

CHILD
COHORT

JULY 2009



**Growing Up
in Ireland**

National Longitudinal
Study of Children

GROWING UP IN IRELAND

KEY FINDINGS: 9-YEAR-OLDS

NO. 3

THE EDUCATION OF 9-YEAR-OLDS

INTRODUCTION

This is the third in a series of *Key Findings* from the *Growing Up in Ireland* study. It summarises some results on the education of 9-year-old children.

NUMBER AND SIZE OF NATIONAL SCHOOLS

The Primary School system in Ireland is made up of approximately 3,200 schools of very different sizes and characteristics. Department of Education and Science figures indicate that:

- The size of primary schools varies greatly. The largest schools have almost 1,000 pupils (of all ages from Junior Infants to Sixth Class). Some schools, especially in rural Ireland, are very small.
- The number of 9-year-olds in schools varies substantially, from none to almost 180.
- Approximately one in five (21%) 9-year-olds attends a single-sex school.
- In a large proportion of schools, multiple-year groups are still taught within a single classroom. The *Growing Up in Ireland* survey indicates that as many as 29% of 9-year-olds are taught in multi-grade classrooms.

Message from the Minister

I welcome the publication of the 'Education of 9-Year-Olds'. This is one of a series of *Key Findings* documents drawn from *Growing Up in Ireland - the National Longitudinal Study of Children*. These documents are designed to provide data and information on children in Ireland in an easily understood manner and should be useful to members of the public as well as policy makers.

The publication of this document would not be possible without the commitment and contribution from parents, teachers, principals and children themselves, all of whom have generously given their time to participate in *Growing Up in Ireland*. I would like to thank them all for their involvement in this very important study.



Barry Andrews TD
Minister for Children



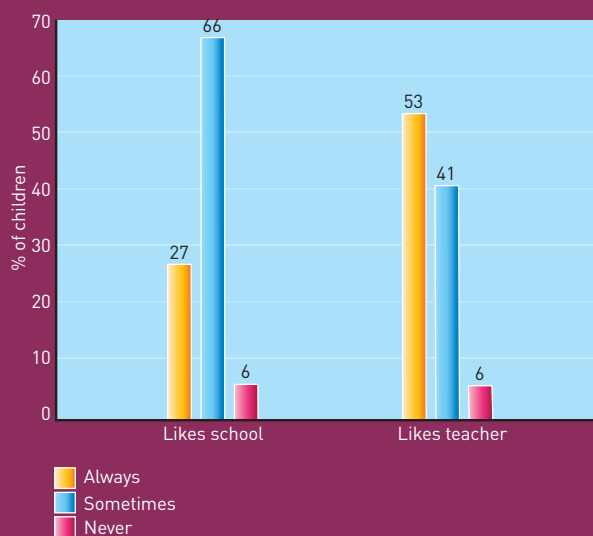
An Irish Government Funded Initiative

A LARGE MAJORITY OF CHILDREN LIKED SCHOOL

Children were asked how much they liked school and their teacher.

- A very large majority of 9-year-olds (93%) said they liked school at least 'sometimes'. The remainder said they 'never' liked it.
- Over half of children said they 'always' liked their teacher (53%) and fewer than 6% 'never' liked him or her. (Figure 1)

Figure 1: Percentage of 9-year-olds who liked (a) school and (b) their teacher



PARENTS HAD HIGH EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS FOR THEIR CHILDREN

Parents were also asked to estimate how far their child would ultimately reach in education – from Junior Certificate level up to postgraduate degree.

- Less than 1% of parents expected their children to achieve only Junior Certificate.
- 76% of parents expected their child to achieve at least degree level.

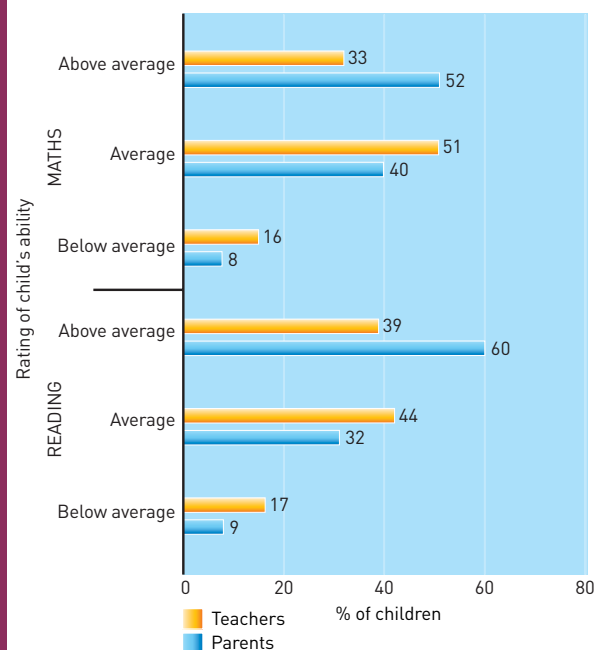


PARENTS HAD A HIGHER ESTIMATE OF THEIR CHILDREN'S ABILITIES THAN THEIR TEACHERS

Parents and teachers rated how well each child was doing at Maths and Reading relative to other children of the same age.

- A majority of parents (60%) felt that their child was 'above average' at Reading.
- A similarly high proportion (52%) felt that their child was 'above average' at Maths.
- Teachers gave more ratings of 'average' or 'below average' than did parents for both subjects – rating 33% of children as 'above average' at Maths and 39% as 'above average' at Reading. (Figure 2)

Figure 2: Parent and teacher rating of child's ability in Reading and Maths

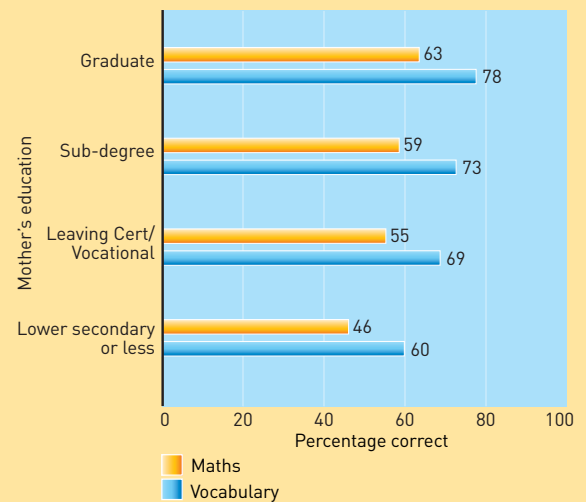


TWO-THIRDS OF 9-YEAR-OLDS SCORED AT EXPECTED LEVEL ON READING VOCABULARY TEST

Children completed the Vocabulary component of the Drumcondra Reading Test (English) and Part One of the Drumcondra Maths test that was appropriate to their school year. These tests have been developed for the Irish school system. They are grade-specific and are linked to the primary school curriculum.

- Girls and boys had a similar percentage of correct scores on the Vocabulary test (67% and 68% respectively). However, boys had somewhat higher Maths scores (55%) than girls (52%).
- Figure 3** shows that, in general, the higher the educational level of the child's mother, the better the child performed on both Vocabulary and Maths tests.

Figure 3: Child's mean percentage correct on Vocabulary and Maths tests, by primary caregiver's own education



85% OF 9-YEAR-OLDS WERE TAUGHT BY WOMEN

Teachers provided information about their own characteristics and teaching methods.

- 85% of 9-year-olds were taught by women, and 38% by women aged between 20 and 29. Only 6% were taught by male teachers in that age group.
- 9-year-olds typically had a teacher who had spent an average of seven years teaching at primary school level.
- Nearly half (46%) of all 9-year-olds were taught by teachers who felt 'very' or 'fairly' stressed by their jobs; however nearly all (97%) had teachers who were at least 'fairly satisfied' with their jobs.

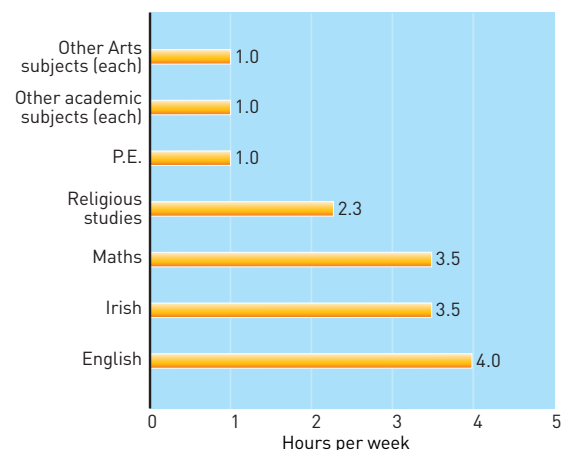
PRINCIPALS WERE MOSTLY MEN

- 54% of all children had a male principal. Almost one-third (32%) had a male principal aged 50-59; a further 15% had a male principal aged 40-49.
- The principal in an average 9-year-old's school had typically been in that position for eight years.
- There were high rates of both job satisfaction and job-related stress among principals. Nearly all 9-year-olds (95%) had a principal who was at least 'fairly satisfied' with their job but a majority (68%) also had a principal who said s/he was stressed by the job.

CHILDREN SPENT MOST CLASS TIME ON ENGLISH

- As can be seen in **Figure 4**, children spent most time on English – four hours per week on average. 3½ hours were spent on Irish and Maths, and just over two hours on Religious Studies. Subjects such as History, Geography, Science and Art were typically allocated one hour per week.
- When asked how much they liked Maths, Reading and Irish, the least preferred subject among 9-year-old children was Irish; 28% said they 'never' liked the subject compared to, respectively, just 10% and 5% who 'never' liked Maths or Reading.

Figure 4: Typical number of hours spent on each subject per week



SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE – NOT ALL SCHOOLS HAD GOOD FACILITIES

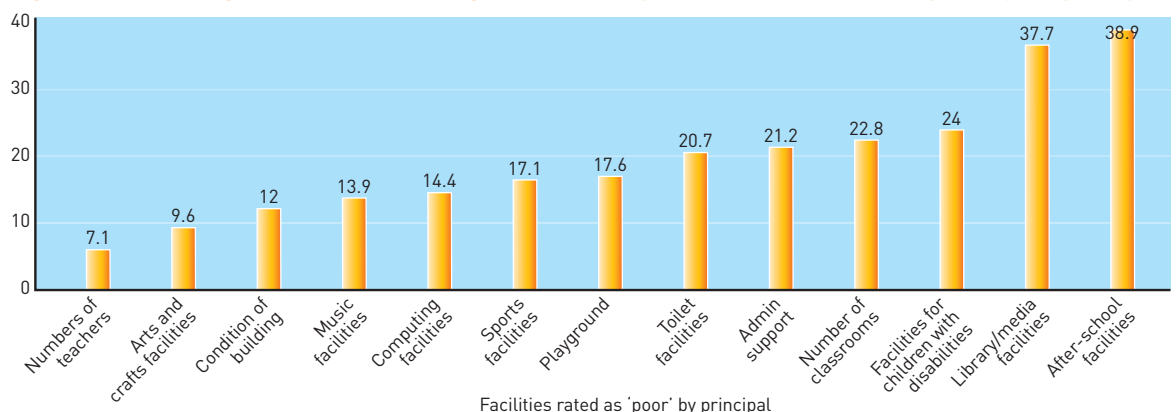
Principals also provided information about the school environment in which the 9-year-olds were taught.

- According to principals' reports, just over half of 9-year-old children attended a school where the Irish language and culture was 'very important' to the ethos of the school.

- Principals also rated the adequacy of school facilities. **Figure 5** shows the percentage of 9-year-olds in schools where the principal rated the facilities as 'poor'. Nearly one-quarter (23%) of 9-year-olds were attending schools in which the principal felt there was an inadequate number of classrooms.

Also, substantial proportions of 9-year-olds were in schools in which the principal felt that facilities for children with disabilities (24%), library facilities (38%) and after-school facilities (39%) were poor.

Figure 5 – Percentage of children attending schools with specified facilities rated as 'poor' by the principal



Facilities rated as 'poor' by principal

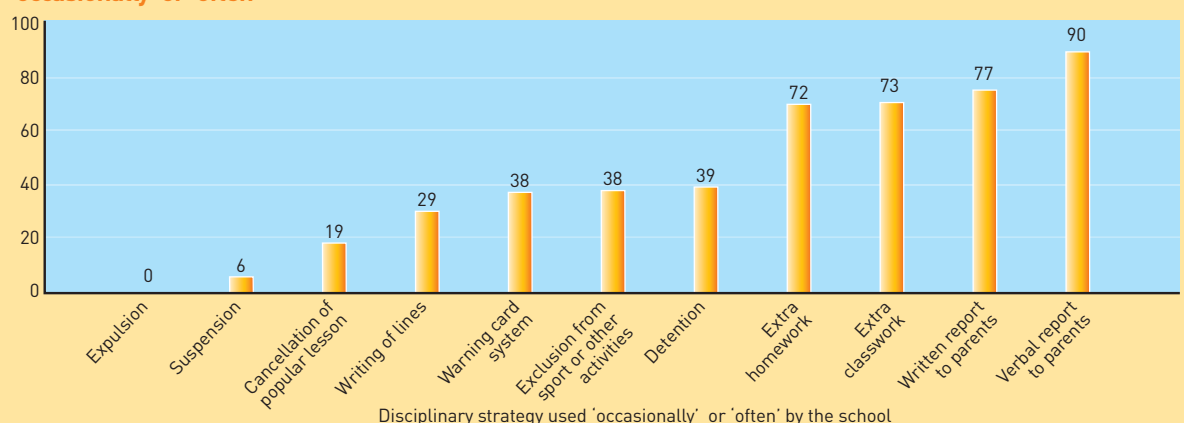
THE MOST FREQUENTLY USED DISCIPLINARY STRATEGY IN SCHOOLS WAS 'REPORT TO PARENTS'

Both principals and teachers were asked to provide information about discipline strategies in the school, as well as pupil behaviour. **Figure 6** summarises the percentage of children attending schools that used each discipline strategy 'often' or 'occasionally'.

- The most frequently used form of discipline was 'verbal report to parents'. This was 'often' used in schools attended by 33% of 9-year-old children and 'occasionally' for an additional 56%.
- Expulsion or permanent exclusion was 'never' used by the vast majority of schools: 96% of children were in schools that 'never' used it, and 4% in schools that 'rarely' used it.

- Virtually all children were in schools that had a written discipline policy. On the basis of principals' reports, nearly 98% of 9-year-olds were in schools whose discipline policy involved teachers to 'a great extent'. Over half (53%) of 9-year-olds were in schools in which the board of management was involved to 'a great extent' in the development of these policies. Smaller proportions were in schools that involved parents and pupils in the process (34% and 14% respectively).
- Over 62% of 9-year-olds had teachers who felt they had 'a great deal of control' over how they disciplined children in their class.
- The majority of 9-year-old children had teachers who felt that nearly all pupils in the school were well-behaved in class (76%) and in the playground (74%), and showed respect to teachers (81%).

Figure 6: Percentage of children attending schools where specified discipline strategies were used 'occasionally' or 'often'



Disciplinary strategy used 'occasionally' or 'often' by the school





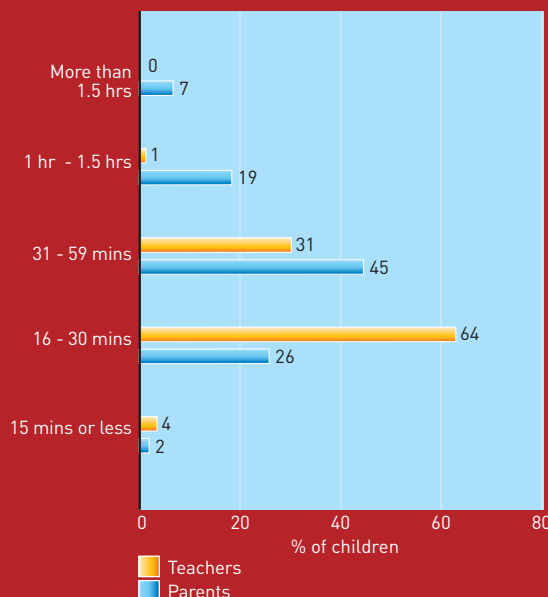
9-YEAR-OLD'S EDUCATION IN THE HOME

Not all of a child's education takes place at school. Homework represents a substantial part of overall schoolwork for many children. The engagement of parent(s) in activities such as helping with homework and attending school meetings is very important in the child's education. The extent of the child's own reading for pleasure is also relevant.

CHILDREN GIVEN HOMEWORK FOUR NIGHTS A WEEK

- Virtually all children received homework several times a week. More than nine out of ten 9-year-olds had teachers who gave homework four nights a week (96%).
- Parents tended to report that children spent longer at their homework than teachers expected, as seen in **Figure 7**. While less than 1% of 9-year-olds had teachers who intended them to spend between 1 and 1½ hours on homework, nearly 20% did spend this amount of time, according to parents.
- 72% of parents said that they or their spouse/partner helped the child with homework at least 'regularly'.
- According to their teachers, 4% of children regularly failed to have homework completed.

Figure 7: (a) Expected time spent on homework each evening according to teachers and (b) parental reports of actual time spent



ALMOST ALL PARENTS ATTENDED TEACHER MEETINGS

A very high proportion (97%) of parents said they had attended a formal meeting with their child's teacher during the school year.

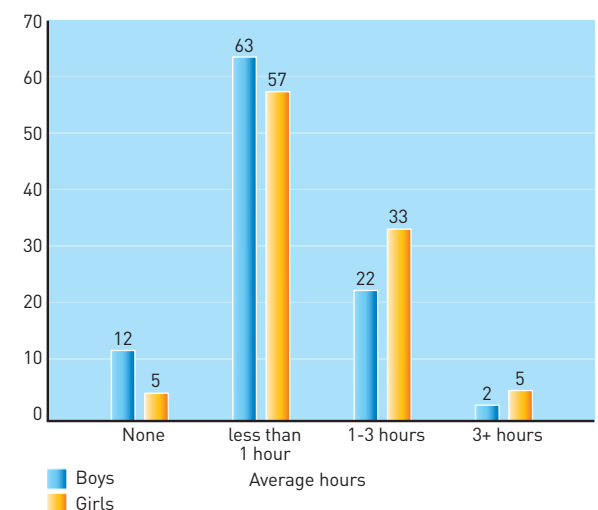
THE MAIN REASON CHILDREN MISSED SCHOOL WAS ILLNESS

- According to parents, one-in-ten 9-year-olds missed no days at school in the school year preceding the survey, one-third missed one to three days and just over one-quarter missed four to six days. Just over 12% missed more than 11 days.
- Parents reported that the main reason for children missing days at school was the child's illness or injury (80%). Family vacation was the second most frequently reported reason (16%).

GIRLS MORE LIKELY TO READ FOR PLEASURE THAN BOYS

- A majority of parents (56%) said that in excess of 30 children's books were available to their 9-year-old within the home; 10% of 9-year-old's homes had fewer than 10 books.
- Approximately two-thirds of parents (65%) used a public library for their child.
- According to their parents, on 'an average day' 9% of 9-year-olds 'never' read for fun outside of school – 12% of boys and 5% of girls. 60% of 9-year-olds spent less than one hour per day reading for pleasure (**Figure 8**).

Figure 8: Average hours per day reading for pleasure (based on parent's report)





Growing Up in Ireland is the National Longitudinal Study of Children. This Study aims to track, from infancy through to adolescence, the lives of two representative cohorts of children in Ireland – an infant cohort (recruited at 9 months of age) and a child cohort (recruited when they were 9 years old).

The Study is funded by the Department of Health and Children through the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, in association with the Department of Social and Family Affairs and the Central Statistics Office. It is being carried out by a consortium of researchers led by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and Trinity College Dublin (TCD).

Focusing initially on the child cohort, the first wave of fieldwork, which included approximately 8,500 nine-year-old children, their parents and their teachers, began in September 2007 and was completed in May 2008. This document is one of a series that summarises key findings from that wave of fieldwork.

The success of ***Growing Up in Ireland*** is the result of contributions from many individuals, organisations and groups, including principals, teachers and other staff in over 1,000 National Schools who helped with recruitment and data collection. We are particularly grateful to the 8,500 9-year-olds and their families, each of whom gave so generously of their time to make this Study possible.



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If you would like further information about ***Growing Up in Ireland***, please visit

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The figures reported above are preliminary and may be subject to change.

