



## Attainment and performance in the controlled schools' sector

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## **Introduction**

In international studies (PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS) Northern Ireland's educational achievement rates highly amongst its counterparts, particularly in maths performance amongst 15 year old pupils. However, behind the headline figures, local reports highlight a number of concerns regarding the performance of some groups of pupils in comparison to others.

The underachievement of Protestant working class boys is one area which has received much media attention over recent years. As the majority (but, not all) Protestant boys attend controlled schools (see Appendix 1), underachievement is therefore linked with the controlled sector.

This paper explores achievement and performance in the controlled sector. In particular it looks at attainment at GCSE, the common level by which a pupil's overall achievement is measured. GCSE attainment is analysed at school level, pupil level and school leaver level, with each providing a better understanding of patterns of attainment and how these link to school type, sector and pupil characteristics. The study also examines the destinations of school leavers from the controlled sector, identifying the routes controlled pupils take upon leaving school and how this compares to other sectors.

## GCSE attainment levels in the controlled sector

The main measure of pupil attainment at post-primary level is GCSE results, in particular those pupils who attain five or more GCSEs at grades A\* - C, including English and Maths (the GCSE standard). Although many may disagree with this measurement of achievement, it continues to be the measure widely used by the Department of Education (DE), educationalists and other stakeholders.

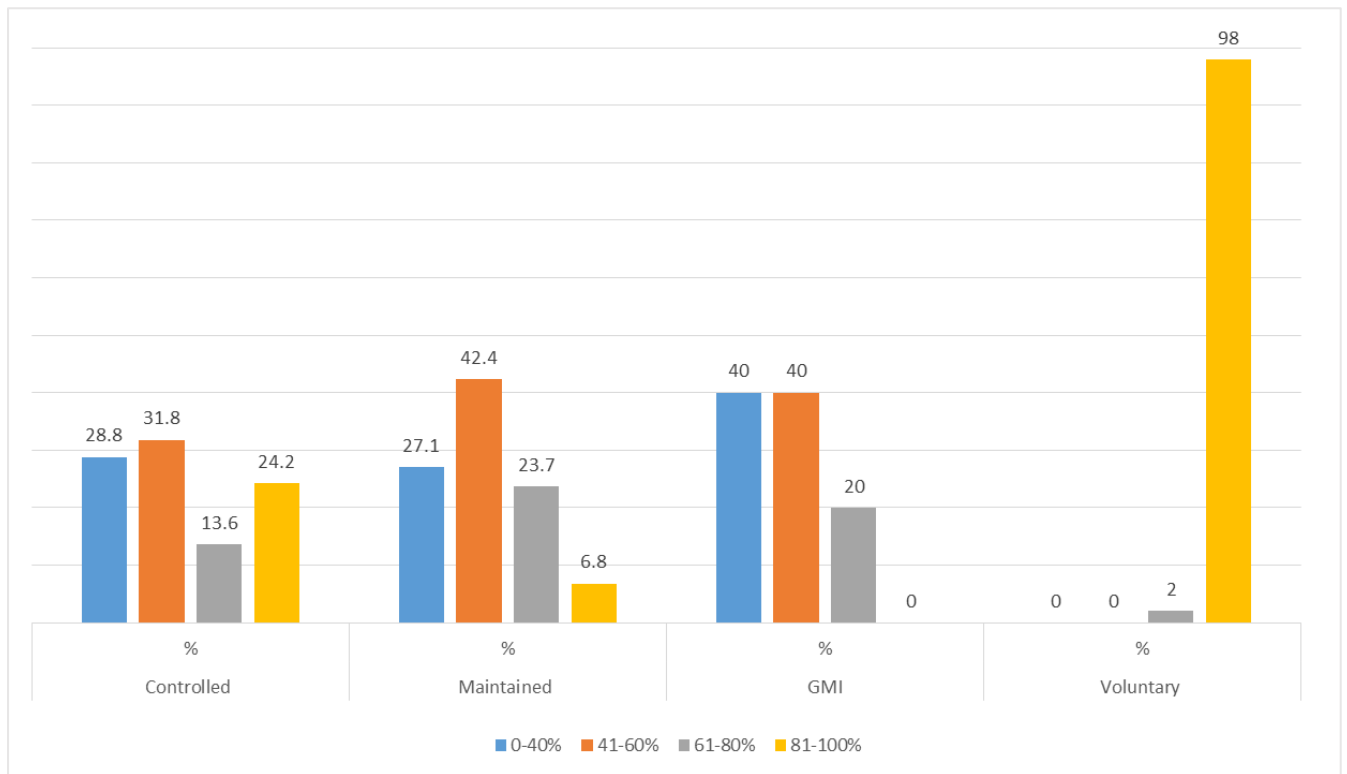
This section examines attainment in controlled schools<sup>1</sup> by looking at overall school attainment, pupil attainment and the qualifications of school leavers.

### School level

#### GCSE performance including English and Maths

Each year the DE collects data on the percentage of pupils in each school who achieve the GCSE standard. Figure 1 provides a breakdown of the proportion of pupils in schools who attained five or more GCSEs at grades A\* - C (including English and Maths) by sector<sup>2</sup>.

Figure 1 - Proportion of pupils achieving 5+ GCSEs A\*-C (including English and Maths) in schools by sector (2016/17) (%)



<sup>1</sup> In this document the controlled sector always includes controlled integrated schools.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 2 for information about school sectors in Northern Ireland.

The results for the controlled sector show that 29% of schools are low attaining, with 40% or less pupils achieving five or more GCSEs grades A\*-C (including English and Maths). The maintained sector is similar to the controlled sector with regard to low attaining schools (27% of maintained schools were low attaining). However, the sector with the greatest proportion of low attaining schools in the Grant Maintained Integrated (GMI) sector, with 40%.

It is interesting to compare the 2016/17 results with those of the previous year<sup>3</sup>. The 2015/16 data show that 41% of controlled schools were low attaining. The most recent results show an improvement of 12 percentage points. Interestingly the 41-60% category has remained fairly unchanged with 32% of schools in this category in the 2016/17 school year, compared to 30% in the 2015/16 results. A notable change is the increase in schools falling into the 61-80% category, from 6% in 2015/16 to 14% in 2016/17. The high attaining category (over 80%) remains much the same (23% in 2015/16 and 24% in 2016/16). All of the schools which are high attaining are grammar schools, with the exception of one secondary school. This said, the increase in schools reaching the 61-80% category is a positive change.

Only 7% of maintained schools could be classed as high attaining (over 80% of pupils achieving five or more GCSEs grades A\*-C including English and Maths). However, as the maintained sector has no grammar schools<sup>4</sup>, each of the schools in this category are secondary schools. Therefore, comparatively their success should be noted.

In the GMI sector (15 schools) no school recorded an attainment level over 80%. In the majority of schools in the voluntary sector (98%) the proportion of pupils attaining the desired results was over 80%.

Table 1 provides more detail on the controlled school findings.

Table 1- Attainment in controlled schools (2016/17)

% year 12 pupils achieving 5+ GCSEs grades A*-C (including equivalent) including GCSE English and GCSE maths	Controlled schools	
	N	%
0-40%	19	28.8
41-60%	21	31.8
61-80%	9	13.6
81-100%	16	24.2
Undisclosed	1	1.5
Total <sup>5</sup>	66	99.9 <sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 3.

<sup>4</sup> With a small exception of pupils in the grammar streams of all ability schools.

<sup>5</sup> Data for controlled schools excludes junior highs and new schools which have come into operation since the data was collected.

<sup>6</sup> Numbers may not add due to rounding.

If data is further examined by type of controlled post-primary school is it clear that the majority of high attaining schools are grammar schools. Table 2 breaks down the results and there is a attainment divide between the two types of schools.

Table 2- Attainment in controlled schools by type of school (2016/17)

	<b>Grammar</b>		<b>Secondary</b>	
	N	%	N	%
0-40%	0	0	19	38
41-60%	0	0	21	42
61-80%	1	6	8	16
81-100%	15	94	1	2
Undisclosed	0	0	1 <sup>7</sup>	2
Total	16	100	50	100

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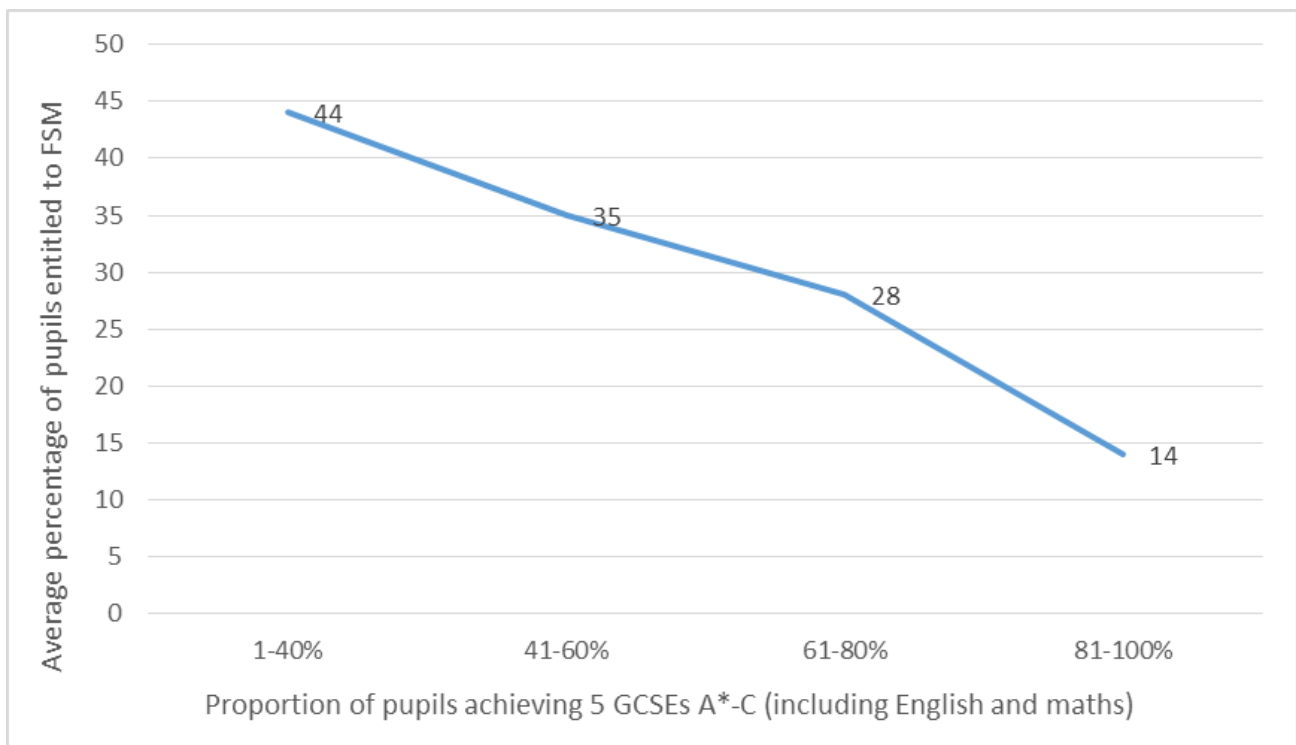
<sup>7</sup> The attainment rate for Crumlin Integrated College was suppressed in the 2016/17 data release.

## School characteristics by attainment level

Attainment levels in schools cannot be isolated from other factors. There is much evidence to suggest that schools in areas of high deprivation have lower attainment rates than those in more affluent areas<sup>8</sup>.

In Northern Ireland the main proxy measure of deprivation is the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals. Figure 2 shows school attainment rates in conjunction with the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals (FSME).

Figure 2 - Proportion of FSME pupils in controlled schools by attainment (2016/17)



In low attaining schools, where 40% or less pupils attain five or more GCSEs (grades A\*-C, including English and Maths), the average proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is 44%. However, as the proportion of pupils in schools with FSME decreases, the school attainment rate increases. In high attaining schools (more than 80% of pupils attaining the desired GCSE standard) the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is 14%. There are also links with attendance and absence rates. Figure 3 shows that as attendance rates increase school attainment also increases. In addition, as absence and unauthorised absence decrease, school attainment increases (see Figure 4).

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<sup>8</sup> See in particular the ILiAD study by Queen's University, Belfast (2017) which explores educational achievement in deprived areas in Northern Ireland: <https://www.qub.ac.uk/research-centres/CentreforSharedEducation/Filestore/Fileupload,775013,en.pdf>.



Figure 3 - Attendance rates in schools by attainment (2016/17)

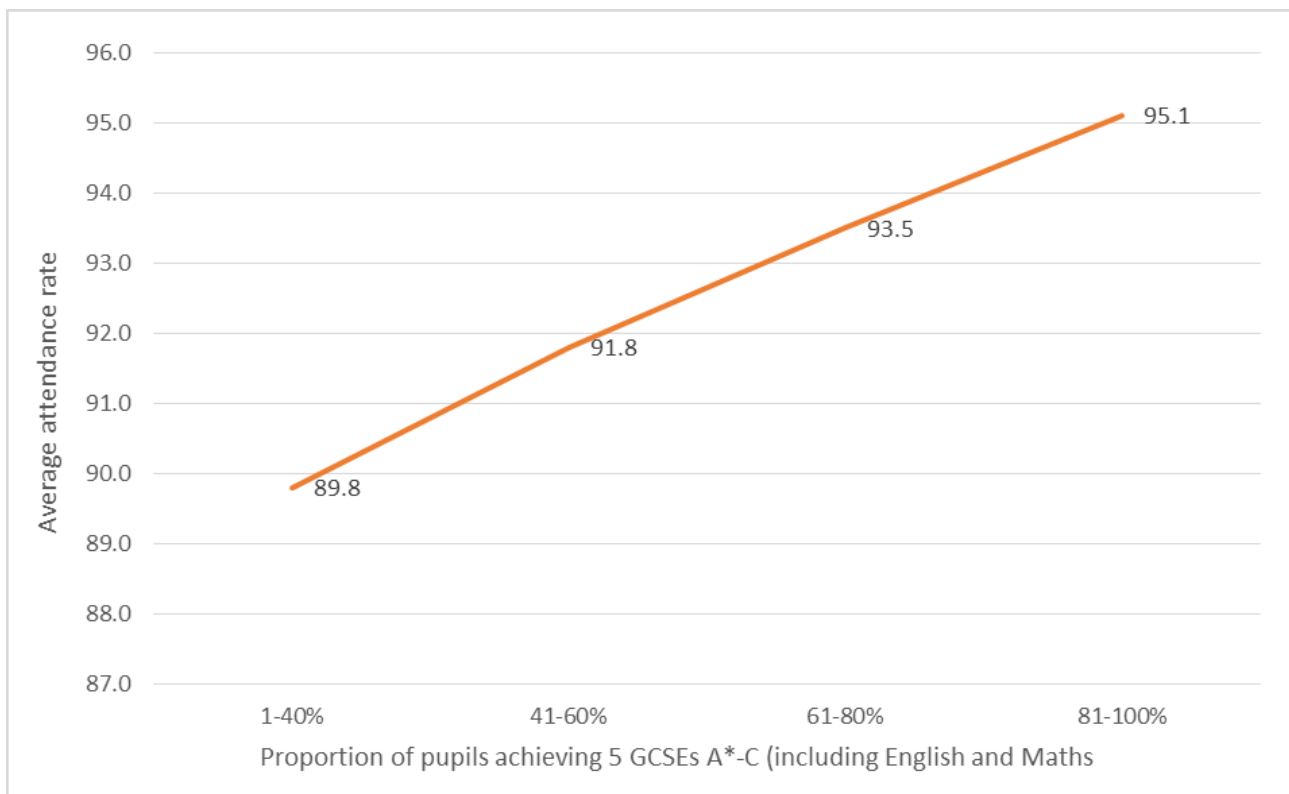
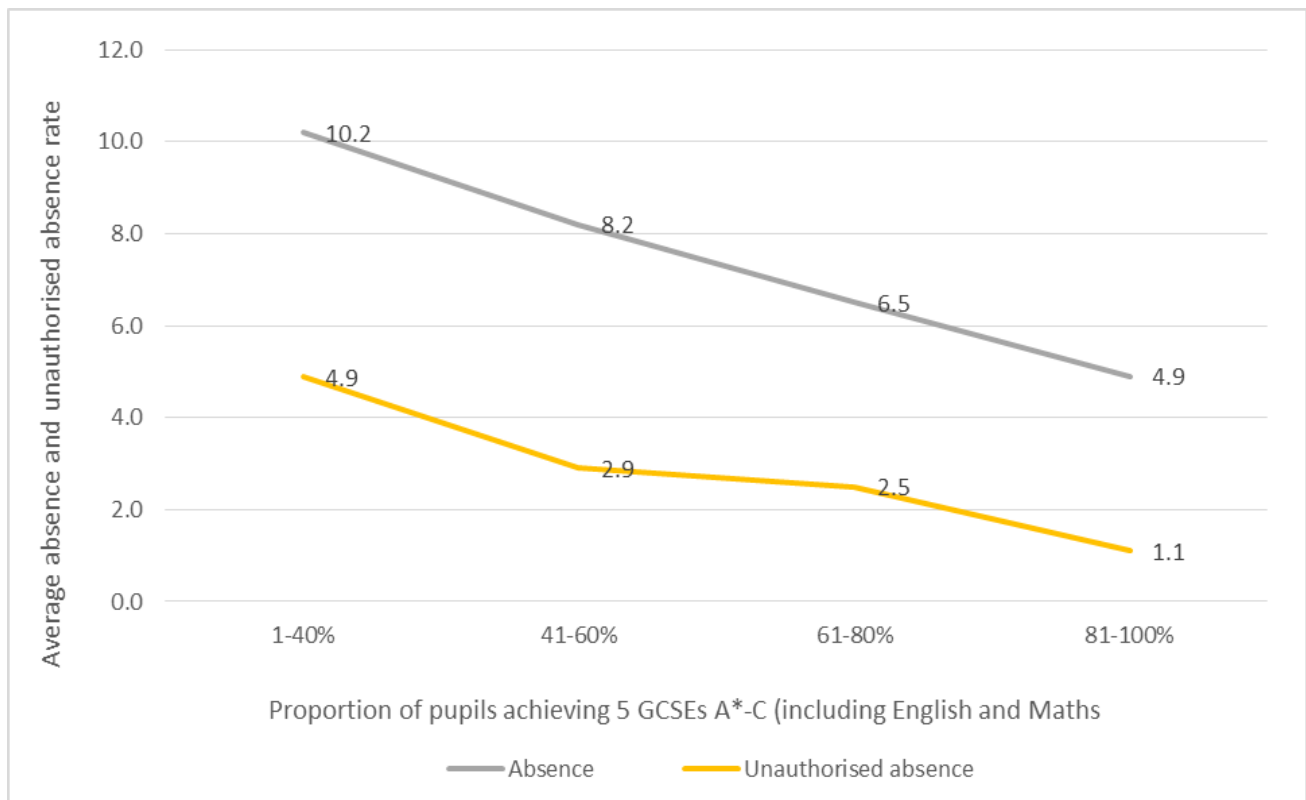


Figure 4 - Absence and unauthorised absence rates by attainment in controlled schools (2016/17)



Taken together, it is noticeable that as the proportion of pupils in schools achieving the desired GCSE results increases:

- the proportion of pupils with an entitlement to free school meals decreases
- the average attendance rate in schools rises
- the average rate of absence decreases
- the average rate of unauthorised absence decreases.

This indicates a link between each characteristic and the level of attainment.

It is interesting to note that:

- High attaining schools (over 80% of pupils achieving the desired GCSE results) have above average attendance rates (95.1%, NI average 94.6%), below average absence rates (4.9%, NI average 5.4%) and below average unauthorised attendance rates (1.1%, NI average 1.7%).
- Low attaining schools (under 40% of pupils achieving the desired GCSE results) have well below average attendance rates (89.8%, NI average 94.6%), higher than average absence rates (10.2%, NI average 5.4%) and above average unauthorised absence rates (4.9%, NI average 1.7%).

There is correlation between free school meal entitlement and rates of attendance and absence. Table 3 shows that as the proportion of pupils in schools with free school meal entitlement increases, rates of attendance drop and rates of absence rise.

Table 3 - Proportion of pupils with free school meal entitlement and average rates of attendance and absence in controlled post-primary schools (2016/17)

FSME entitlement	% attendance	% absence	% authorised absence	% unauthorised absence
10% or less	95.6	4.4	3.4	1.0
11%-30%	93.6	6.4	4.1	2.3
31%-50%	91.0	9.0	5.2	3.7
51%-70%	89.5	10.5	5.9	4.6

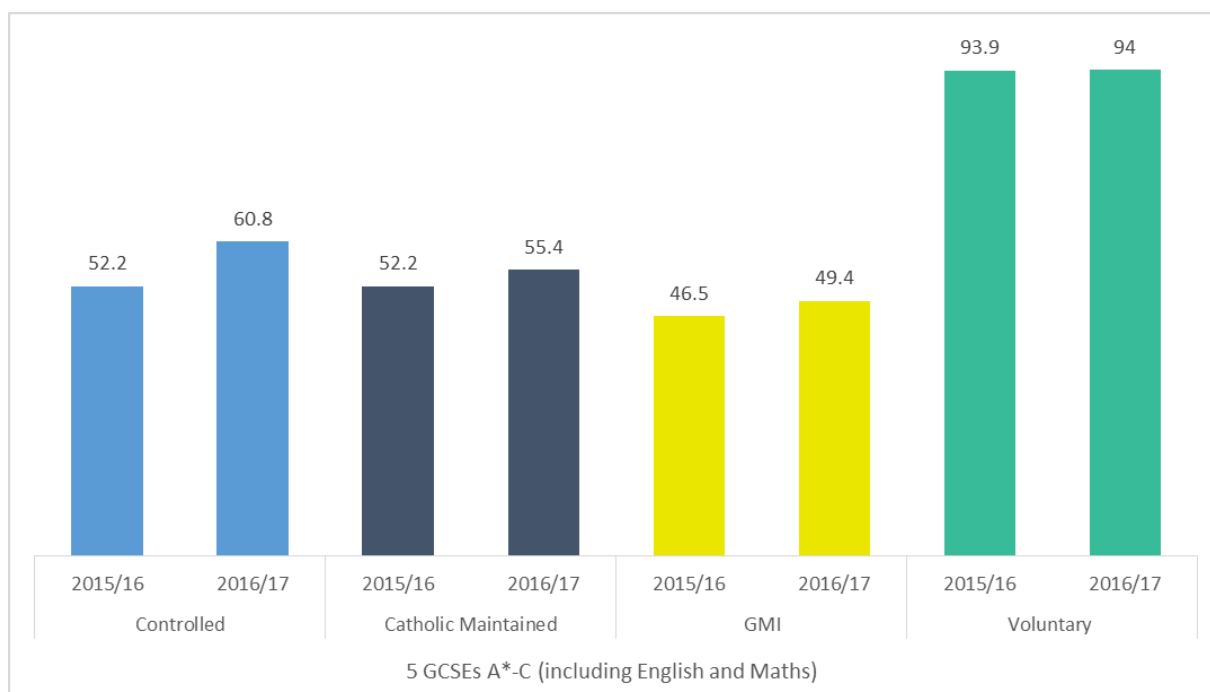
Free school meal entitlement strongly correlates with the other variables. The links between attendance, absence and deprivation call for further exploration through research.

## Pupil level

### Pupil attainment at GCSE

Each year schools are required to provide DE with the GCSE results of pupils in Year 12. The data is compiled and produced as part of the Summary of Annual Examination Results (SAER) statistical bulletin. The 2016/17 figures in this statistical release are based on information correct on 14 December 2017. Figure 5 shows the GCSE performance of Year 12 pupils in each sector.

Figure 5 - Pupil performance at GCSE by school sector (2016/17)<sup>9</sup>



In the 2015/16 results an equal proportion of controlled and maintained pupils (52%) received 'good' GCSEs. A year later in the 2016/17 results, there is a difference of 5.4 percentage points between the two sectors, with 60.8% of controlled school pupils achieving the GCSE standard compared to 55.4% of maintained pupils. In the GMI sector just under half of all pupils achieved the GCSE standard, an increase of 2.9 percentage points on the previous year. The attainment rate for each sector has increased over the last year, with the exception of the voluntary sector which remains at 94%.

### Free school meal entitlement and attainment

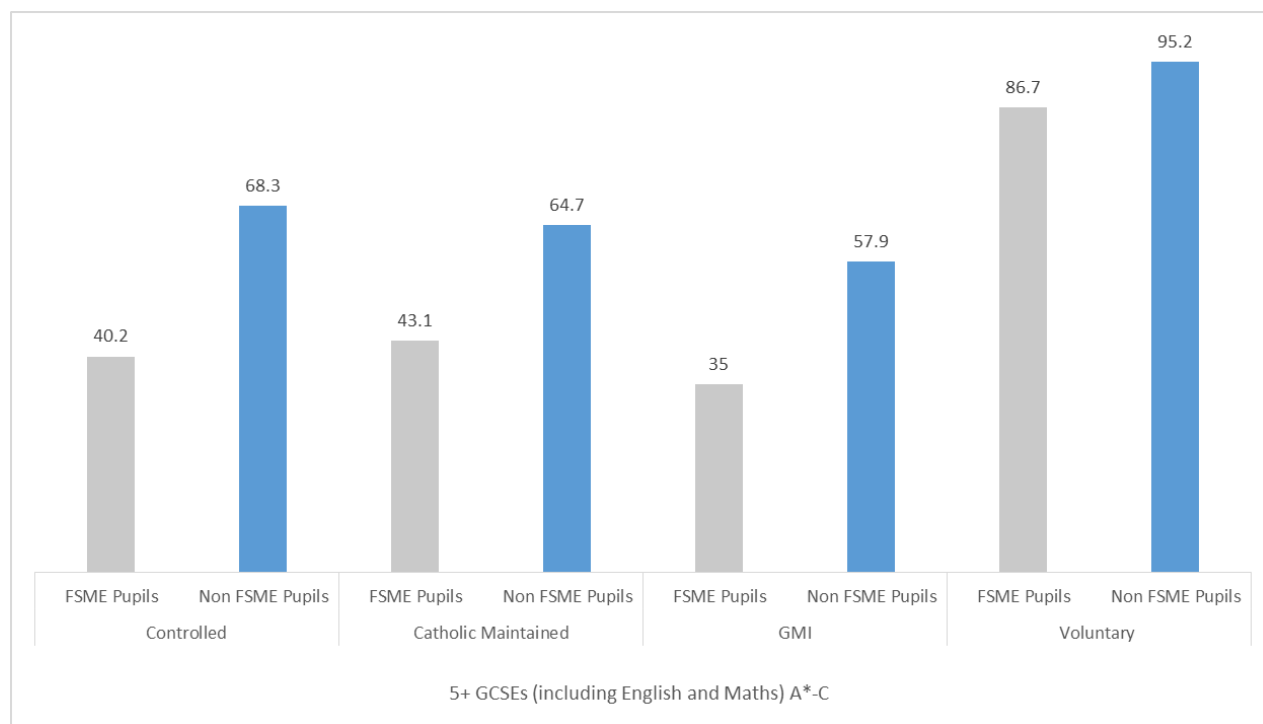
The results in the previous section (school characteristics by attainment level) showed that there are links between attainment and the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals. In schools with a high percentage of free school meal entitlement, attainment rates were lower than in schools with a low proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals. Correspondingly, when looking at the individual pupil results, pupils not entitled to free school meals are more likely to

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<sup>9</sup> The Other Maintained sector is omitted as the sample is too small to compare.

achieve five or more GCSEs (grades A\*-C, including English and Maths) than those entitled to free school meals. The figure below shows the results by sector.

Figure 6 - FSME and non FSME Pupils' attainment of 5 GCSEs (A\*-C including English and Maths) by sector (2016/17)<sup>10</sup>



In each sector, free school meal entitled pupils do less well than those not entitled to free school meals.

There is very little difference between the results for controlled school pupils and maintained school pupils; 40% of controlled pupils and 43% of maintained pupils who are entitled to free school meals achieved the recommended GCSE standard, a difference of three percentage points.

In GMI schools 35% of pupils who are entitled to free school meals achieved the GCSE standard, compared to over half (58%) of those not entitled to free school meals.

Interestingly, only 13% of free school meal entitled pupils in voluntary schools failed to achieve the GCSE standard.

In voluntary schools there is 8.5 percentage points of difference between the attainment rates of pupils entitled to free school meals and those who are not entitled. In the other sectors the gap is larger, most significantly in the controlled sector with a difference of 28 percentage points between the two pupil groups.

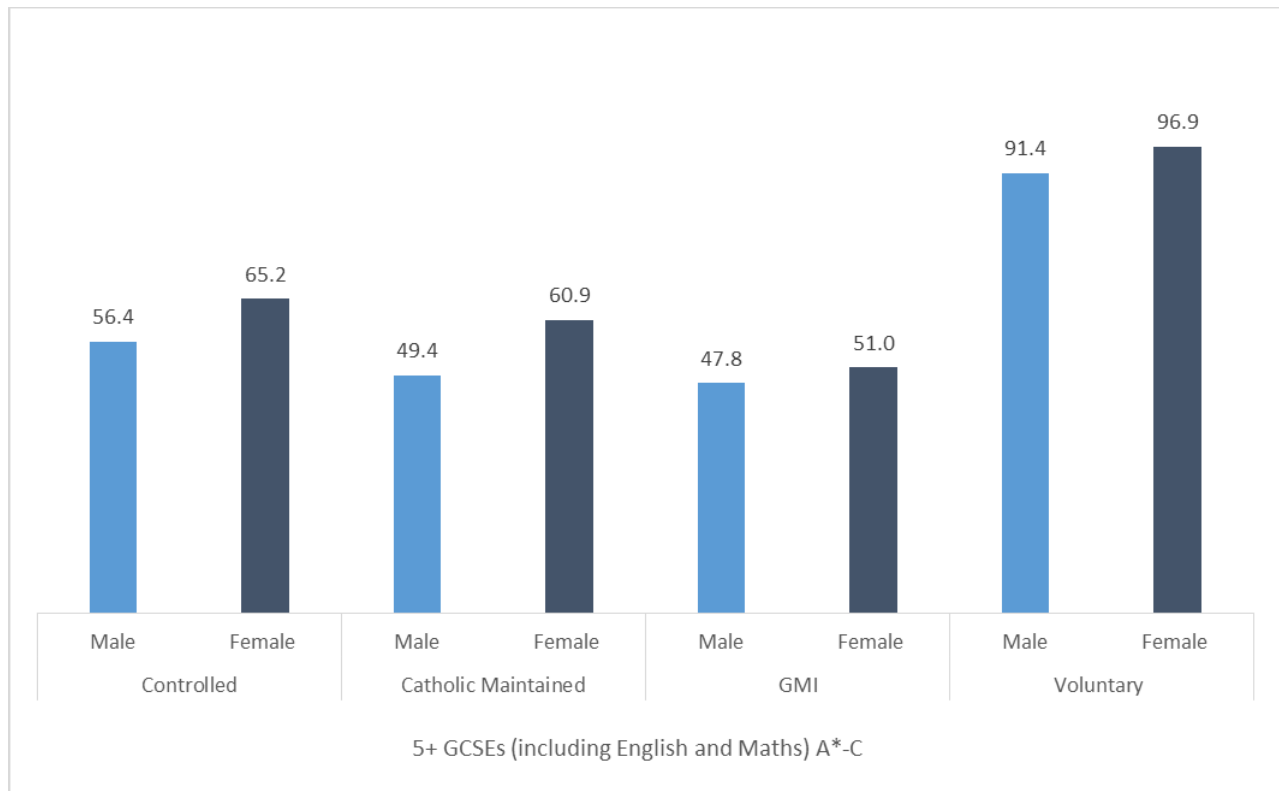
It is notable that in the controlled sector a greater percentage non free school meal entitled pupils attain the GCSE standard than the same group of pupils in the maintained and integrated sectors.

<sup>10</sup> The Other Maintained sector is omitted as there is only one school in the sample.

## Attainment and gender

The figure below provides a breakdown of pupil attainment by gender and sector. In each sector a higher percentage of female pupils than male pupils attain the set GCSE standard.

Figure 7 - Pupils attaining five GCSEs A\*-C (including English and Maths) by gender and sector (2016/17)



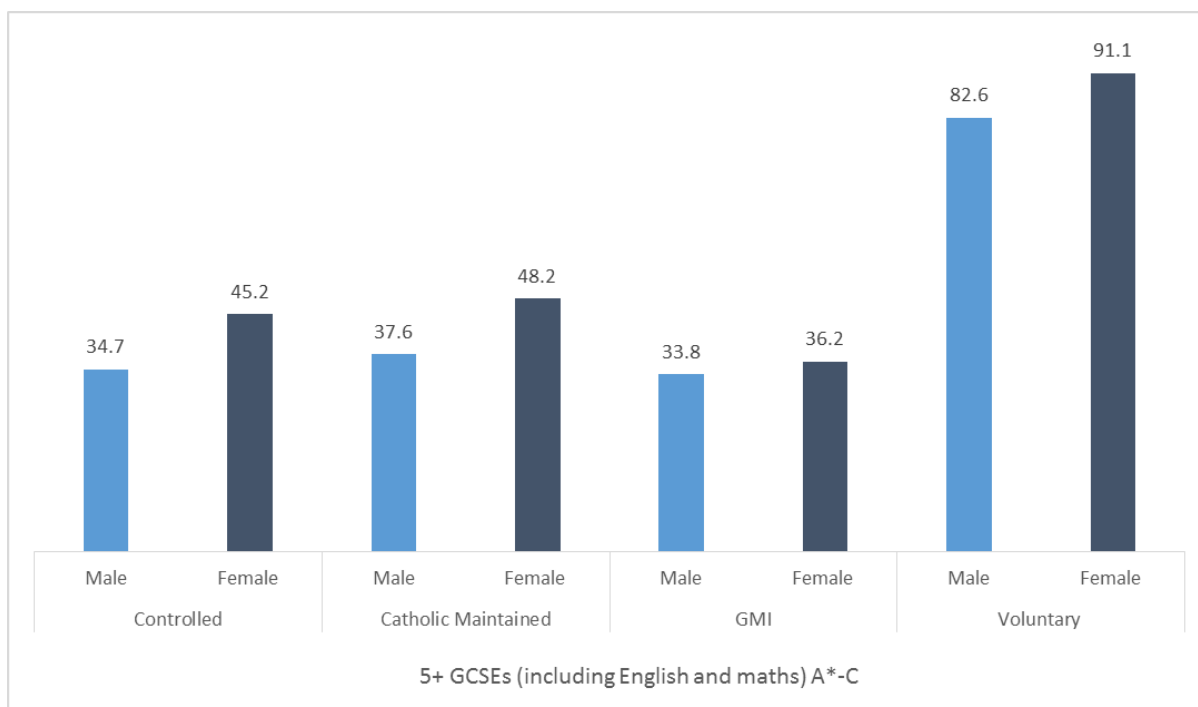
In the controlled sector, attainment for both male and female pupils is higher than in both the maintained and integrated sectors. However, it is important to remember that both grammar school and secondary school pupils are included in the controlled results, whereas all of the pupils in the maintained and integrated sectors will attend non-selective, secondary schools<sup>11</sup>. Regardless of sector, female pupils have higher attainment results than their male counterparts.

When attainment rates are analysed from both a gender and free school meal perspective the results for females attaining the GCSE standard exceed those for male pupils, continuing the gender trends noted above. Overall, results for both females and males decrease when the pupils are entitled to free school meals (see Figure 8).

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<sup>11</sup> With a small exception of pupils in the grammar streams of bilateral schools.

Figure 8 - FSME Pupils' attainment of 5 GCSEs (A\*-C including English and Maths) by gender and sector<sup>12</sup> (2016/17)



In the 2015/16 data an equal proportion of males entitled to free school meals in both controlled and maintained schools achieved five or more GCSEs A\*-C including English and Maths (34% respectively). In the 2016/17 data a slightly greater proportion of FSME male pupils in maintained schools achieved the GCSE standard compared to their counterparts in controlled schools (37.6% compared to 34.7%). There is a minimal difference of 2.9 percentage points.

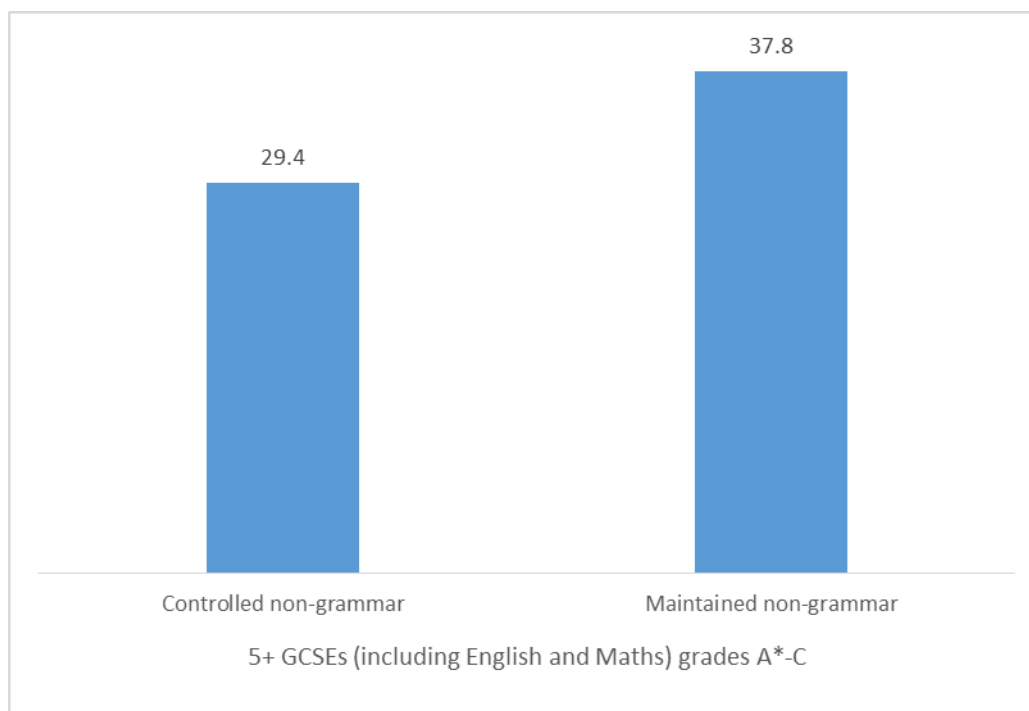
Much of the debate around pupil attainment centres on the underachievement of Protestant working class boys. In controlled post-primary schools, 75% of pupils are from a Protestant background. As the majority of Protestant pupils, but not all, attend schools in the controlled sector there are many perceived links between underachievement and controlled schools.

To draw a comparison between male free school meal entitled pupils in the controlled and maintained sectors provides an interesting result. However, to break this down further, it is perhaps more accurate to draw comparisons between boys entitled to free school meals in non-grammar schools in the controlled sector with the same cohort of boys in maintained schools. Figure 9 shows this comparison.

A lower proportion of boys entitled to free school meals, attending controlled schools, achieved the GCSE standard (29.4%), compared to the same group of pupils in maintained schools (37.8%). A difference of 8.4 percentage points is recorded.

<sup>12</sup> The Other Maintained sector is omitted as there is only one school in the sample.

Figure 9 - FSME male pupils in controlled and maintained non-grammar schools attaining 5+ GCSEs including English and Maths (2016/17)



This noted, the proportion of FSME boys at grammar schools in the controlled sector who attained the GCSE standard is 82.6%. If free school meal entitlement is the proxy measure for deprivation, then these boys still fall under the 'Protestant working class boy' title, which calls into question the difference in the percentages of working class boys in grammar and secondary schools in the controlled sector.

In summary, although it is incorrect to say that the controlled sector represents the Protestant sector, it is true that the majority of pupils in controlled schools (particularly at post-primary level) are from a Protestant background. Similarly, the maintained sector caters largely for pupils from a Catholic background. Based on this premise it is interesting to see that at GCSE level males entitled to free school meals in both the maintained and controlled sectors perform similarly. However, when grammar pupils in the controlled sector are omitted there is a noticeable difference in the results between the two groups of male pupils (8.4 percentage points).

The SAER data cannot be broken down by religion as this information is not collected. Therefore a comparison by school type is the only way of exploring the issue of underachievement. This issue will be explored further in the school leavers' data (see page 15).

## School leavers

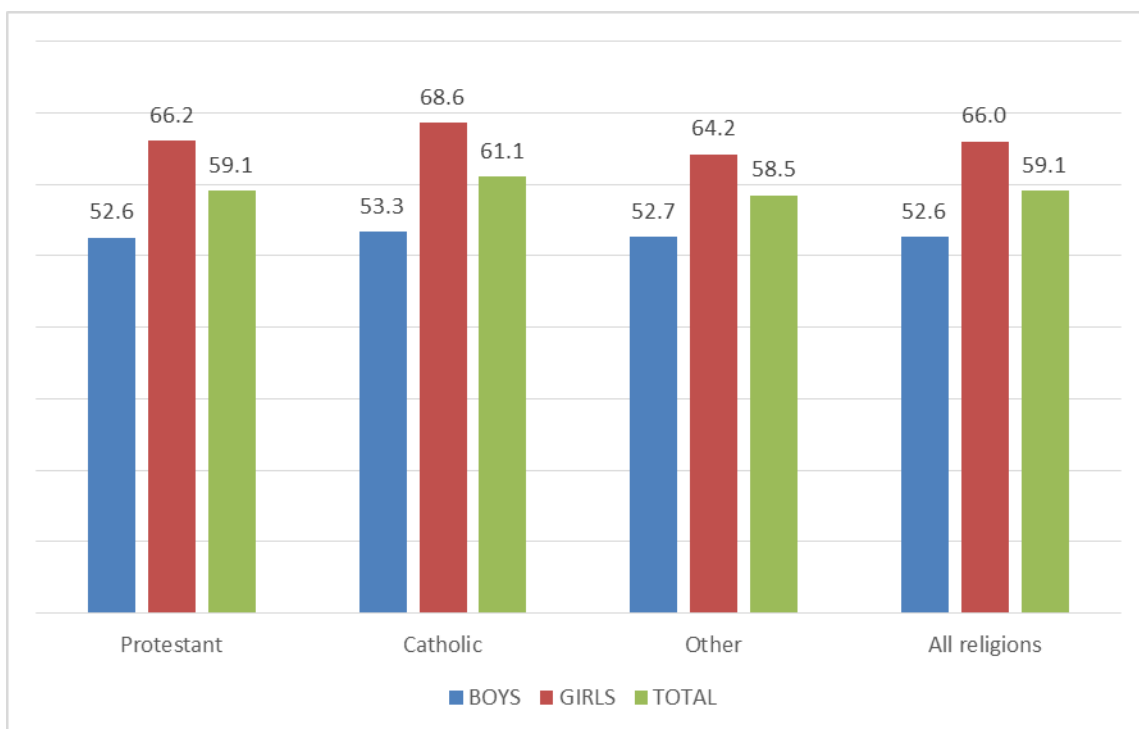
In 2015/16 there were 22,746 school leavers in Northern Ireland<sup>13</sup>. The school leaving cohort comprises of year 12, 13 and 14 pupils leaving mainstream post-primary schools. DE data records the qualifications and destinations of school leavers.

The school leavers' data shows the percentage of pupils who leave school each year with five GCSEs (A\*-C) including English and maths. These pupils include those leaving after year 14, as well as those who leave school directly after year 12.

As with the SAER data there are common trends which are reflected in the school leaver data, namely female pupils achieve higher grades than male pupils, grammar school pupils are higher achievers than secondary school pupils and free school meal entitled pupils do less well compared to those not entitled to free school meals.

The school leavers' data, however, enables the results to be broken down by pupil religion, a feature which is not possible in the SAER data. It is interesting to look at the proportion of pupils from each religious background who achieve the set GCSE standard within controlled schools (see Figure 10).

Figure 10 - Percentage of school leavers achieving five GCSEs A\*-C (including English and Maths) in the controlled sector by religion (2015/16)



<sup>13</sup> At the time of writing the most up to date school leaver data was for the school year 2015/16.



There is very little difference in achievement between the three religious groups, particularly when gender is considered. It is particularly noticeable that the same proportion of Catholic and Protestant boys leaving controlled schools attained the set GCSE standard.

### School leavers entitled to free school meals by gender

Disappointingly a comparison between Catholic and Protestant male school leavers who are entitled to free school meals within the controlled sector is not possible due to a small sample size. Table 4 shows the attainment of free school meal pupils across Northern Ireland.

Table 4 - Percentage of school leavers entitled to free school meals achieving at least 5 GCSEs A\*-C including English and maths by gender and religion of pupil (2015/2016)

	Boys		Girls		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
<b>Protestant</b>	329	34.0	351	42.5	680	37.9
Total	969		825		1794	
<b>Catholic</b>	794	43.6	979	53.1	1773	48.4
Total	1822		1845		3667	
<b>Other</b>	108	39.3	116	48.9	224	43.8
Total	275		237		512	
<b>All religions</b>	1231	40.2	1446	49.7	2677	44.8
Total	3066		2907		5973	

The findings show that 43.6% of Catholic boys who are entitled to free school meals attain the GCSE standard, compared to 34% of Protestant school leavers. This is a difference of almost 10 percentage points. Although an analysis looking specifically at the controlled sector cannot be completed, 76% of the Protestant boys in the sample above attended controlled schools.

Figure 10 showed that within the controlled system pupils, most notably boys, from both Catholic and Protestant backgrounds achieve to a similar standard. However, when entitlement to free school meals is considered at a nationwide level (Table 4) Catholic boys exceed their Protestant counterparts.

Breaking down the numbers, it would take an increase of 97 more Protestant free school meal entitled boys to attain the GCSE standard to create equal footing with the same cohort of Catholic boys. This is 10% of the male free school meal Protestant cohort<sup>14</sup>.

Overall, almost half of Catholic free school meal entitled pupils achieve the set GCSE standard, compared to 38% of Protestant pupils. As the majority (72%) of the FSME Protestant cohort who attain 'good' GCSEs attend controlled schools there is work to be done within the controlled sector to look at the factors influencing this trend and the actions which can be taken to address it.

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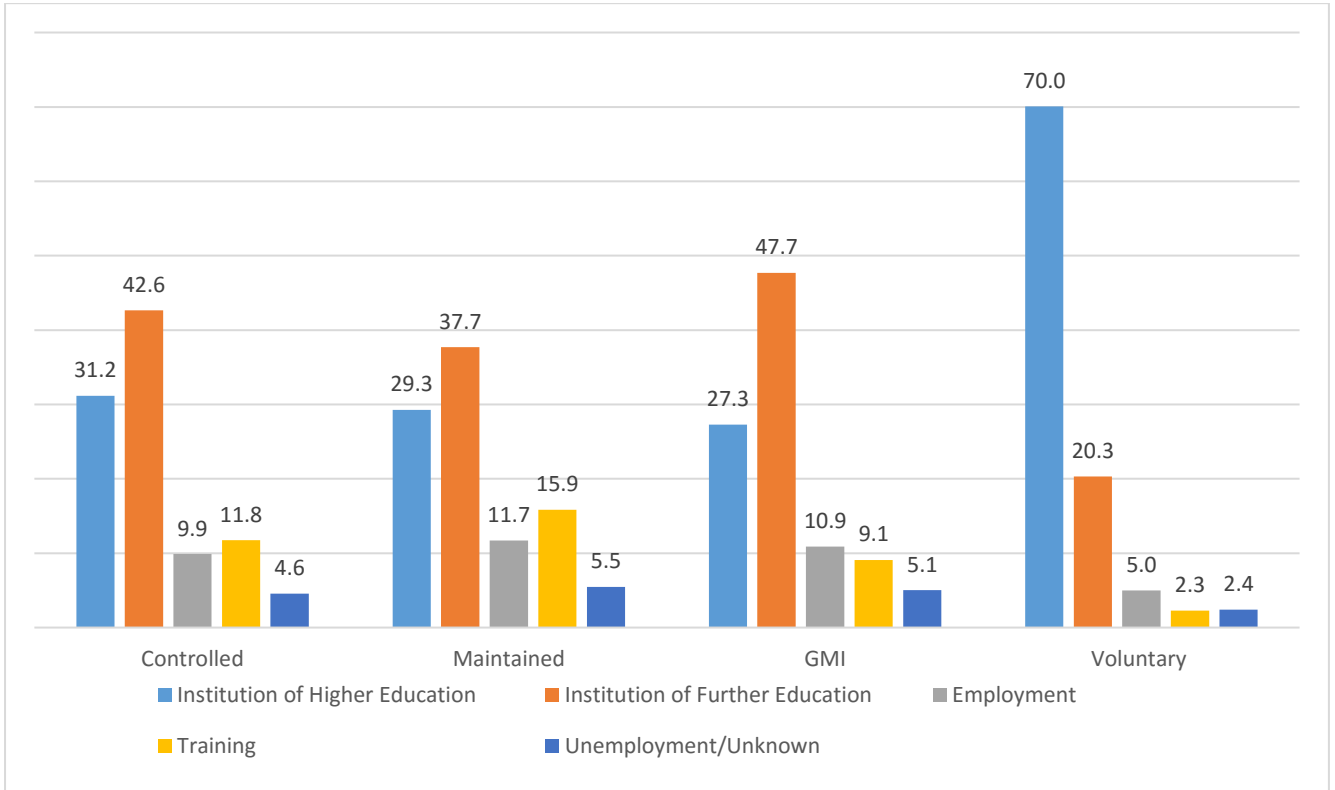
<sup>14</sup> Since the time of writing the 2016/17 school leavers data has been published, showing a narrowing of the gap between protestant FSME boys and Catholic FSME boys' attainment to 8 percentage points. In 2016/17, 37% of FMSE Protestant boys and 45% of Catholic FSME boys attained good GCSEs.

## Destinations of school leavers

### Pupil destinations by sector

The following chart shows the destinations of school leavers by school sector.

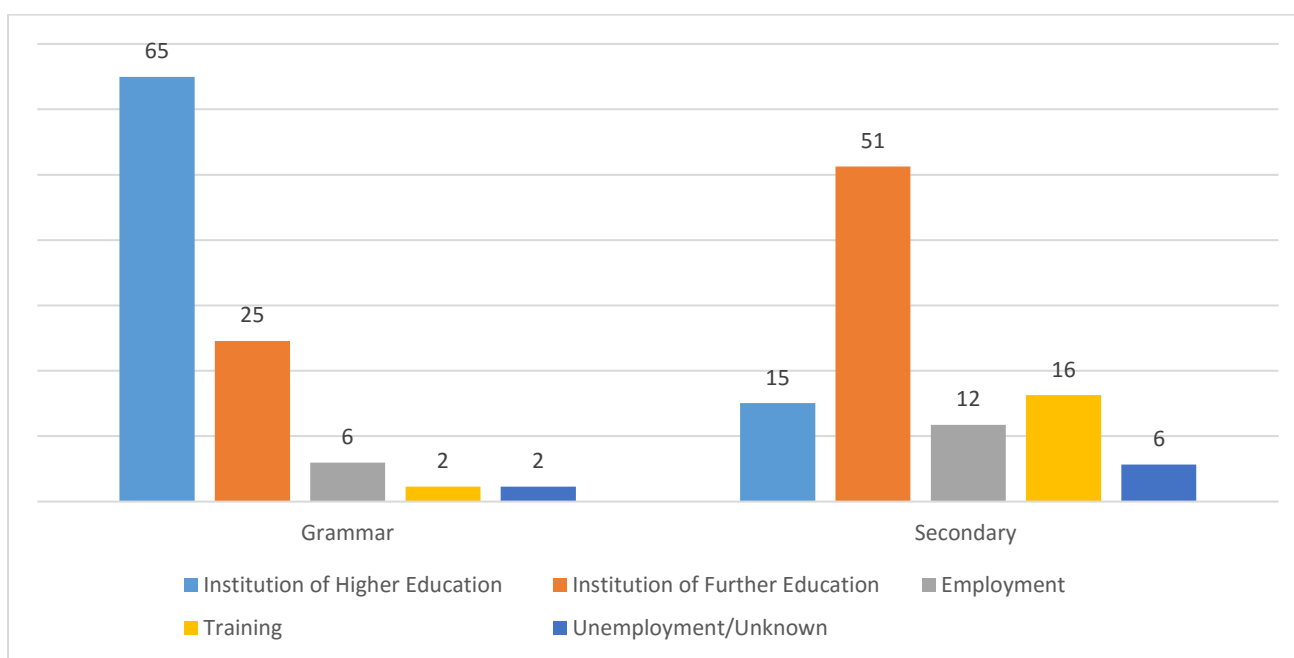
Figure 11 - Destinations of school leavers by sector 2015/16



A greater proportion of school leavers in voluntary schools (70%) continued their education in an institute of higher education (university or teaching college) than any other sector. Across the other sectors the proportion of school leavers attending higher education is broadly similar (31% in controlled schools, 29% in maintained schools and 27% in GMI). However the figures for controlled schools account for both grammar and secondary schools, whereas in both maintained and GMI sectors all schools are secondary schools<sup>15</sup>. Figure 12 provides a breakdown of school leavers in the controlled sector by school type.

<sup>15</sup> With the exception of some schools with grammar streams.

Figure 12 - School leaver destinations in the controlled sector by school type 2015/16



When the results are broken down by controlled grammar and secondary schools a greater proportion of grammar pupils attend higher education than secondary pupils (65% and 15% respectively). There are 16 controlled grammar schools and 54 secondary schools in Northern Ireland. Within secondary provision are a number of Dixon plan schools, including four junior highs. A total of 16 controlled secondary schools do not have sixth form provision (see Appendix 6). Pupils at these schools are therefore more likely to become school leavers at an earlier age, perhaps explaining why 51% go on to study at institutions of further education. Fewer pupils in grammar schools (25%) continued their study in institutes of further education.

Interestingly, double the proportion of pupils in secondary schools compared to grammar schools entered employment directly after school (12% compared to 6% respectively). Furthermore, 16% of pupils in secondary schools compared to only 2% in grammar schools entered training upon leaving school. These trends show that grammar school pupils are more likely to pursue academic study than their secondary school counterparts. Indeed the controlled grammar school results are broadly similar to the results for school leavers in voluntary grammar schools.

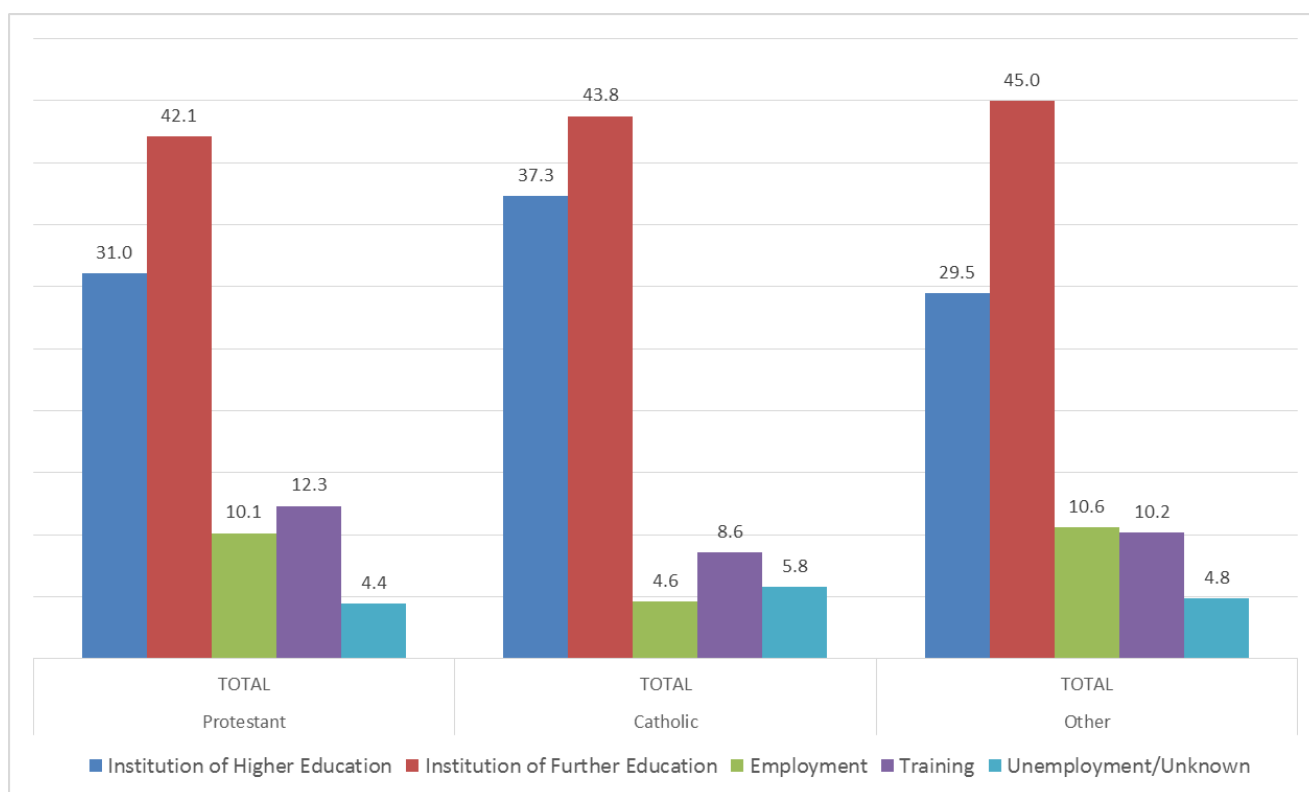
It is interesting to compare the controlled secondary school results to secondary schools in the maintained and GMI sectors. Fewer pupils in controlled secondary schools go on to study in higher education (15%, compared to 29% in maintained schools and 27% in GMI schools). More pupils in the controlled secondary schools go on to further education or training than those in the maintained or GMI sectors (67% in controlled secondary schools, 54% maintained and 57% GMI).

Similar proportions of pupils in the three sectors left school to take up employment (12% controlled secondary, 12% maintained, 11% GMI). Additionally similar proportions of secondary school pupils in the controlled, maintained and integrated sectors became unemployed or their destination was unknown after leaving school (6%, 5.5% and 5.1% respectively).

## Destinations of school leavers by religion

The controlled sector accepts pupils from all faiths and none. The following chart shows the destinations of school leavers from the controlled sector by religion.

Figure 13 - Destinations of school leavers in the controlled sector by religion (2015/16)

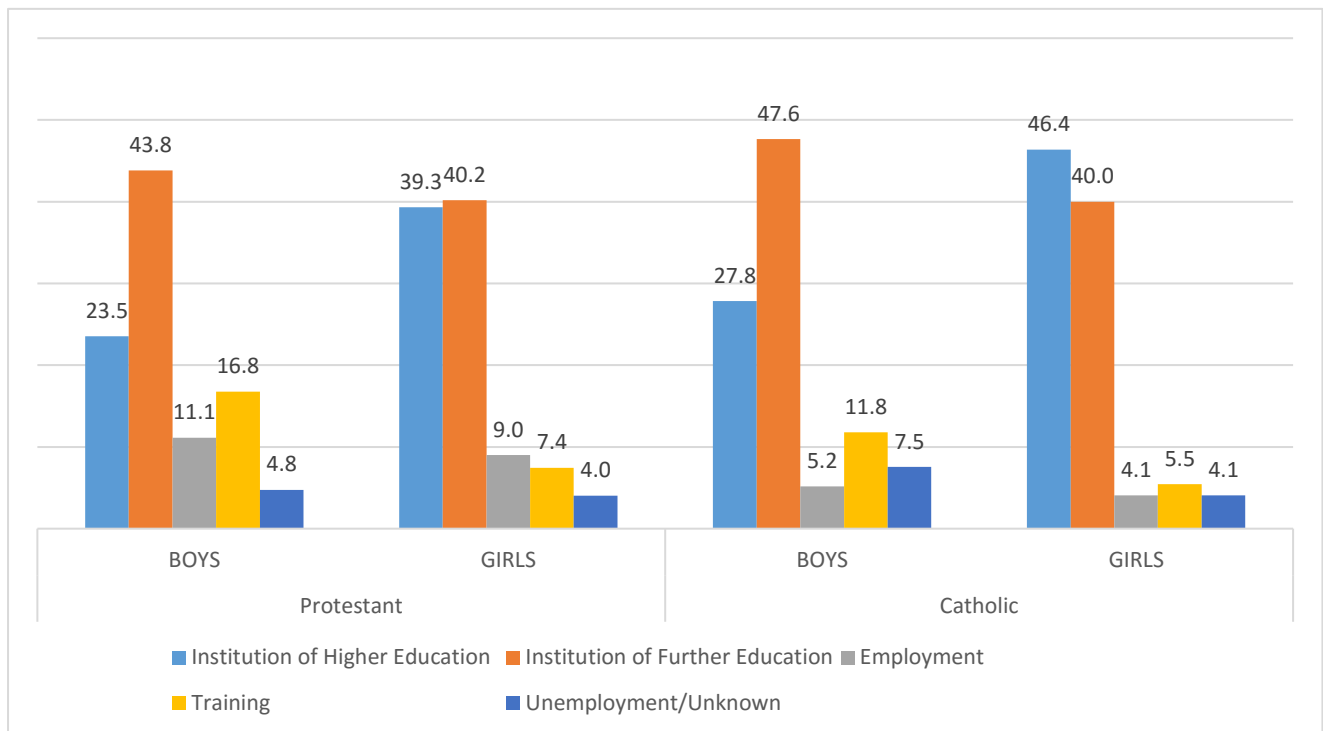


It is interesting to note that pupils from a Catholic background attending controlled schools were more likely than pupils from both Protestant and 'other' backgrounds to continue their study at an institute of higher education (37%, compared to 31% and 30% respectively). Broadly similar proportions of pupils from each background attended further education institutions. Double the proportion of Protestant pupils compared to Catholic pupils entered employment upon leaving school (10% compared to 5% respectively).

When the results are examined by gender and religion (Figure 14) it is clear that girls are more likely to continue to higher education than boys; this is true of both Protestant and Catholic pupils. In particular, almost half (46%) of Catholic girls in controlled schools attended institutes of higher study upon leaving school, compared to 39% of Protestant girls.

It is particularly interesting to explore the destinations of Protestant and Catholic boys given the emphasis on Protestant boys' achievement and performance over recent years. The sample below shows only school leavers from controlled schools; 24% of Protestant boys and 28% of Catholic school leavers attended higher education, while 44% and 48%, respectively, attended further education. There is a four percentage point difference between the two cohorts for both higher and further education.

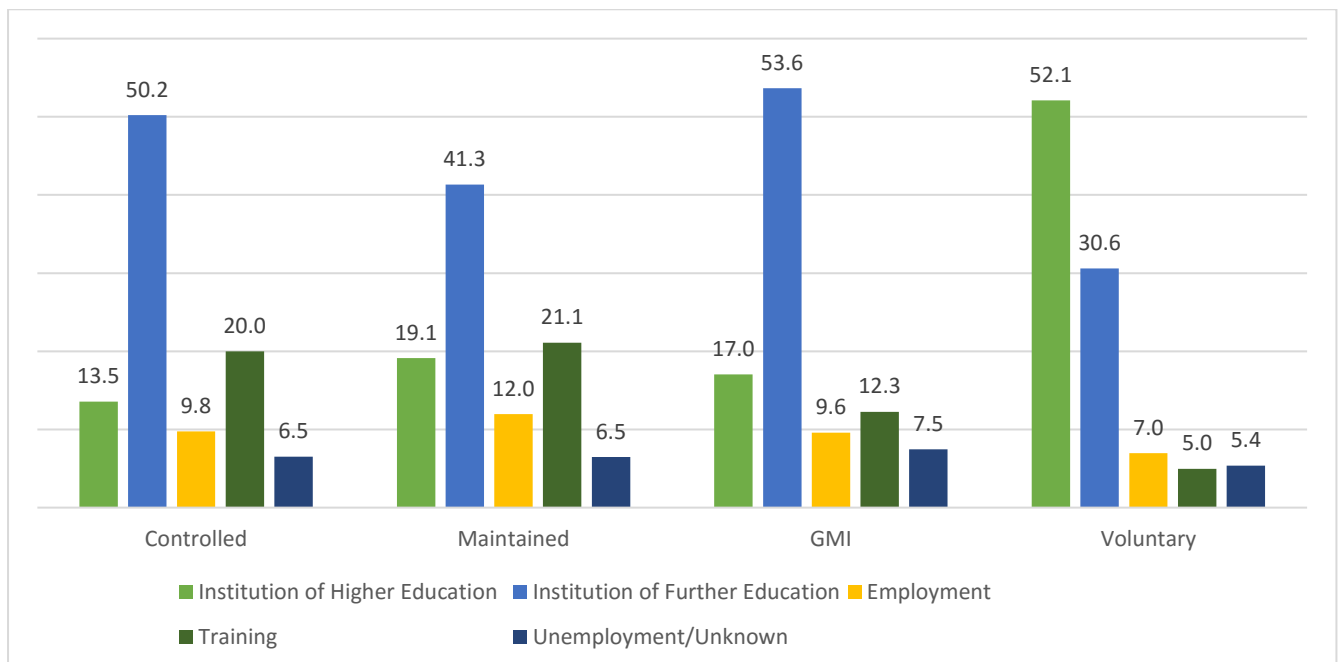
Figure 14 - Controlled school leaver destinations by gender and religion (2015/16)



### School leavers entitled to free school meals

Figure 15 shows the destinations of school leavers who are entitled to free school meals.

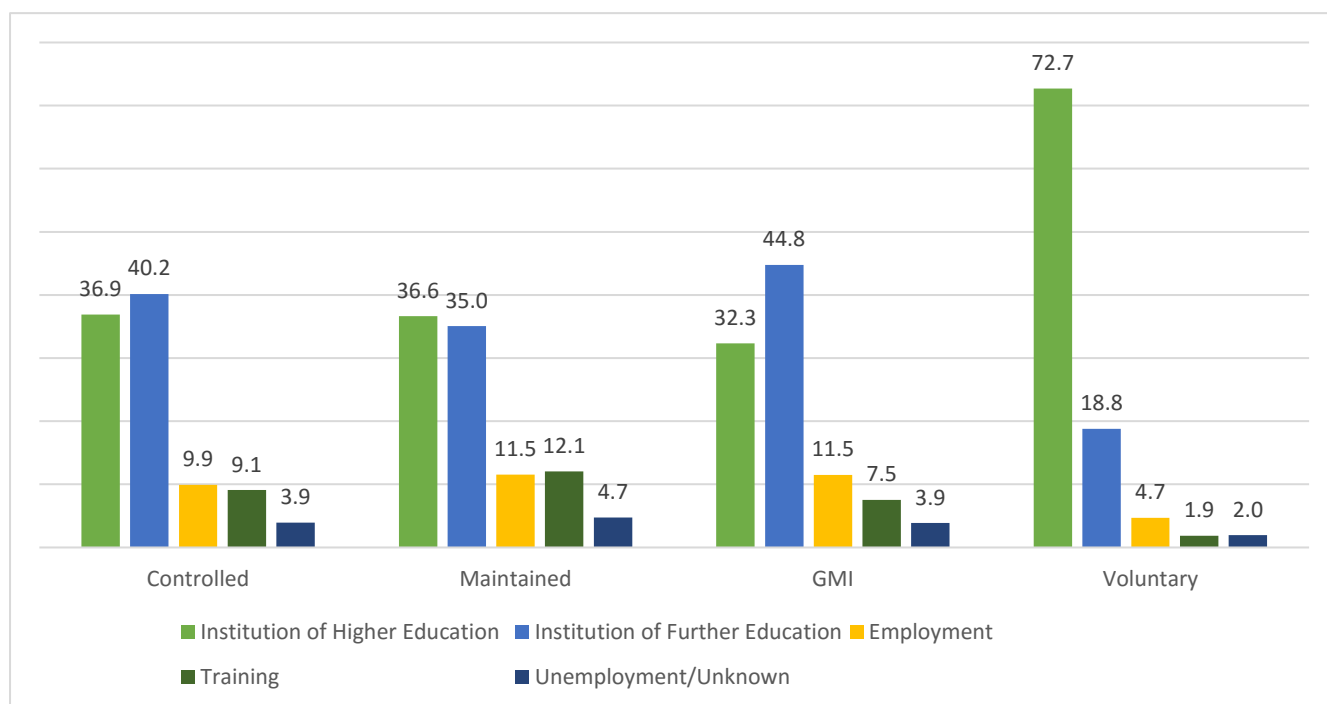
Figure 15 - Destinations of FSME school leavers by sector (2015/16)



The majority of pupils in the controlled, maintained and GMI sectors left school and attended an institute of further education. In the voluntary sector over half of free school meal entitled pupils went on to higher education. Just over 30% attended further education.

In each of the sectors fewer pupils entitled to free school meals go on to study in institutes of higher education than those pupils who are not entitled to free school meals.

Figure 16 - Destinations of pupils not entitled to FSM by sector (2015/16)



These results line up with the results of the previous section which showed that pupils entitled to free school meals do not achieve as highly at GCSE as those pupils not entitled to free school meals. Free school meal entitled pupils in the controlled, maintained and GMI sectors are more likely to attend institutes of further education. There is also a marked difference between pupils entering training between the two cohorts. Pupils entitled to free school meals are more likely, in every sector, to enter training after leaving school, than those not entitled to free school meals. This is particularly noticeable in the controlled sector with over double the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals compared to those not entitled entering training after school.

There is very little difference in the proportions of pupils leaving school to enter employment in both groups, particularly in the controlled and maintained sectors, see the table below.

Table 5 - Proportion of pupils entitled and not entitled to free school meals entering employment by sector (2015/16)

	Controlled	Maintained	GMI	Voluntary
Pupils <i>entitled</i> to free school meals	9.8	12.0	9.6	7.0
Pupils <i>not entitled</i> to free school meals	9.9	11.5	11.5	4.7

Finally, it is noticeable the pupils entitled to free school meals are more likely to leave school and fall into the 'unemployed/unknown' category than pupils who are not entitled to free school meals. This perhaps correlates with the results of the previous section showing that this cohort of pupils is less likely than its counterparts to achieve 'good' GCSEs grades, limiting access to advanced education routes and employment.

## Conclusions

### Attainment at GCSE

In 2015/16 the controlled sector had the highest proportion of low attaining schools, compared to other sectors. In 41% of controlled schools 40% or less pupils achieved the set GCSE standard. In the same year, 28% of maintained schools fell into the same low attaining category.

In the most recent round of results (2016/17) the data shows a change in the proportion of low attaining schools in the controlled sector, in that 29% of controlled schools were classed as low attaining. This marks a 12 percentage point improvement on the previous year, and brings the sector's results in line with the results of the maintained sector (27% of schools in 2016/17 classed as low attaining).

The proportion of high attaining schools in the controlled sector remains largely unchanged compared to the previous year (23% in 2015/16 and 24% in 2016/17). However, it is the performance of pupils in controlled grammar schools which props up the overall sector's results. Grammar schools consistently outperform secondary schools. Yet, it is positive to see the shift in controlled secondary schools from the low attaining categories to the 61-80% category in the 201/17 results.

Attainment at GCSE level is recorded according to the number of pupils who achieve five GCSEs, grades A\*-C, including English and Maths. This benchmark is controversially upheld, with many doubting its worth. However failure to achieve it can limit a pupil's advancement to further or higher education and act as a barrier to future career opportunities. It is in the pupils' best interests to attain the set GCSE standard.

### Free school meal entitled pupils

Pupils entitled to free school meals do less well across each of the sectors, compared to pupils who are not entitled. This trend is consistent across gender, religion, and school type. There are some factors which must be considered. It is interesting in particular that free school meal entitled pupils in grammar schools (in both the controlled and voluntary sectors) achieve much higher than those attending secondary schools. However, it is still notable that despite outperforming their secondary school counterparts, they still achieve less highly than non-free school meal entitled grammar school pupils. This highlights that free school meal entitlement (as a proxy measure of deprivation) is indeed a significant influencing factor on attainment. The difference between grammar and secondary free school meal entitled pupils' attainment may simply come down to the selective transfer process, during which pupils with the academic ability to pass the transfer test attend grammar schools. A recent article<sup>16</sup> on educational underachievement states:

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<sup>16</sup> Donnelly, C (2017) *Tackling Educational Underachievement: Poverty, Selection & Comparative Levels of Attainment for Poorest Boys*, available at <https://sluggerotoole.com/2017/08/16/tackling-educational-underachievement-poverty-selection-comparative-levels-of-attainment-for-poorest-boys/>.



Academic selection ensures that the vast majority of the poorest, academically weakest, socially/emotionally and behaviourally challenged are filtered out of the grammar school stream and into non-grammar schools from age eleven (Donnelly, 2017).

There are other factors, for example, the differences in culture in grammar schools as opposed to secondary schools, which could also affect attainment rates.

It is important, however, to remember that the majority of free school meal entitled pupils attend secondary schools and therefore if a true comparison across the sectors is to be completed only free school meal entitled pupils attending secondary schools should be considered. Indeed while a gender comparison is also interesting (in that female pupils achieve consistently higher than male pupils), much of the discussion and debate on educational underachievement focuses on the low achievement of working class (i.e. free school meal entitled) Protestant boys, compared to the same cohort of Catholic boys. In the SAER data religion is not available as a variable, therefore the next available broad measurement tool is to draw a comparison between free school meal entitled boys in the controlled (majority Protestant) and maintained (majority Catholic) sectors.

When all free school meal entitled boys in controlled schools are considered, 35% attain good GCSEs. A slightly higher proportion of maintained boys (38%) achieve the same. When only male pupils attending secondary schools in the controlled sector are analysed, the proportion gaining five GCSEs grades A\*-C including English and Maths drops to 29%.

The same trends are noticeable in the school leavers' data. Within controlled schools the same proportion of Catholic and Protestant boys achieve the desired GCSE standard. However an analysis including free school meal entitlement and gender across all NI school leavers shows that Catholic boys attain better results than their Protestant counterparts. These results not only reiterate that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds underachieve, but that there is a specific need to focus support on disadvantaged pupils from Protestant backgrounds.

### **School leaver destinations**

The data shows that grammar school pupils are more likely than secondary school pupils to continue their education in an institute of higher education. It is interesting to note that compared to the maintained and integrated sectors, pupils in controlled secondary schools are less likely to go on to higher education. Rather, pupils from controlled secondary schools are more likely to go on to further education or training than their counterparts in maintained and GMI schools.

Within controlled schools there is a notable difference between the destinations of pupils of different religions. In particular, Catholic pupils are more likely than Protestant pupils to continue their study in higher or further education. Double the number of Protestant pupils, compared to Catholic pupils, left school and entered employment. Indeed training was a more popular choice amongst Protestant than Catholic pupils. It is particularly interesting that Protestant boys in particular are more likely to choose to go into training upon leaving school (17%) than Catholic boys (7%).

As the entire cohort of pupils, whether Catholic or Protestant, described above attend controlled schools the trends noted above indicate that the choices pupils make could be influenced by other factors, such as family or community values. Much research points to the influence

family/community values can have on pupils' choices. The recently published ILiAD study<sup>17</sup> by Queen's University and Stanmillis University College (2017) provides a detailed study of links between achievement and deprivation, with a particular focus on religious identity (see Appendix 7 for an overview of findings). In particular the study found that in the predominantly Catholic case study areas, higher value was placed on education.

Looking at the data from a free school meal perspective shows that, in line with free school meal pupils' average GCSE results, fewer pupils from deprived backgrounds go on to study in higher education (13.5%). These pupils are more likely than those not entitled to free school meals (37%) to attend further education or training upon leaving school.

### **In summary**

An education system should equip pupils with the skills they need to fulfil their potential. The successful achievement of qualifications which open the door to further study, employment and career opportunities are central to a school's role in preparing pupils for adult life.

Within the controlled sector some excellent schools exist and that on the whole controlled school pupils are on par with those in the maintained sector in terms of standard GCSE performance. However, the report adds to the growing body of evidence that pupils in the sector entitled to free school meals are underachieving, especially male pupils, when compared to the other sectors. Above all, there are definite opportunities for improvement, particularly if attention is focused on initiatives targeted at free school meal entitled pupils and methods of community and family engagement are explored.

There is always a story behind the data and in the Controlled Schools' Support Council's short existence it has already identified a breadth of excellent examples of good practice in schools across Northern Ireland. This expertise can and should be shared throughout the sector. There is much success to be celebrated, but our findings also show a need to address the insufficiencies in the sector to raise standards for every pupil.

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<sup>17</sup> QUB (2017) *Final Summary Report Volume 3*, <https://www.qub.ac.uk/research-centres/CentreforSharedEducation/Filestore/Filetoupload,775013,en.pdf>, p 55

## Appendix 1 – Religious breakdown of pupils in controlled schools

A common misconception is that the term ‘controlled sector’ equates to the ‘Protestant sector’. Although it is true to say that the majority of pupils in the sector define as Protestant, Table 6 shows that this proportion is 65%.

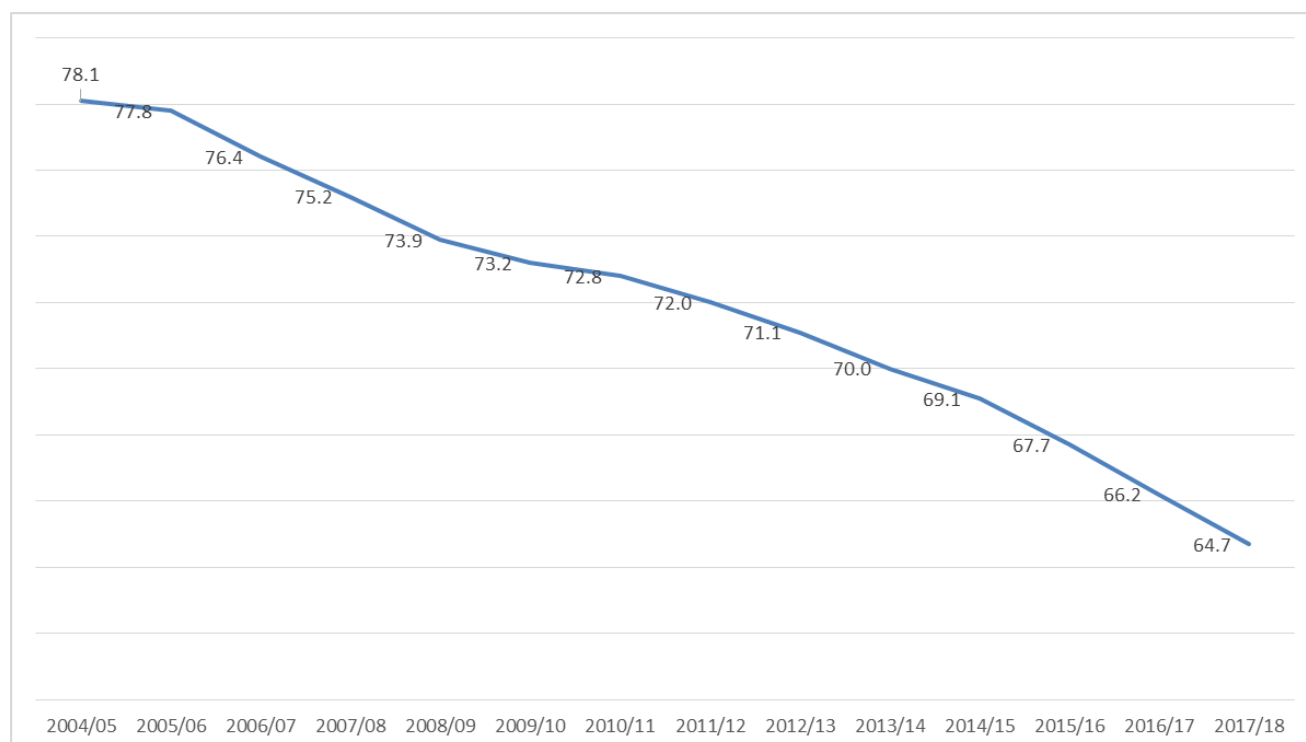
Almost 10% of pupils in controlled schools are Catholic, 5.7% are ‘Other Christian’, 1% are non-Christian and 18.7% are of no religion.

Table 6- Religion of pupils attending Northern Ireland schools by Management Type (2017/18)

%	Protestant	Catholic	Other Christian	Non-Christian	No Religion
<b>Controlled</b>	64.7	9.9	5.7	1	18.7
<b>Catholic maintained</b>	0.6	95.2	0.6	0.9	1.6
<b>Other maintained</b>	7.1	83.6	0.9	0	0
<b>GMI</b>	35.8	41.1	6	0.8	7.7
<b>Voluntary</b>	27.7	59.4	3.5	0.9	7.5

The following chart shows that over the last decade (2007/08 - 2017/18), the percentage of Protestant pupils in controlled schools has decreased by 10.5% (from 75.2% to 64.7%). It has decreased by 13.4 percentage points since 2004/05.

Figure 17 – Percentage of controlled pupils from Protestant families (2004/05 – 2017/18)



## Appendix 2 - Overview of school sectors in Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland education system is complex, with a range of organisations involved in administering and providing education.

Table 7 provides an overview of the five school sectors in Northern Ireland.

Table 7 - Education sectors in Northern Ireland

Sector	% of Schools	Summary	Support body
<b>Controlled</b>	48.8%	<p>Schools are managed and funded by the Education Authority (EA) through Boards of Governors. Primary and post-primary school Boards of Governors consist of representatives of transferors, representatives of parents, teachers and the EA.</p> <p>EA is also the employing authority for controlled schools.</p>	Controlled Schools' Support Council (established September 2016)
<b>Catholic Maintained</b>	40.1%	<p>The Employing Authority is the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS). Schools are managed by Boards of Governors which consist of members nominated by trustees, along with representatives of parents, teachers and the EA.</p>	Catholic Council for Maintained Schools (CCMS) (established 1989)
<b>Voluntary</b>	5.3%	<p>Self-governing schools, funded by the Department and managed by Boards of Governors. The Boards of Governors are constituted in accordance with each school's scheme of management - usually representatives of foundation governors, parents, teachers and in most cases, DE or EA representatives.</p> <p>The Board of Governors is the employing authority and is responsible for the employment of all staff in its school.</p>	Governing Bodies Association NI (GBA) (Established c. 1940)
<b>Grant Maintained Integrated</b>	3.3%	<p>Self-governing schools with integrated education status, funded directly by the Department of Education and managed by Boards of Governors. The Board of</p>	Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) (Established 1989)

		Governors is the employing authority and responsible for employing staff.	
<b>Other Maintained</b>	2.7%	Mostly Irish Maintained schools. DE has a responsibility to encourage and facilitate Irish-Medium Education.	Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (established 2000)

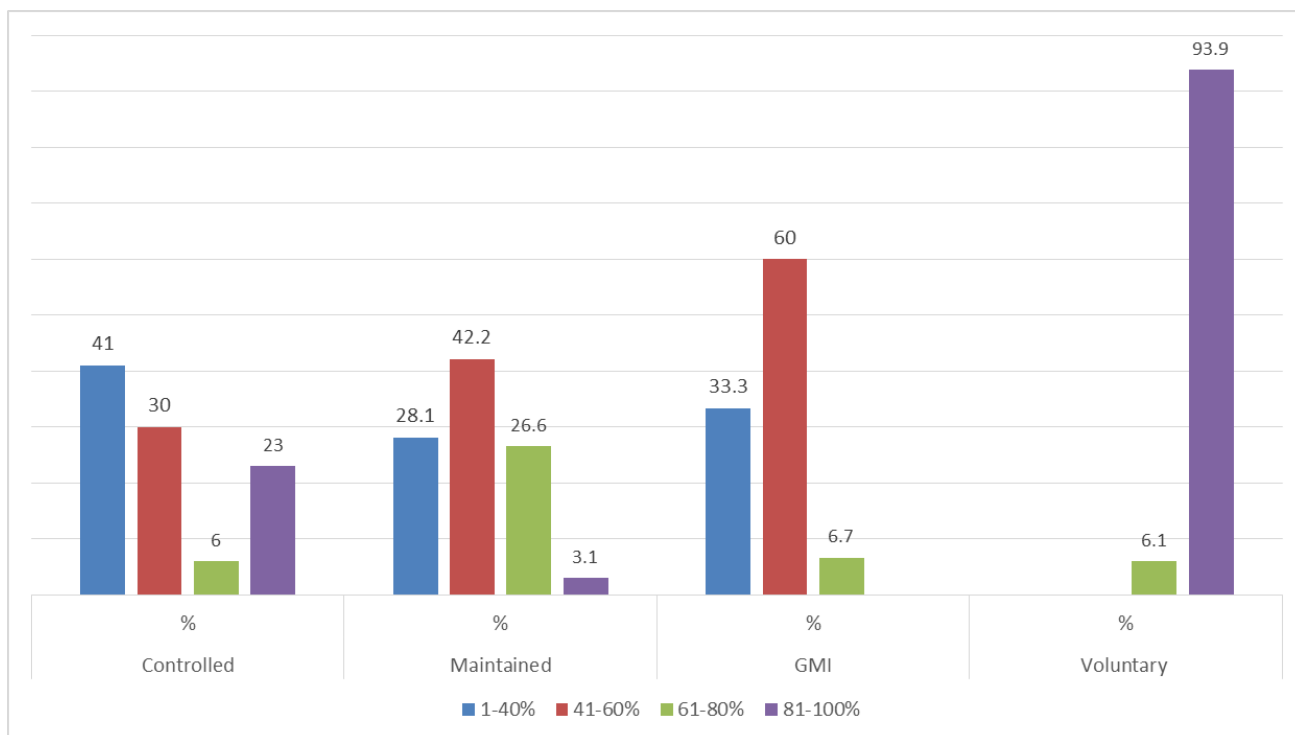
There are 559 schools in the controlled sector, accounting for 48% of all schools (2017/2018). The controlled sector is the only education sector to contain all school types (nursery, primary, secondary, grammar and special schools).

Table 8 - Schools by sector (2017/2018)

	All schools	Controlled	Catholic maintained	GMI	Other maintained	Voluntary	Controlled schools (percentage by type)
<b>Nursery</b>	95	64	31	0	0	0	67
<b>Primary</b>	817	388	367	23	28	11	47
Non-grammar	133	54	62	15	2	0	41
Grammar	66	16	0	0	0	50	24
<b>Total post-primary</b>	199	70	62	15	2	50	35
<b>Special</b>	39	37	1	0	1	0	95
<b>Total schools</b>	<b>1150</b>	<b>559</b>	<b>461</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Percentages</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>48.6</b>	<b>40.1</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>5.3</b>	<b>100</b>

### Appendix 3 – Attainment by school sector 2015/16 results

Figure 18 - Proportion of pupils achieving 5+ GCSEs A\*-C (including English and Maths) in schools by sector (2015/16) (%)



In comparison to the other sectors, the controlled sector has the highest proportion of schools (41%) in which the percentage of pupils achieving the desired standard of GCSE results was 40% or lower. Indeed, in 71% of schools the attainment rate is 60% or less.

At the other end of the spectrum, in 23% of controlled schools the proportion of pupils attaining the desired standard was over 80%, a greater proportion than schools in the Maintained and GMI sectors. It must be noted however, that all of the schools in the high attaining category belonging to the controlled sector are grammar schools. In contrast, the high attaining schools (3.1%) in the maintained sector are secondary schools.

In the GMI sector (15 schools) no school recorded an attainment level over 80%. In the majority of schools in the voluntary sector (93.9%) the proportion of pupils attaining the desired results was over 80%. It is interesting to note that in the 2014/15 statistical release all 50 schools in the voluntary sector were very high attaining schools, with each recording an attainment rate of over 80%.

## Appendix 4 - Free school meal entitlement

The Education Authority is responsible for the day to day operation of the school meals service in all grant-aided schools, with the exception of voluntary grammar schools and grant-maintained integrated schools, where the responsibility lies with the Trustees/Boards of Governors.

A pupil is entitled to free school meals if<sup>18</sup>:

1. he/she or the parent is in receipt of Income Support or Income based Jobseeker's Allowance; or
2. he/she or the parent is in receipt of Income related Employment and Support Allowance; or
3. the parent receives the Child Tax Credit or the Working Tax Credit; and has an annual taxable income not exceeding an amount as determined by the Department<sup>19</sup>; or
4. the parent receives Working Tax Credit "run-on" – the payment someone may receive for a further four weeks after they stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit; or
5. the parent receives the Guarantee element of State Pension Credit; or
6. he/she has a statement of special educational needs and is designated to require a special diet; or
7. he/she is a boarder at a special school; or
8. he/she is the child of an asylum seeker supported by the Home Office National Asylum Support Service (NASS)<sup>2</sup>; or
9. if none of the above apply and a child presents at school hungry, then the school should, on humanitarian grounds, provide free school meals to the child.

This report refers to pupils who are entitled to free school meals. Free school meal entitlement is widely used as an indicator of deprivation in education statistics.

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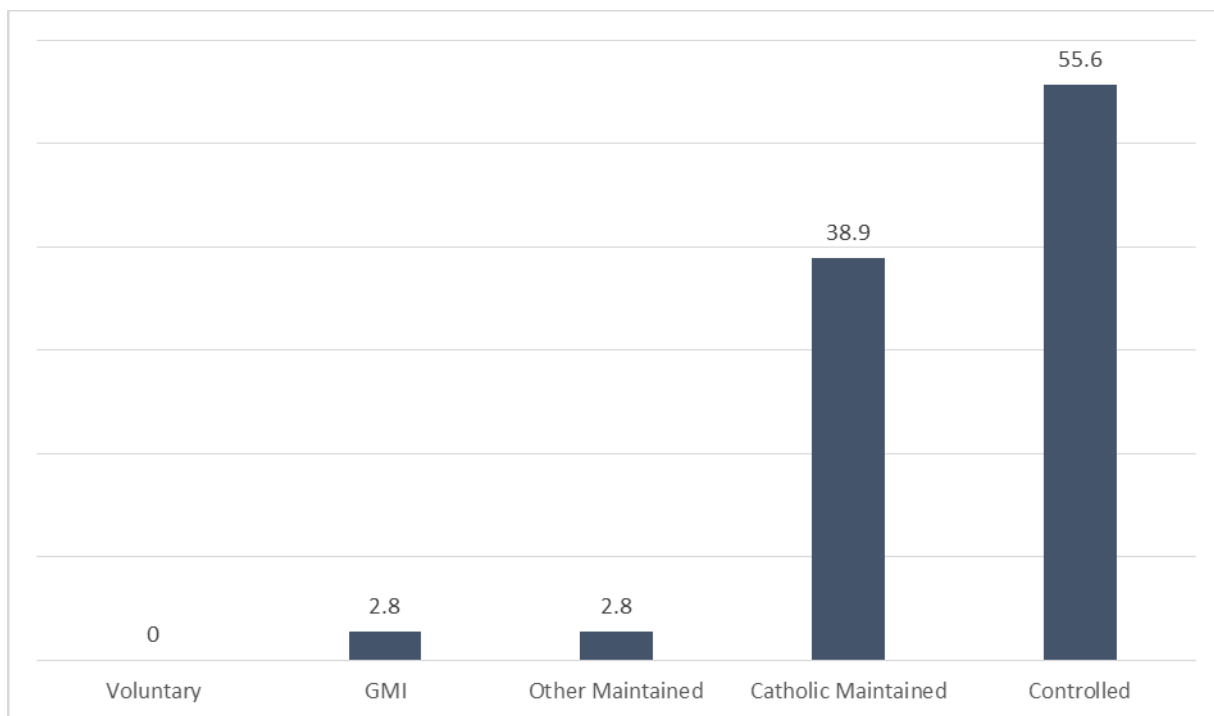
<sup>18</sup> See paragraph 6 of the Education Authority's guidance on Milk and Meal Arrangements, <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/de/ea-milk-and-meals-arrangements-april-2015.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> Parents are in receipt of Working Tax Credit and have an annual taxable income which does not exceed £16,190 (in 2015/16).

## Appendix 5 - Sixth form provision in post-primary schools

There are 36 post primary schools in Northern Ireland which do not have sixth form provision, with the majority of these schools (55.6%) in the controlled sector, see the chart below.

Figure 19 - Post primary schools without sixth form (2017/18)



There are 20 schools in the controlled sector which do not have sixth form provision, four of these schools are junior highs (part of the Dickson plan).



## **Appendix 6 – Religious Identity, achievement and deprivation – IliAD study**

The IliAD study was commissioned by OFMDFM in 2012. Its aim was to understand some of the reasons for differential educational achievement within and between deprived areas in Northern Ireland (NI).

The study examined patterns of educational achievement in seven of the most deprived Ward areas in Northern Ireland. Three wards were predominantly Catholic (Whiterock, The Diamond and Rosemount) and another three predominantly Protestant Wards (Duncairn, Woodstock and Tullycarnet).

The final report, published in 2017, showed marked differences in the educational achievement between predominantly Catholic and predominantly Protestant Wards.

The study found that there was a higher value placed on education in the predominantly-Catholic case study Wards than was found in the predominantly-Protestant Wards. The data suggest that these variances are related to:

- historical experiences of discrimination in the Catholic community in terms of the industrial labour market;
- the value of education being championed by nationalist politicians;
- the role of the Catholic ethos in terms of encouraging learning in disadvantaged communities; and
- negative socio-cultural norms in some working class Protestant communities around education.

See QUB (2017) *Final Summary Report Volume 3*, <https://www.qub.ac.uk/research-centres/CentreforSharedEducation/Filestore/Filetoupload,775013,en.pdf>, p 55.