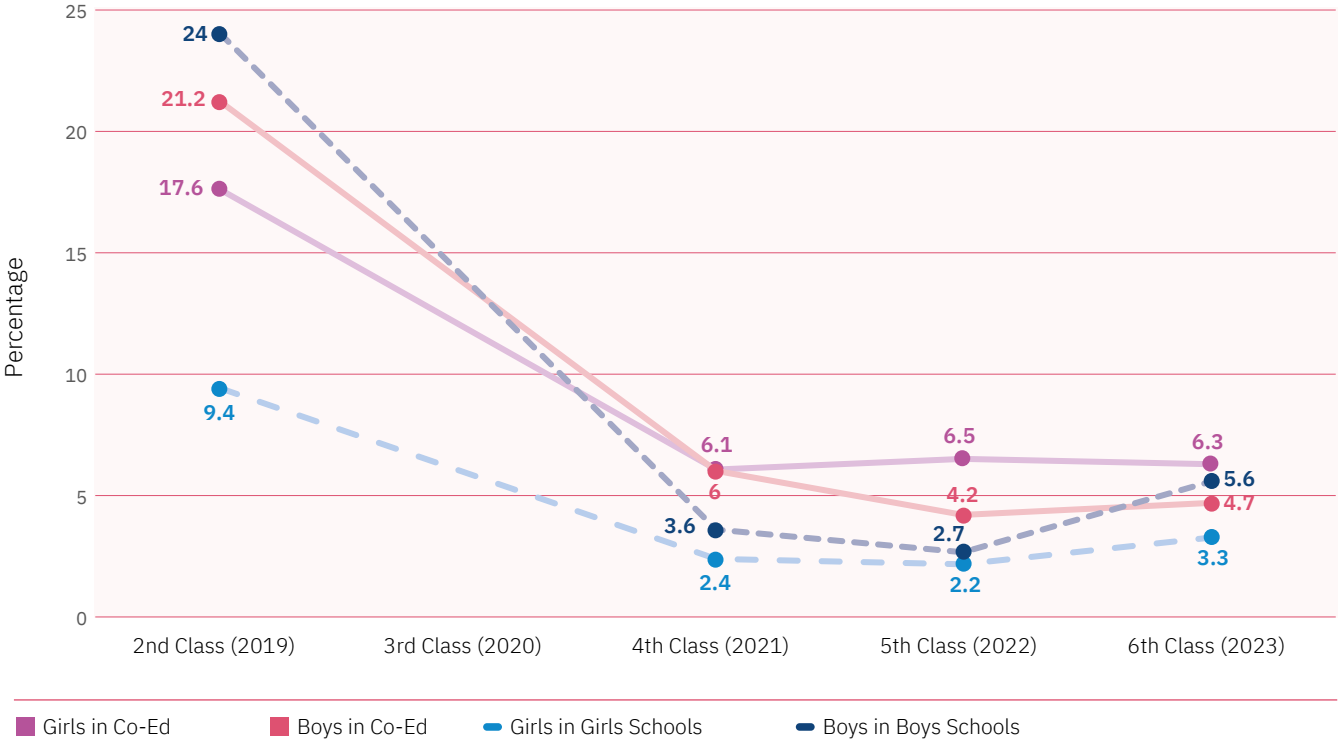
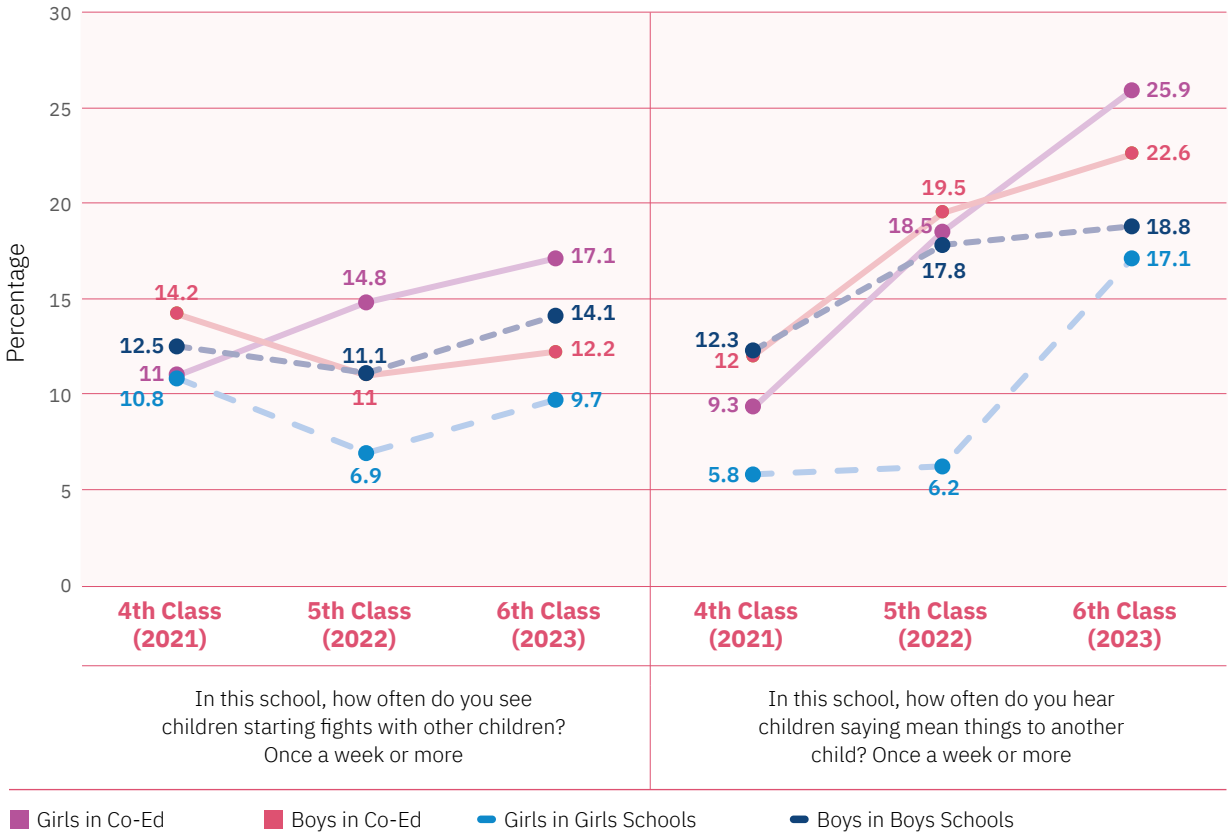
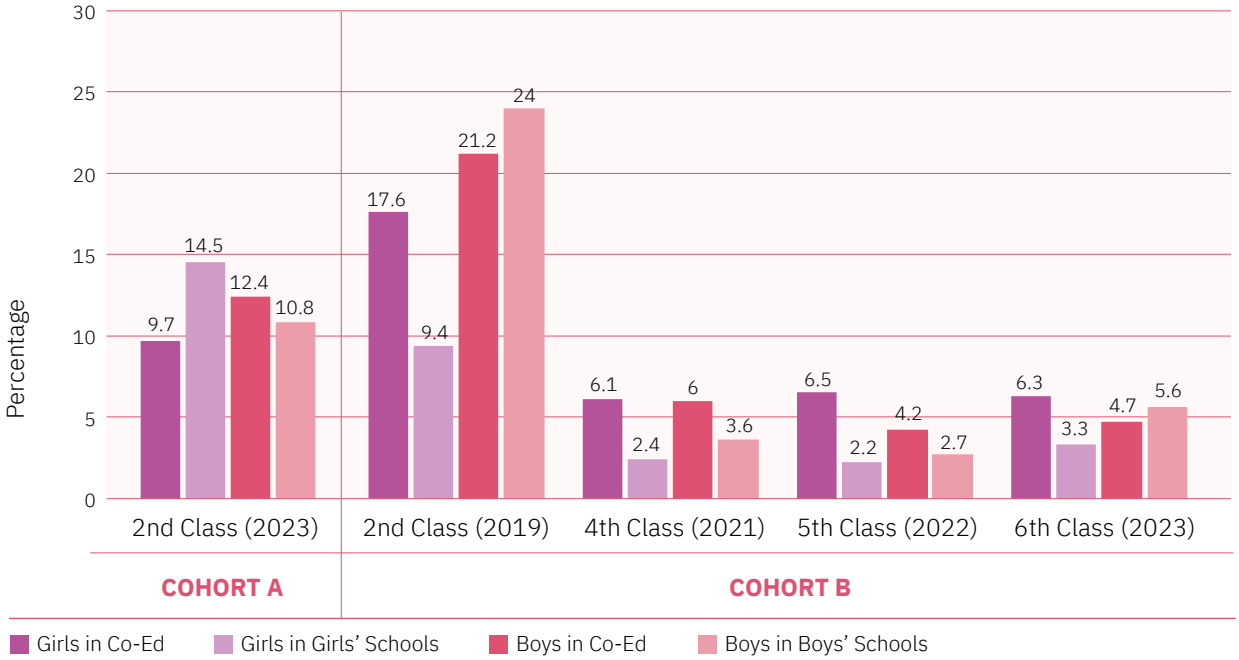


FIGURE 55: Overt bullying (Once a week or more) (Cohort B)



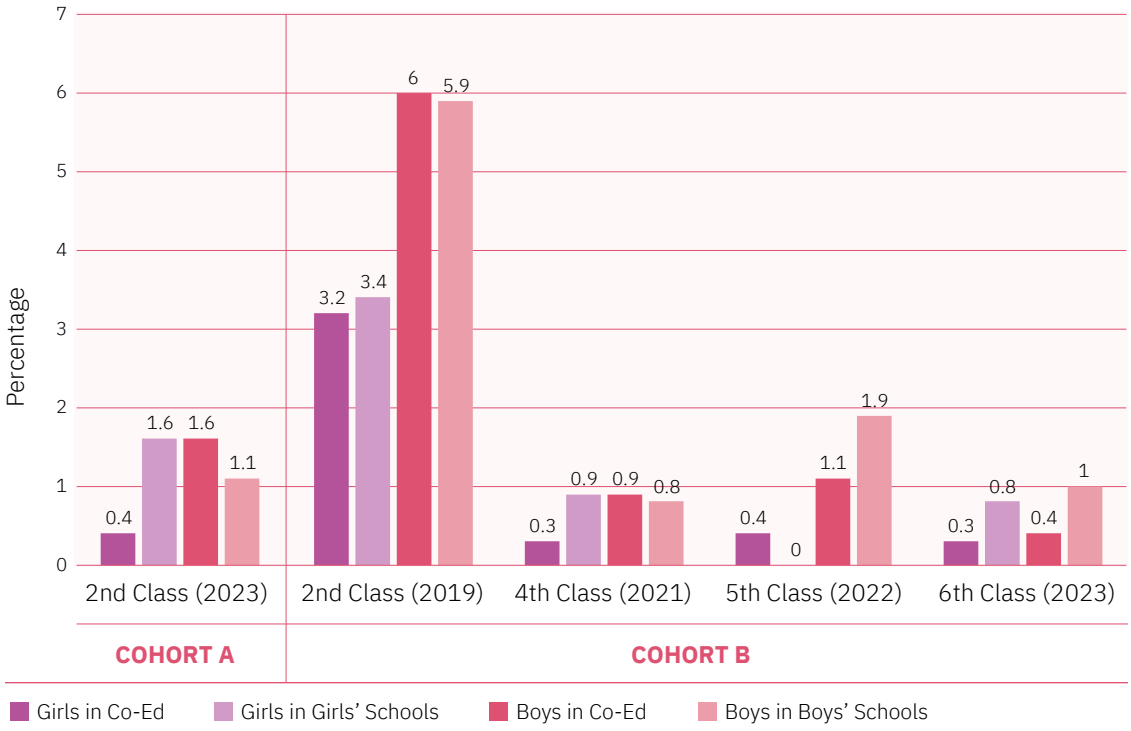
The situation is reversed for the younger children in 2nd class from cohort A. As Figure 56 shows, in general there is a higher reporting of bullying by children in cohort A than in cohort B, with some differences in the reporting experiences of children in 2nd class in 2019 (Cohort B) and 2nd class in 2023 (Cohort A). While it was boys in all-boys' schools who were most likely to report having been bullied in 2nd class in 2019, it was girls in all-girls schools who were most likely to do so in 2023. While the numbers are relatively low, these patterns dovetail with the analysis in Report 7, where a noted difference in experiences of bullying among younger girls was identified.

FIGURE 56: "How often have you been bullied at school in the last couple of months?" (Once a week or more) (Cohorts A & B)



There is also a noticeable decline in reporting of bullying of another child, especially among boys between 2nd class in 2019 and 2nd class in 2023.

FIGURE 57: "How often have you bullied another student in the last couple of months?" (Once a week or more) (Cohorts A & B)



Prejudice and bias

Children's social interactions are influenced by gender stereotypes and norms of behaviour that connect with ideas of what it is to be a 'boy' or 'girl', with some nuance and flexibility in this, especially evident among girls. Slagging for example is viewed as a bonding ritual for all children but especially so among boys:

> Girl 1: *The boys are usually the ones slagging like the girls don't really slag people.*
> Girl 2: *Yeah, they're the ones who usually do it, they kind of know what's serious and what's not.*
> Girl 1: *And if the girls are slagging it would probably just be a joke between their friends.*
> Girl 2: *Whereas the boys actually try to embarrass.*
> Girl 1: *Yeah.*
> (Children, 6th class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Rural town)

> Interviewer: *Okay. Is there a lot of slagging?*
> Boy: *Yeah.*
> Interviewer: *Like who?*
> Boy: *Everybody.*
> Interviewer: *Why do you think that is?*
> Boy: *Everybody just slags everybody.*
> (Boy, 6th class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

Boy 1: *There were a few of us laughing, but he had the ball … this was we were out for a football match, for a tournament, and he forgot his boots, he didn't have any boots, and he was in his shoes on the astro, and he kept on slipping….*
Interviewer: *Right.*
Boy 1: *And we started calling him 'Bambi on ice.'*
Interviewer: *Right.*
Boy 2: *Yeah, that's just banter.*
(Boys, 6th class, DEIS, All-boys, Urban)

Specifically with respect to gender and sexualities there was some reference mainly, but not exclusively, to teasing of boys with respect to diversity in sexuality that was connected to hetero masculine norms,[8] also signalled in pending subject choices when the children talked about moving into secondary school:

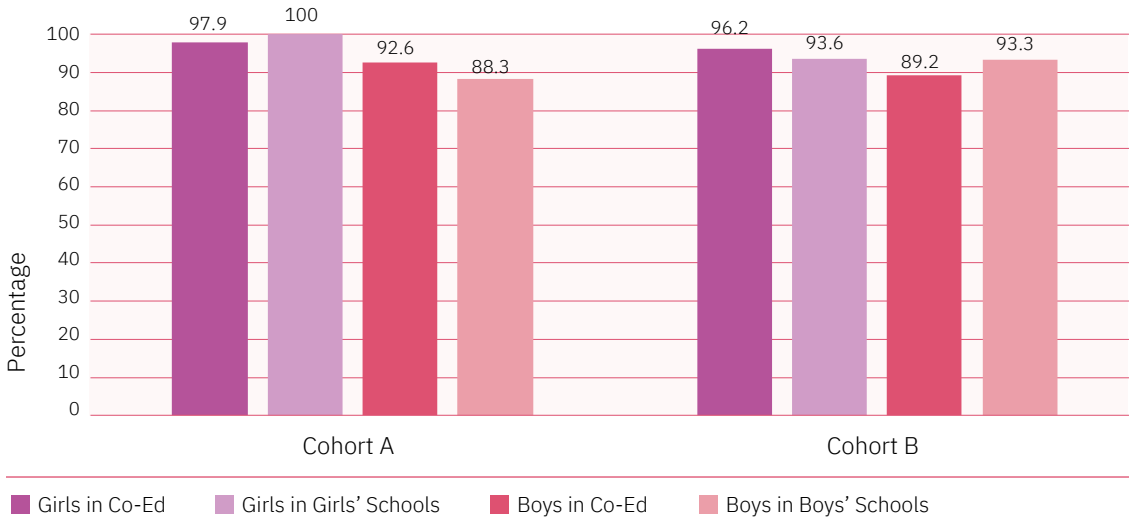
Girl 1: *But there is a slur against it, it's like the f-slur.*
Interviewer: *Sorry, what's the f-slur?*
Girl 1: *f a g.*
Interviewer: *Oh yes.*
Girl 2: *Like that, it used to be for a cigarette then, now people call it or gay people like lesbians or whatever.*
Girl 1: *I think more boys are homophobic than girls because … I feel like the boys would use 'oh you're gay' as an insult, like 'oh if you don't do this then you're gay.' And they're like 'oh well then I'll do it because I don't want to be gay.' I think they'll use that so like if someone came up to me and said 'oh you're gay', I'm like okay, I really do not care.*
Girl 2: *I'm not sure but my brother told me that gay, there's also another name like joyful.*
(Girls, 6th class, Non-DEIS, All-girls, Rural Town)

Girl 1: *Like … two boys in the whole year that did 'Home Economics'*
Girl 2: *Just certain boys would … I'm not saying that there is…. But in schools there would be a few boys that would kind of….*
Interviewer: *Would be like, oh, 'Home Ec' is like a girly subject?*
Boy 1: *And there's definitely going to be people that are not going to do it because of that.*
Boy 2: *Yeah.*
Interviewer: *Do you think that can be changed?*
Boy 1: *You can't really. Just let someone mature a little bit.*
Girl 1: *Just wait for them to grow up.*
(Children, 6th class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Rural Town)

[8] Hetero masculine norms refer to a form of masculinity centred on heterosexuality and clear distinctions between male and female traits.

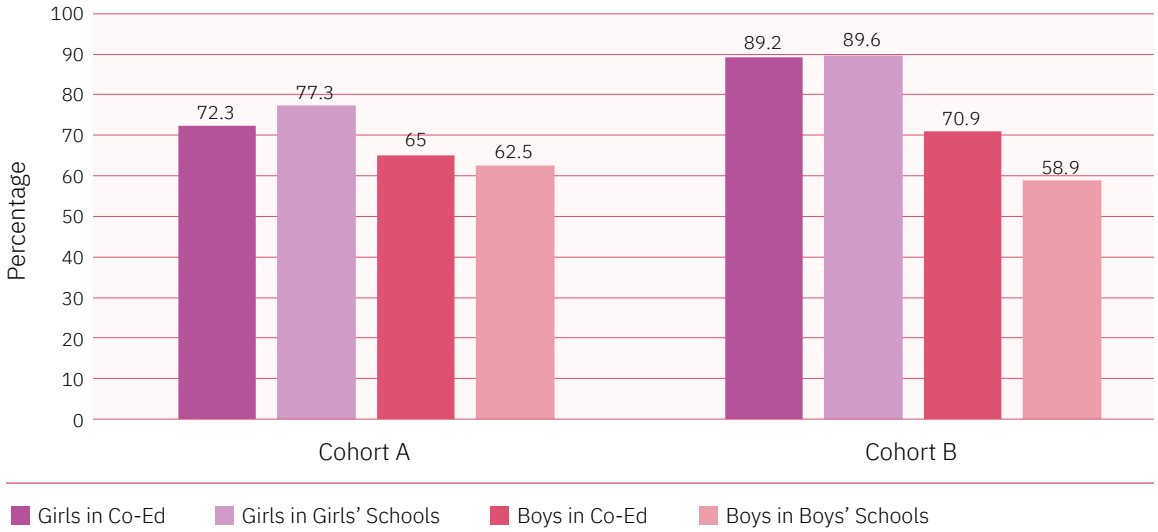
We explored some of these dynamics further to see if prejudice and bias varied by gender and also by the gender profile of the school i.e. single-sex and/or co-educational. With respect to children's views on the importance of being treated fairly, Figure 58 shows that there are relatively high levels of agreement among most children in 2nd class (Cohort A) and 6th class (Cohort B) that it is important that all people are treated fairly, with girls most likely to agree, especially in 2nd class.

FIGURE 58: "It is important that all people are treated fairly" (Agree/Strongly Agree) (Cohorts A & B, 2023)



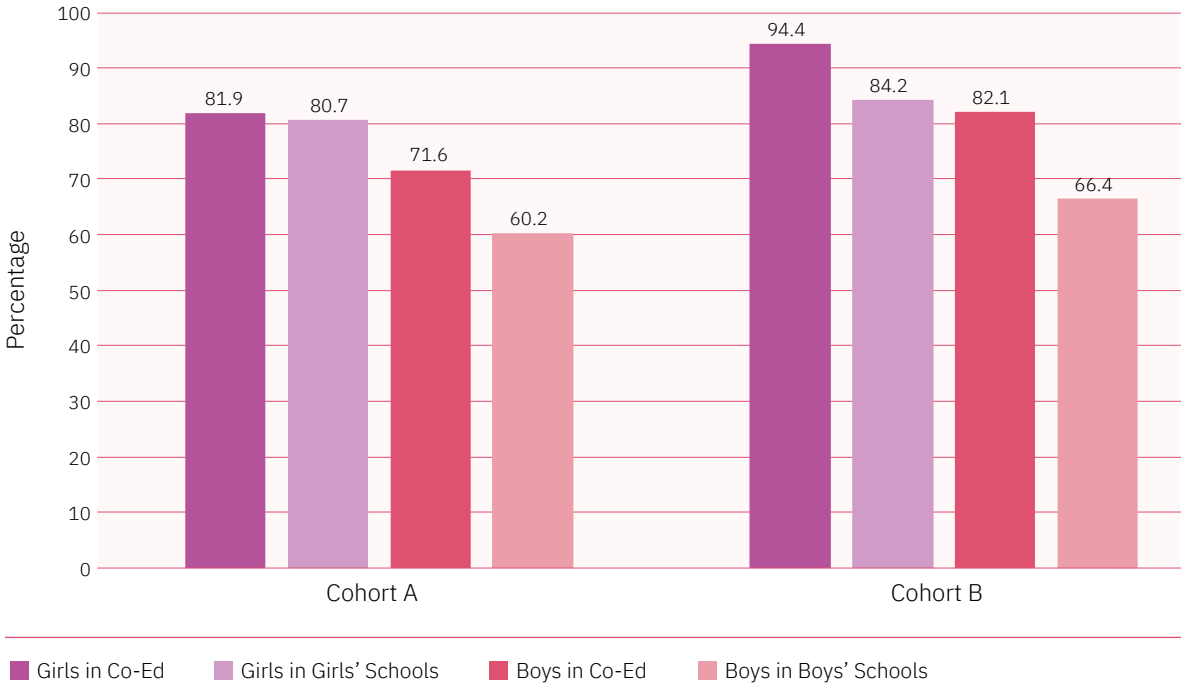
When asked specific questions in relation to gender, more notable differences in the responses of girls and boys emerge. Girls are significantly more likely than boys to agree with the statement that 'boys and girls can do as well as each other at the same things' both in 2nd class (Cohort A) and 6th class (Cohort B), with girls in all-girls' schools significantly most likely to agree and boys in all-boys' schools least likely to agree.

FIGURE 59: "Boys and girls can do as well as each other at the same things" (Agree/Strongly Agree) (Cohorts A & B, 2023)



When asked if 'girls deserve as many good things as boys deserve', noted differences are evident in the responses of boys in all-boys' schools who are least likely to agree both in 2nd class (Cohort A) and 6th class (Cohort B).

FIGURE 60: "Girls deserve as many good things as boys deserve" (Agree/Strongly Agree) (Cohorts A & B, 2023)



These dynamics suggest gender cultural differences in schools that were also referred to by teachers in the section on attitudes to single-sex/co-educational school. In our discussions with the children, both boys and girls in the case study schools, we found evidence of their awareness of structural gender inequality but also changing perceptions of gender roles and possibilities:

> Boy 1: *That's what we think but because actually in the past the women weren't really treated well.*
> Boy 2: *That's true. Until they got like much jobs, until they were able to do way [so] much jobs.*
> Boy 1: *'Til they stood up for themselves.*
> Boy 2: *Yeah, they always had to like stay at home and wash the dishes ... they wouldn't really be allowed to leave the house, they would always stay at home cleaning and stuff.*
> Boy 1: *Actually, I wonder what jobs women probably got, probably like slaves?*
> Boy 2: *They would clean the houses and just make the husband's food.*
> Interviewer: *What happened that changed, do you think or has it changed?*
> Boy 1: *I think when women made a decree and made it so women must be free and not become slaves.*
> (Boys, 2nd class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Rural Town)

Girl: *It's not fair … because when you're parents, the [man] goes to work and then you're stuck with the kids screaming.*
(Girl, 2nd class, DEIS, All-girls, Urban)

Boy 1: *[A good man] taking care of maybe your family.*
Boy 2: *Having a job.*
Interviewer: *And do you think would a man and a woman have different roles then?*
Boy 2: *Not really.*
Boy 1: *It's like, their choice.*
(Boys, 6th class, DEIS, Co-Ed, Rural town)

Girl 1: *[A good man] is … like someone who cares.*
Interviewer: *Someone who cares?*
Girl 2: *Thoughtful about you and smart I guess … good job but it's not like about the money … someone who's like thoughtful, and is like mature.*
Girl 1: *Yeah, and he's not like all about [money], isn't mean or gambling, he's like responsible.*
(Girls, 6th class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

However, it was girls in both single-sex and co-educational schools who more consistently spoke in broader terms about gender but who also referred to a tension in pushing the boundaries of 'acceptable behaviour' as girls/women:

Girl 1: *The perfect woman that I would picture was … a nice woman, a tiny bit mean, really fashionable and caring.*
Interviewer: *Caring?*
Girl 1: *Caring is the word, but sometimes you can be too caring.*
Girl 2: *Like being kind, being generous, being thoughtful for other people.*
Girl 1: *But sometimes you have to be a little bit mean for stuff.*
Interviewer: *Tell me about that.*
Girl 1: *So, sometimes you have to be a tiny bit mean or else you'll be too kind that you'll just get too carried away.*
(Girl, 2nd class, Non-DEIS, All-girls, Urban).

Girl: *Maybe say they wanted to be something when they grow up, like … say to be a professional camogie player or something like that, and then they didn't get to be one…. Yeah, and if they didn't get invited, they wouldn't scream or anything, like they just keep it inside.*
(Girl, 2nd class, DEIS, All-girls, Urban)

Girl 1: *I think smart is very important*
Girl 2: *I think kind of street smart.*
Interviewer: *What do you mean by street smart?*
Girl 1: *… think it's good for like everyone to have street smart because like you need to be able to defend yourself or something.*
Girl 2: *Like men need it too because like you never know what can happen like it's not like everything is a set life.*
(Girls, 6th class, Non-DEIS, Co-Ed, Urban)

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

This report considered the impact of gender and sexualities on children's school lives, framing this in the context of norms and expectations in the wider society. Foregrounding children's voices and agency as active contributors to their social worlds, it builds on analysis in previous reports that have signalled the importance of gender in framing children's engagement with their learning. This includes during the COVID-19 pandemic (Report 2); pedagogies that shape classroom practice (Report 5), curriculum and assessment (Report 6) and the overall impact on children's wellbeing (Report 7). This report also builds on some of the analysis presented in Report 8a highlighting the intersection between social background and gender in children's experience of school. In so doing it provides a more detailed overview of how gender dynamics pervade children's school lives through the expectations and aspirations children hold for themselves, through their interests and motivations in learning, their wellbeing, the social networks they belong to and their sense of belonging and affiliation in school. In prioritizing the social relational processes involved in shaping children's dispositions to their learning and how they see themselves (and others) in the world, we also considered how the gender profile of the school – as all-boys', all-girls', and co-educational influences children's school lives.

Wider dynamics in relation to gender in society are evident in the over-representation of female teachers in primary schools in the CSL study, and in the greater prevalence of male teachers as children progress through primary school. The intersection of gender with social background is evident in single-sex schools. While small in number, all-boys' schools are more likely to be classified as DEIS, especially for senior primary schools (Cohort B). While children's narratives of gender signalled stereotypical ideas of girls as nice, polite and diligent, and boys as intelligent and good at sport, girls were more likely to comment on the possibilities of gendered identities that cut across gender stereotypes. These patterns were further reinforced in single-sex schools, also evident in teacher narratives and their general preferences for working in co-educational contexts. Measures of prejudice and bias with respect to gender indicated that boys in all-boys' schools were least likely to subscribe to gender equal norms. Nuances were also reflected that underscored children's active engagement with gender issues, informed by wider dynamics in their families and increasing awareness of diverse sexualities as well as gender roles. Of note is teachers' need for professional development to support their work with children in these areas.

This report highlights how some of these patterns become embedded in gendered learner identities. Children's engagement with extracurricular activities aligned with their evolving ideas about gender as well as the skills and competencies they develop. Boys are significantly more likely than girls to participate in team sports outside of school, while girls are more likely to participate in music, dance and swimming activities. With respect to literacy, our findings highlight girls' more positive engagement with literacy learning but also the challenges of boys, especially in DEIS schools, who equated their literacy struggles with not feeling smart in school. The intersection between social background and gender is evident when considered in light of previously noted concerns over the potential disengagement of these boys from school in Report 8a. Of note also is the higher levels of confidence of boys generally compared to girls, with respect to their literacy learning, in spite of the greater likelihood of girls' placement in the higher reading ability groups, and of the significantly higher attainment in literacy for girls in 2nd and 4th class. The relative improvement in attainment of boys in the senior years of primary school, eliminating significant gender differences, is also of note. With respect to maths these patterns are somewhat reversed, with boys in all school types expressing higher levels of interest and confidence in maths learning. Of note are the more negative views of girls, in all school types, with these becoming more pronounced as they progress through primary school. Yet no significant gender differences in mathematics attainment was identified for children in 2nd, 4th or 6th class. However, our findings suggest the need to focus especially on girls from poorer families who were consistently more

likely to be in the lowest maths ability groups. The increasing placement of these girls in the lowest ability reading groups by 6th class is also of note. Consistently our findings highlight the lower academic self-concept of girls relative to boys that also becomes mirrored in higher levels of anxiety in general, including about tests in school. Yet irrespective of social background and/or profile of school attended (single-sex/co-educational), girls are more likely than boys to aspire to go to college, and teachers are more likely to expect girls to be successful in doing so. While both boys and girls tend to agree that their teacher thinks they are smart, it is girls in the junior years (Cohort A) in all-girls' schools who are most likely to do so, suggesting strong cultures of expectations in these schools.

These patterns are also borne out in our findings on the disciplinary cultures in schools which are shown to be gendered. Our findings confirm girls' more positive orientation and engagement with their learning in school and in both teacher and children's reports of the more disruptive behaviour of boys in all school types. Yet also of note is the higher standard of behaviour that appeared expected of girls across both cohorts, but especially in all-girls' schools in the junior years (Cohort A). Correspondingly there was some evidence of normalising boisterous and at times aggressive behaviour between boys in both cohorts, and especially in all-boys' schools, highlighting the impact of peer dynamics on school and classroom cultures. As noted also in Report 8a, case study analysis pointed to the potential 'invisibility' of quieter children in some contexts. These patterns are further reinforced in the social dynamics between children and reported incidences of bullying, noted previously in Report 7. While we noted there the gradual decline in reported incidences of bullying as children get older, this report highlights that girls are more inclined to witness incidences of bullying as they get older, especially girls in co-educational schools. Our analysis also highlights the strong and more intimate social bonds between girls in their friendships with one another and the greater prevalence of status/popularity among boys in their social networks. A key finding is differences in the kind of networks that develop between children resulting from the gender profile of the school. Girls in all-girls' schools had the highest levels of closeness/social connectivity while boys in all-boys' schools the lowest. The gender profile of the school also influences children's range of friendships, with boys and girls in co-educational schools indicating a greater number of friends than boys or girls in single- sex schools. While there were incidences of cross gender friendships in co-educational schools these invariably involved girls joining boys' games, rather than vice versa. This reiterates the greater tendency for girls rather than boys to disrupt gender norms, suggesting more restrictive norms for boys in how they 'do' masculinity.

The report highlights the salience of gender to children's school lives but also how its impact is mediated by social background as well as the gender profile of the school. Understood in terms of how children actively engage with and 'do' gender, our findings signal how their learner identities evolve in tandem with their ideas of femininity and masculinity, at times reinforcing gender stereotypes – at other times challenging them. Children's experiences outside of school including role models as well as the kind of extracurricular activities they engage in, influences the competencies they develop and sense of possibilities they have for themselves inside of school. Gender dynamics in turn influence the kind of learning climate that exists in classrooms as well as the disciplinary culture, especially in single-sex schools. Such findings should not obscure the gender dynamics that also take place both between and within boys and girls in co-educational school. The findings suggest that teachers and school leaders need to be attentive to gender effects, mindful of peer dynamics, attentiveness, and visibility in classroom interactions, as children navigate their friendships, their academic and social esteem in their primary school lives. The next report will explore some of these issues also with respect to the intersection with ethnicity in children's school lives.

Additional Publications on the Children's School Lives Study

Chzhen Y, Symonds J, Devine D, Mikolai J, Harkness S, Sloan S, Martinez Sainz G (2022). Learning in a Pandemic: Primary School children's Emotional Engagement with Remote Schooling during the spring 2020 COVID-19 Lockdown in Ireland. *Child Indicators Research, 15(4):1517–1538*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-022-09922-8

Crean, M; Devine, D; Moore, B; Martinez-Sainz, G; Symonds, J; Sloan, S, Farrell, E. (2023). Social class, COVID-19 and Care: Schools on the front line in Ireland during the COVID-19 pandemic. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*. Vol 44, Issue 3: 452-466; DOI: 10.1080/01425692.2023.2174077

Crean, M; Moore, B; Devine, D; Symonds, J; Martinez Sainz G (2024). Qualitative research during the COVID-19 pandemic: the impact of remote research on the collaborative production of methodological knowledge, *International Journal of Research and Method in Education*, https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2024.2341707

D'Urso, G., Symonds, J., Sloan, S. Devine, D. (2022). Bullies, victims, and meanies: the role of child and classmate social and emotional competencies. *Social Psychology of Education*, 25, 293–312. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-021-09684-1 Devine, D.; Symonds, J., Sloan, S., Cahoon, A., Crean, M., Farrell, E., Davies, A., Blue, &

Hogan, J. (2020). Children's School Lives: An Introduction, Report No.1, University College Dublin. https://cslstudy.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/CSL-Annual-Report-1-Final.pdf

Devine, D; Martinez-Sainz, G; Symonds, J; Sloan, S; Moore, B; Crean, M; Barrow, N; Greaves, M; Donegan, A; Samonova, E; Davies, A; Farrell; E; O' Giobúin, R; Farrell, J. (2023). Primary Pedagogies: Children and Teachers' Experiences of Pedagogical Practices in Primary Schools in Ireland 2019-2022, Report No.5, University College Dublin. https://cslstudy.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/CSL-Annual-Report-1-Final.pdf

Donegan, A; Devine, D; Martinez-Sainz, G; Symonds, J; Sloan, S. (2023) Children as co- researchers in pandemic times: Power and participation in the use of digital dialogues withchildren during the COVID-19 lockdown. *Children & Society, 37(1),235–253.* https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12665

Farrell, E., Symonds, J., Devine, D., Sloan, S., Crean, M., Cahoon, A. & Hogan, J. (2024). "What does well-being mean to me?" Conceptualisations of well-being in Irish primary schooling. *Health Education*, https://doi.org/10.1108/HE-03-2024-0023

Gleasure, S., Devine, D., Martinez Sainz, G., Sloan, S., Crean, M., Moore, B., Symonds, J (2024). "This is Where the Care Can Step Up": A Typology of Nurturing Pedagogies in Primary Schools Serving Low-Income Communities During COVID-19 Closures. *Early Childhood Education Journal*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-024-01636-6

Gleasure, S; Devine, D, Martinez Sainz, G., Sloan, S., Symonds, J. (2024). Understanding Children's Experiences of Care in their School Lives through Participatory Research Methods: a Comparative Analysis of Focus Group Discussions and Photovoice; *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 10.1177/16094069241286849 https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2023.2174077

Greaves, M; Devine, D, Martinez-Sainz, G, Moore, B, Crean, M, Barrow, N, Sloan, S, Symonds, J, Ioannidou, O (2024) Failing by Design? Exploring the currere lived experiences of a working-class boy in primary school, *Curriculum Journal.*

Jones, M. H., Symonds, J. E., Downey, S., Sloan, S., Devine, D., & Kinsella, W. (2023). The social inclusion of neurodivergent children in Irish primary schools. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*. http://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2023.2195861

Martinez Sainz, G., Devine, D., Sloan, S., Symmonds, J., Moore, B., Barrow, N., Crean, M., Donegan, A., Greaves, M., Samonova, E., Gleasure, S. Ioannidou, O. (2024). A rights-based exploration of children's pedagogic voice in the classroom. *Education 3- 13, 0(0), 1–17*. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2024.2331953

Martinez Sainz, G; Devine, D; Sloan, S; Symonds, J; Ioannidou, O; Moore, B; Crean, M; Barrow, N; Greaves, M; Gleasure, S; Donegan, A; Samonova, E; Davies, A; Stynes, H; Farrell; E; O' Giobuìin, R; Smith, A; Farrell, J. Gilligan, E.(2023). Curriculum and Assessment in Children's School Lives: Experiences from Primary Schools in Ireland 2019–2023. Report No. 6. University College Dublin. https://cslstudy.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/CSL-Report-Number-6-v6.pdf

Murphy, G. & Devine, D. (2023). Sensemaking in and for times of crisis and change: Irish primary school principals and the COVID-19 pandemic. *School Leadership and Management.* https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2022.2164267

O'Halloran, T., Symonds, J., Bhreathnach, L.L., Sloan, S., Devine, D., Martinez Sainz, G. & Davies, A. (2023) How School-Based Wellbeing Interventions, Socioeconomic Status, and Gender Impact Anxiety Development in Middle Childhood. *Education Sciences, 13, 994*. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13100994

Sloan, S., Devine, D., Martinez Sainz, G., Symonds, J. E., Crean, M., Moore, B., Davies, A., Farrell, E., Farrell, J., Blue, T., Tobin, E. & Hogan, J. (2021). Children's School Lives in Junior Infants, Report No.3. University College Dublin. https://cslstudy.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/CSL_Annual-Report-_30.11.21.pdf

Sloan, S., Devine, D., Martinez Sainz, G., Symonds, J. E., Crean, M., Moore, B., Davies, A., Farrell, E., Farrell, J., Blue, T., Tobin, E. & Hogan, J. (2022). Children's School Lives: The Preschool to Primary School Transition in Ireland, Report No. 4. University College Dublin. https://cslstudy.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/CSL_Annual-Report-4-_2022_V6.pdf

Tobin, E., Sloan, S., Symonds, J. & Devine, D. (2022). Family–school connectivity during transition to primary school. *Educational Research, 64, 3, 277-294.* https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2022.2054451

Tobin, E., Symonds, J., Sloan, S., Devine, D., Torsney, B. & D'Urso, G. (2023). Multigroup model of transition experiences: how parents' school readiness beliefs and practices change with another child in school. *Irish Educational Studies.* https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2023.2220704

References

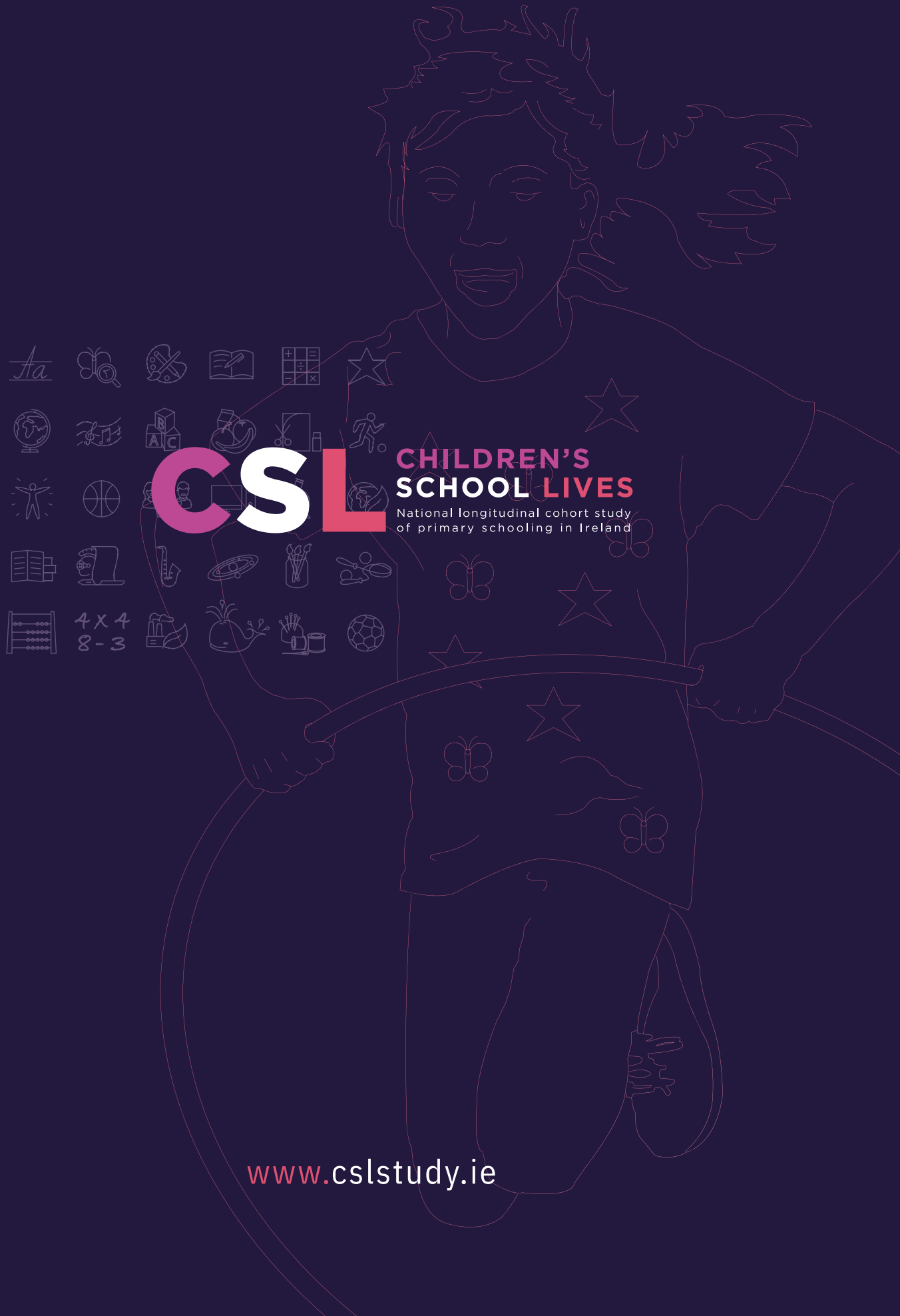
Corell, M., Chen, Y., Friberg, P., Petzold, M., & Löfstedt, P. (2021). Does the family affluence scale reflect actual parental earned income, level of education and occupational status? A validation study using register data in Sweden. BMC Public Health, 21(1), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-11968-2

Chzhen Y, Symonds J, Devine D, Mikolai J, Harkness S, Sloan S, Martinez Sainz G (2022) Learning in a Pandemic: Primary School children's Emotional Engagement with Remote Schooling during the spring 2020 COVID-19 Lockdown in Ireland. *Child Indicators Research, 15(4):1517–1538*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-022-09922-8

Csardi, G., & Nepusz, T. (2006). The igraph software. *Complex syst*, *1695*, 1–9.

European Commission. (n.d.). *National Policies*. Eurydice. https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/ireland/primary-education

Galton, M. & Hargreaves, L. (2019) ORACLE: Observational Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation. Teacher Record. University of Cambridge, Faculty of Education.



CSL

CHILDREN'S SCHOOL LIVES

National longitudinal cohort study of primary schooling in Ireland

www.cslstudy.ie