

Education

February 2017



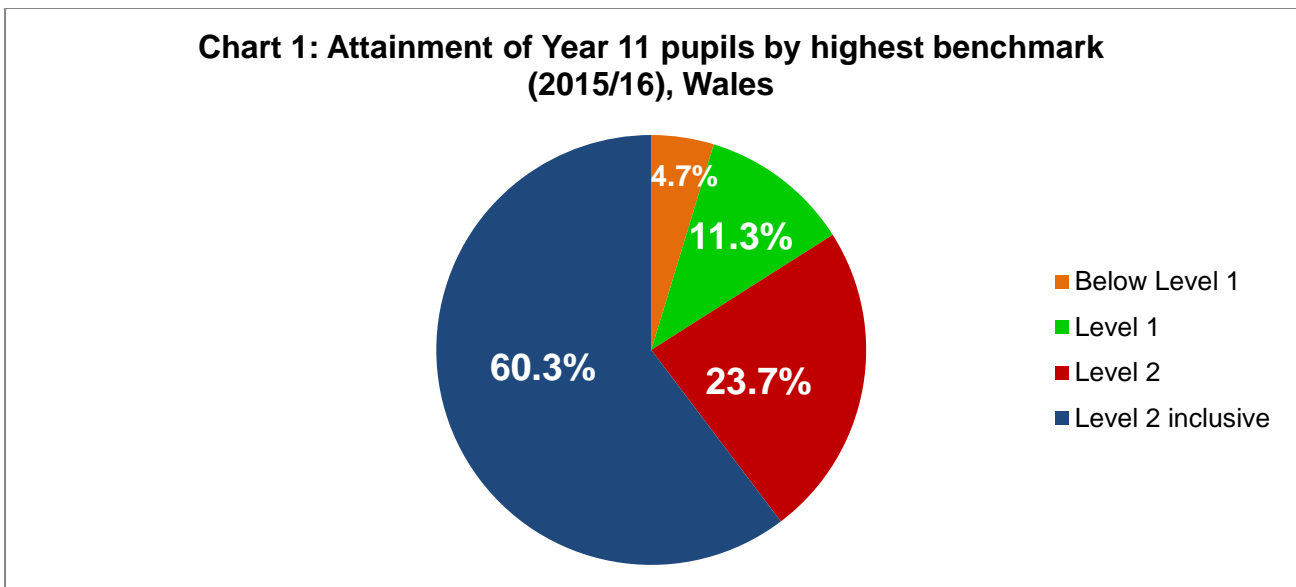
Introduction

This briefing explores the attainment of pupils in 2016 who were finishing their compulsory education. It focuses on the pupils who were not awarded 5 GCSEs or equivalent qualifications at A*-C grade including English and Maths, known as **Level 2 inclusive**.

While there are many ways of considering attainment, Level 2 inclusive is an important benchmark as it is often an entry requirement for apprenticeships, A Level courses and many jobs and other opportunities. It considers the attainment rates for pupils depending on characteristics (e.g. gender, ethnic background) as well as the type of school they attend (e.g. Welsh medium school, Pupil Referral Unit).

It also looks at the qualifications the pupils do achieve, considering the proportion which meet the **Level 1** (equivalent to the volume of 5 GCSE's at grade A*-G) and **Level 2** (equivalent to the volume of 5 GCSE's at grade A*-C) benchmarks.

Chart 1 illustrates the attainment rates in Wales for 2015/16 using these four benchmarks.



Source: Welsh Government (2016), Statistics: Examination Results, Tables - 2015/16: Table 1: Headline indicators for pupils in Year 11/ aged 15 at the start of the academic year

So, for example, a pupil that achieved four A grade GCSEs, and three B grade GCSEs including Maths and Welsh First Language would have reached the Level 2 inclusive. However, if they had been awarded a D grade in Maths they would have reached the Level 2 benchmark but not Level 2 inclusive. Likewise, a student with three B grade GCSEs, two C grade GCSEs and four D grade GCSEs would have reached the Level 2 benchmark, but were it the case that they got one fewer C grade results they would only reach the Level 1 benchmark.

While the benchmarks are a useful measure to compare pupils' performance, there is the potential (however unlikely) of a significant degree of variation in the pupils' results within

each level. It is possible for a student to have four A* grade GCSEs and three U grade GCSEs and not reach the Level 1 benchmark, while a pupil who gets 5 C grade GCSEs including English/Welsh First Language and Maths, and 3 U grade GCSEs would have reached the Level 2 inclusive benchmark.

Key messages for Wales:

- For pupils leaving compulsory education in 2016, [approximately two fifths did not achieve Level 2 inclusive](#) by the end of the school year – roughly 13,000 pupils.
- There was considerable variation in Level 2 attainment rates by [local authority area](#) and region.
- [Boys were at greater risk](#) than girls of not meeting all three attainment benchmarks considered in this briefing.
- Approximately two thirds of the 2015/16 cohort who were eligible for [Free School Meals](#) did not obtain Level 2 inclusive. While they were at much lower risk, pupils who were not eligible for Free School Meals made up a much greater proportion of total number of pupils who did not reach this benchmark.
- Pupils at [Welsh medium schools](#) were more likely to achieve Level 2 inclusive than those in English-medium schools in 2015/16.
- Pupils on the [Special Educational Need \(SEN\) register](#) were at much greater risk of not achieving Level 2 inclusive.
- There was a strong correlation between pupils' [absenteeism](#) rates and the likelihood of obtaining results equivalent to Level 2 inclusive.
- The group of pupils most vulnerable to not passing the Level 2 inclusive benchmark were those educated primarily at [Pupil Referral Units](#).
- Of the pupils who did not achieve Level 2 inclusive in 2016, approximately one in 10 pupils did not receive sufficient qualifications to meet the [Level 1 benchmark](#).
- Two in every five pupils in 2015/16 who did not achieve Level 2 inclusive did not reach the [Level 2 measure](#) by the end of their compulsory education.

Level 2 inclusive attainment

Achieving ‘Level 2 inclusive’ means that a student has been awarded a volume of qualifications equivalent to the volume of 5 GCSE’s at grade A*-C including English or Welsh First Language and Mathematics. It has been used as a measure at Key Stage 4 - the two years of school education which incorporate GCSEs, and other exams - in Wales since 2006/7, based on the proportion of students aged 15 at the start of the academic year who go on to achieve this. However, since 2015/16, the chosen measure has been pupils in year 11.

In this section, we look at the proportion of pupils who did not achieve Level 2 inclusive at KS4. Table 1 shows that in 2015/16, approximately two in every five pupils in year 11 did not achieve Level 2 inclusive by the end of the school year – roughly 13,000 young people.

However, there has been a steady downward trend in the number of pupils not achieving Level 2 inclusive since 2006/7, when over half of students did not meet this benchmark by the end of their compulsory education.

Table 1: Non-attainment of Level 2 inclusive for pupils aged 15 (2006/07-2015/16) and pupils in year 11 (2015/16), Wales

	Number of Pupils	Number of pupils that did not achieve Level 2 inclusive	Percentage that did not achieve Level 2 inclusive
Pupils aged 15	-	-	
2006/07	39,576	22,009	55.6%
2007/08	39,027	21,244	54.4%
2008/09	37,607	19,859	52.8%
2009/10	37,072	18,755	50.6%
2010/11	36,088	18,008	49.9%
2011/12	35,404	17,319	48.9%
2012/13	36,617	17,308	47.3%
2013/14	35,168	15,672	44.6%
2014/15	34,004	14,300	42.1%
Pupils aged 15 version - most like for like methodology as 14/15			
2015/16	32,847	13,191	40.2%
Pupils in Year 11			
2015/16	32,248	12,807	39.7%

Source: Welsh Government (2016), Statistics: Examination Results, Tables - 2015/16: Table 1: Headline indicators for pupils in Year 11/ aged 15 at the start of the academic year

There was some variation in attainment rates between different local authority areas in 2015/16.

There was a 22.1 percentage point difference between the best performing local authority in respect of Level 2 inclusive attainment (Ceredigion) and the worst performing (Blaenau Gwent) – the only local authority where over half of pupils did not achieve this benchmark.

At a regional level, just under half of year 11 pupils did not achieve Level 2 inclusive in

South East Wales, while this was only the case for a third of pupils in South West and Mid Wales.

Table 2: Attainment of Level 2 inclusive for pupils in year 11 (2015/16) by region and LA area, Wales

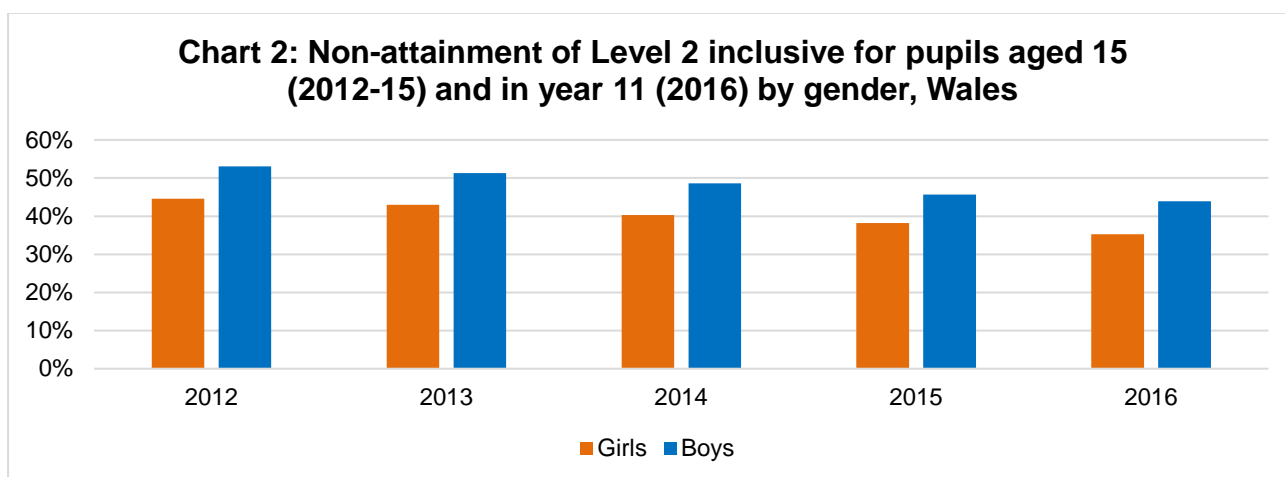
	Number of pupils	Number of pupils that did not achieve Level 2 inclusive	Percentage that did not achieve Level 2 inclusive
North Wales	7,087	2,864	40.4%
Isle of Anglesey	617	254	41.2%
Gwynedd	1,281	437	34.1%
Conwy	1,159	511	44.1%
Denbighshire	1,119	462	41.3%
Flintshire	1,615	621	38.5%
Wrexham	1,296	579	44.7%
South West and Mid Wales	9,162	3,301	36.0%
Powys	1,316	457	34.7%
Ceredigion	698	207	29.7%
Pembrokeshire	1,233	502	40.7%
Carmarthenshire	1,928	672	34.9%
Swansea	2,479	874	35.3%
Neath Port Talbot	1,508	589	39.1%
Central South Wales	9,620	3,759	39.1%
Bridgend	1,529	586	38.3%
The Vale of Glamorgan	1,521	501	32.9%
Rhondda Cynon Taf	2,641	1,147	43.4%
Merthyr Tydfil	614	283	46.1%
Cardiff	3,315	1,242	37.5%
South East Wales	6,286	2,796	44.5%
Caerphilly	2,048	962	47.0%
Blaenau Gwent	653	338	51.8%
Torfaen	1,085	505	46.5%
Monmouthshire	799	264	33.0%
Newport	1,701	727	42.7%
Wales	32,248	12,807	39.7%

Source: Welsh Government (2016), Statistics: Examination Results, Tables - 2015/16: Table 3: Pupils in Year 11 at the start of the academic year, 2015/16, by LA

Attainment of Level 2 inclusive by pupil and school characteristics

Gender

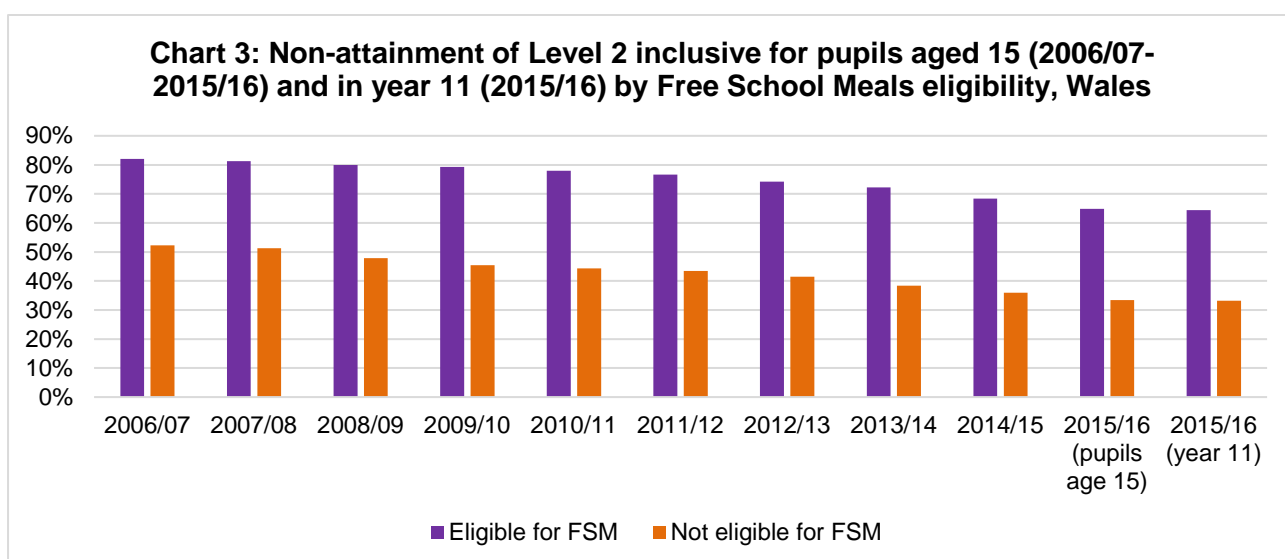
Chart 2 shows that there has been a gradual decline in the proportion of pupils who do not achieve Level 2 inclusive for both genders. There was an 8.6 percentage point difference between the attainment rates for boys and girls in 2016; boys were at greater risk of not achieving Level 2 inclusive compared to girls.



Source: Welsh Government (2017), Academic achievement by pupil characteristics, Table 4: Key Stage 4 by gender, 2012-2016

Free School Meal eligibility: pupils

Chart 3 shows that pupils who were eligible for Free School Meals (eFSM) were at much greater risk of leaving compulsory education without achieving Level 2 inclusive than their peers who were not eligible.



Source: Welsh Government (2016), Statistics: Examination Results, Tables - 2015/16: Table 5: Key Stage 4 indicators by free school meal entitlement

Approximately two thirds of the 2015/16 cohort (4,837) who were eFSM did not obtain Level 2 inclusive. This compares to around a third of the cohort (26,495) who were not eFSM. So while a greater number of pupils who did not achieve Level 2 inclusive were not eligible for FSM, pupils who were eFSM were at much greater risk of not achieving this benchmark.

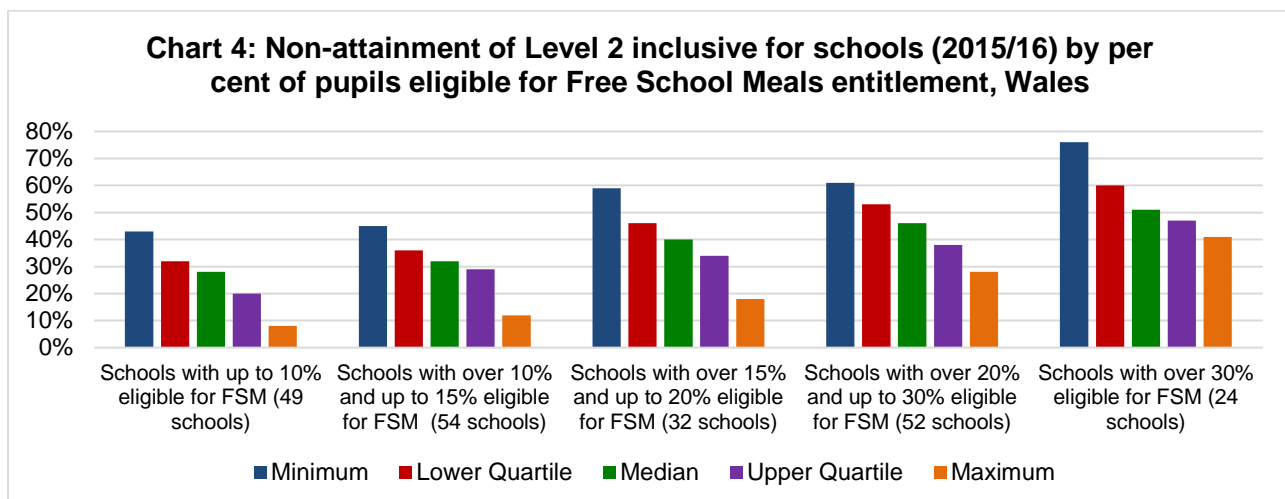
However, there has been a considerable increase in the proportion of eFSM pupils attaining Level 2 inclusive in the last decade, with improvement at a slightly faster rate than for all pupils.

Free School Meal eligibility: schools

As would be expected from Chart 3, schools with less than 10% of eFSM pupils typically have a lower rate of pupils not achieving Level 2 inclusive compared to those with a higher proportion of eFSM pupils (based on the median performance of schools classified by the proportion of eFSM pupils).

However, the distribution in attainment rates for schools depending on the proportion of eFSM pupils is remarkable (see Chart 4). For schools with over 30% of eFSM pupils, there was a 35 percentage point difference between the best and worst performing schools. It should also be noted that there is only a two percentage point difference between the best performing school where over 30% of pupils are eFSM, and the worst performing school with up to 10% eFSM pupils. This suggests that only having data for Free School Meal eligibility, and not more information about household income, for example, gives us a limited understanding of the impact of poverty on educational attainment.

What is also unclear from Chart 4 is if being in a school with a higher proportion of eFSM pupils puts all pupils at greater risk of not attaining Level 2 inclusive, and vice versa.

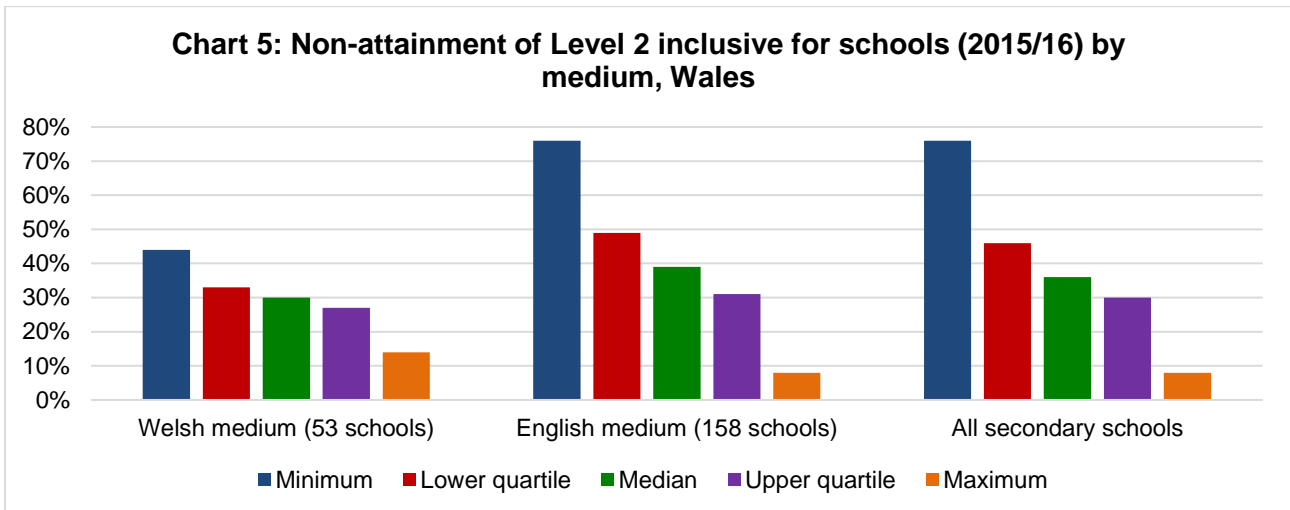


Source: Welsh Government (2016), Statistics: Examination Results, Tables: Key Stage 4 benchmarking, 2016: Table 1: Schools with up to 10 per cent eligible for FSM; Table 2: Schools with over 10 per cent and up to 15 per cent eligible for FSM; Table 3: Schools with over 15 per cent and up to 20 per cent eligible for FSM; Table 4: Schools with over 20 per cent and up to 30 per cent eligible for FSM; Table 5: Schools with over 30 per cent eligible for FSM

Medium

Based on the median attainment rates of English and Welsh language schools in Wales, pupils at Welsh medium school were more likely to achieve Level 2 inclusive than those in English-medium schools in 2015/16 (a difference of approximately 9 percentage points).

Chart 5 shows a much greater distribution in the Level 2 inclusive attainment rates for English-medium school, compared to Welsh-medium schools. In part, this could be because there were three times as many English-medium secondary schools in Wales compared to Welsh-medium schools, so the sample is much bigger.



Source: Welsh Government (2016), Statistics: Examination Results, Tables: Key Stage 4 benchmarking, 2016: Table 6: Welsh Speaking Schools; Table 7: English Speaking Schools; Table 8: All Secondary Schools

However, the higher rate of pupils attaining Level 2 inclusive achieved by Welsh-medium secondary schools shown in Chart 5 may also result from the lower proportion of eFSM pupils in Welsh-medium schools, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Non-attainment of Level 2 inclusive for schools (2015/16) by medium and Free School Meal eligibility, Wales

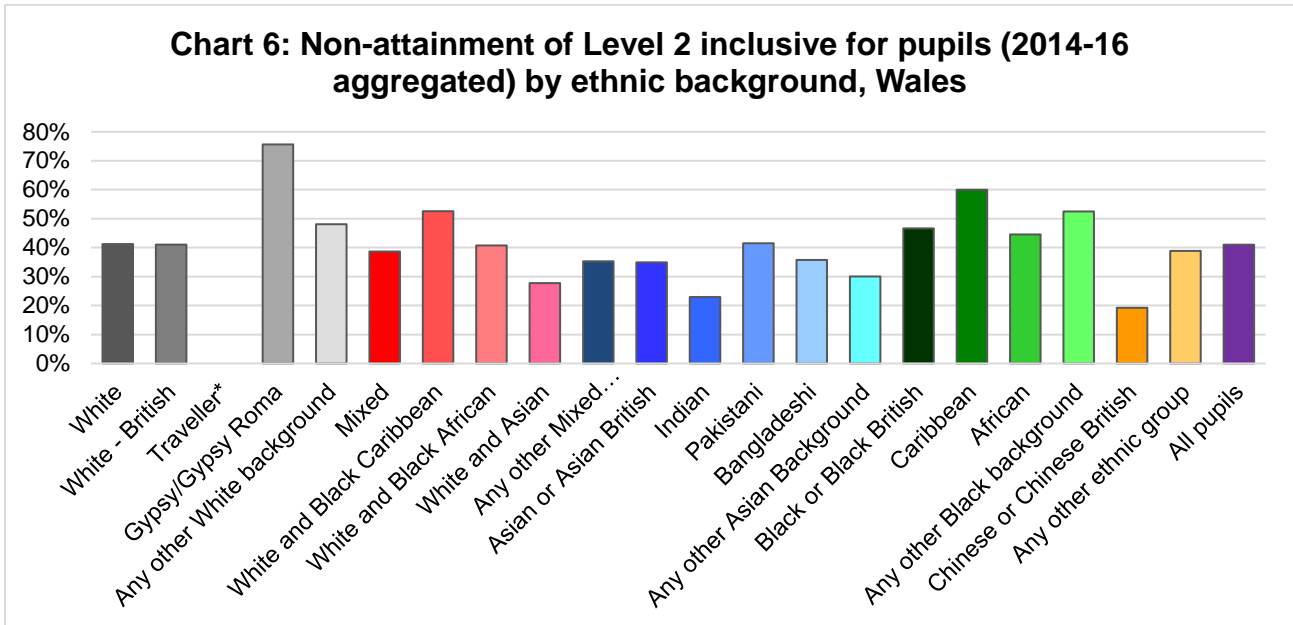
	FSM Band					all schools
	up to 10%	over 10% and less than 15%	over 15% and less than 20%	over 20% and less than 30%	over 30%	
Welsh Speaking Schools	28%	33%	32%	.	.	31%
No. of pupils	2,810	2,347	746	105	0	6,008
English Speaking Schools	23%	31%	41%	47%	54%	39%
No. of pupils	4,200	6,016	4,045	7,860	2,902	25,023
All Secondary Schools	25%	32%	40%	46%	54%	37%
No. of pupils	7,010	8,363	4,791	7,965	2,902	31,031

Note: figures given are for the proportion of the full cohort

Source: Welsh Government (2016), Statistics: Examination Results, Tables: Key Stage 4 benchmarking, 2016: Table 9: Welsh Speaking Schools - Summary table; Table 10: English Speaking Schools - Summary table; Table 11: All Schools - Summary table

Ethnic background

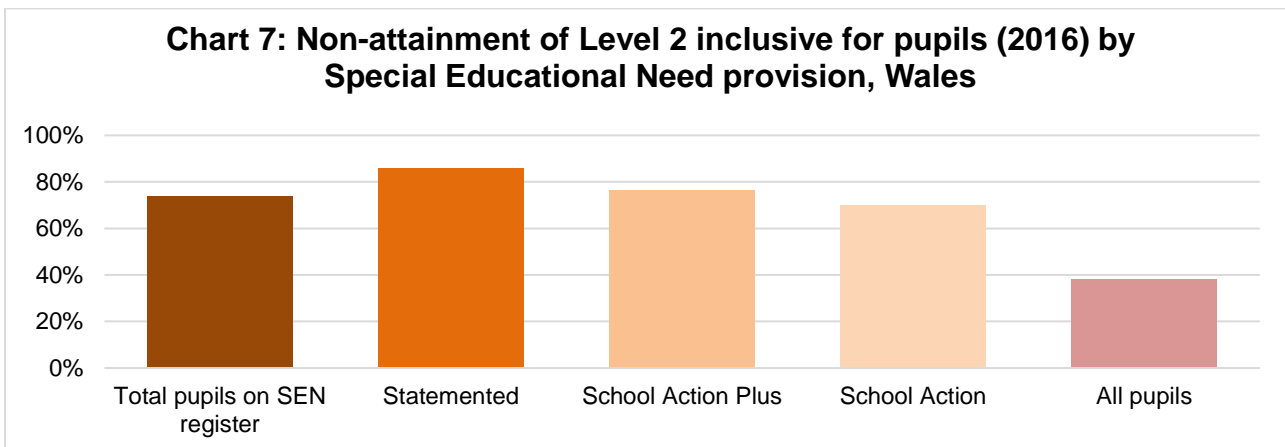
There was considerable variation in the Level 2 inclusive attainment rate when pupils' ethnic background is considered. Over half of pupils from Gypsy/Gypsy Roma, Caribbean, and White and Black Caribbean backgrounds did not obtain Level 2 inclusive, compared to less than a quarter of pupils from Indian/Indian British and Chinese/Chinese British backgrounds.



Source: Welsh Government (2017), Academic achievement by pupil characteristics, Table 8: Key Stage 4 by ethnic background, 2014-2016 (aggregated); *data not available

Special Educational Need

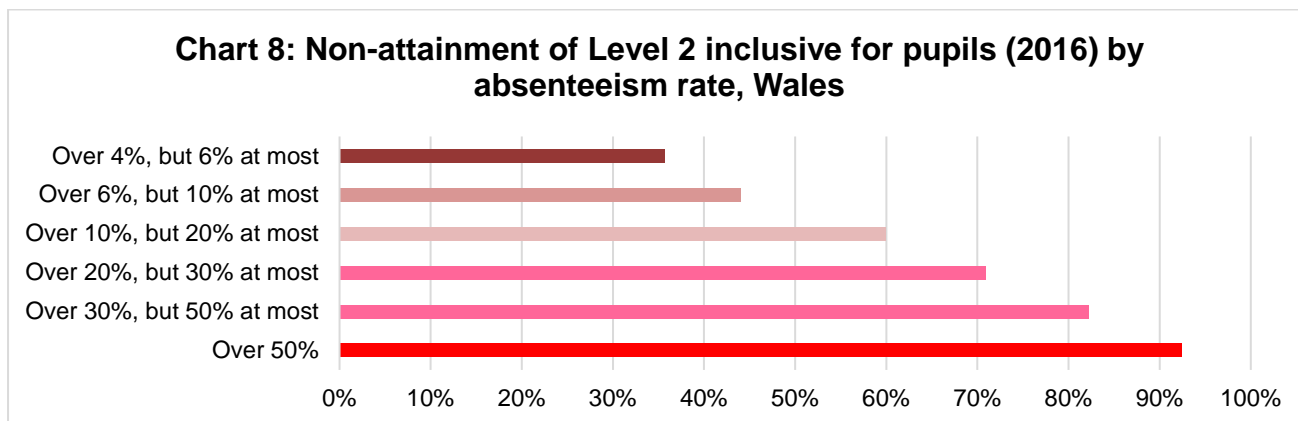
Pupils on the Special Educational Need (SEN) register were at much greater risk of not achieving Level 2 inclusive, with a slightly higher risk posed to pupils with a statement of SEN. Approximately three quarters of students on the SEN register did not achieve this benchmark.



Source: Welsh Government (2017), Academic achievement by pupil characteristics, Table 16: Key Stage 4 by Special Educational Need provision, 2012-2016

Absenteeism

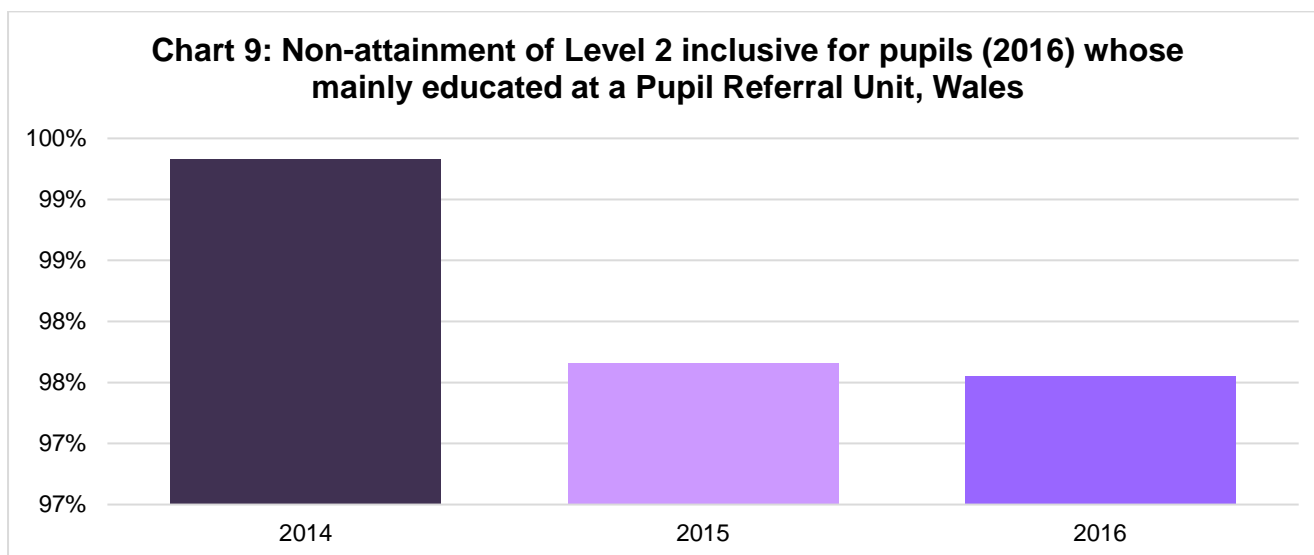
There was a strong correlation between pupils' absenteeism rates and the likelihood of obtaining results equivalent to Level 2 inclusive. Just over nine in 10 pupils with an absenteeism rate of over 50% did not achieve Level 2 inclusive, compared to approximately a third of pupils with an absenteeism rate between 4% and 6%.



Source: Welsh Government (2017), Academic achievement by pupil characteristics, Table 24: Key Stage 4 by overall absence rates, 2014-2016

Pupil Referral Units

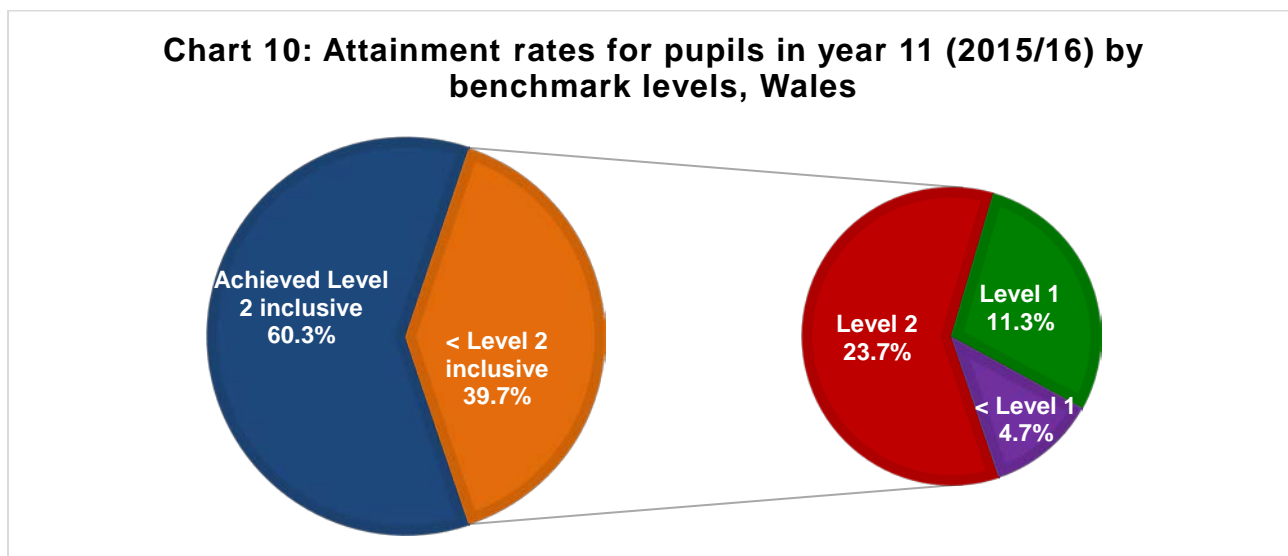
The group of pupils most vulnerable to not passing the Level 2 inclusive benchmark were those educated primarily at Pupil Referral units - 368 pupils in 2016. Approximately 2% obtained results equivalent to Level 2 inclusive.



Source: Welsh Government (2017), Academic achievement by pupil characteristics, Table 29: Key Stage 4 results for pupils in Year 11 or aged 15 at the start of the academic year whose main education is at a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)

Attainment levels for pupils not achieving Level 2 inclusive

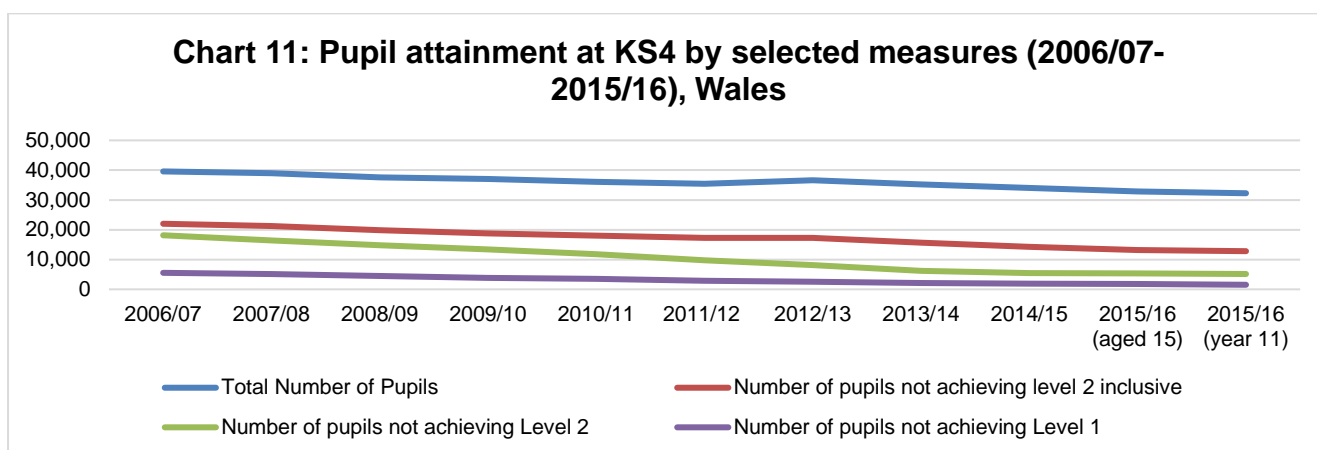
This section looks at the attainment rates for pupils who do not achieve Level 2 inclusive at the end of KS4 – the situation faced by approximately 13,000 young people.



Source: Welsh Government (2016), Statistics: Examination Results, Tables - 2015/16: Table 1: Headline indicators for pupils in Year 11/ aged 15 at the start of the academic year

Percentages given in this section are a proportion of the cohort that did not achieve Level 2 inclusive, rather than as a proportion of all pupils. We refer to the following benchmarks:

- Level 2** – a volume of qualifications at Level 2 equivalent to the volume of five GCSE's at grade A*-C. For example, a student who finishes compulsory education with two A grade GCSEs and six B grade GCSEs, but a D in maths would have reached the Level 2 benchmark, but not the Level 2 inclusive benchmark.
- Level 1** – a volume of qualifications at Level 1 equivalent to the volume of five GCSE's at grade A*-G. In this case, a student who finishes compulsory education with two B grade GCSEs and two D grade GCSE, and three E grade GCSEs would have reached the Level 1 benchmark.

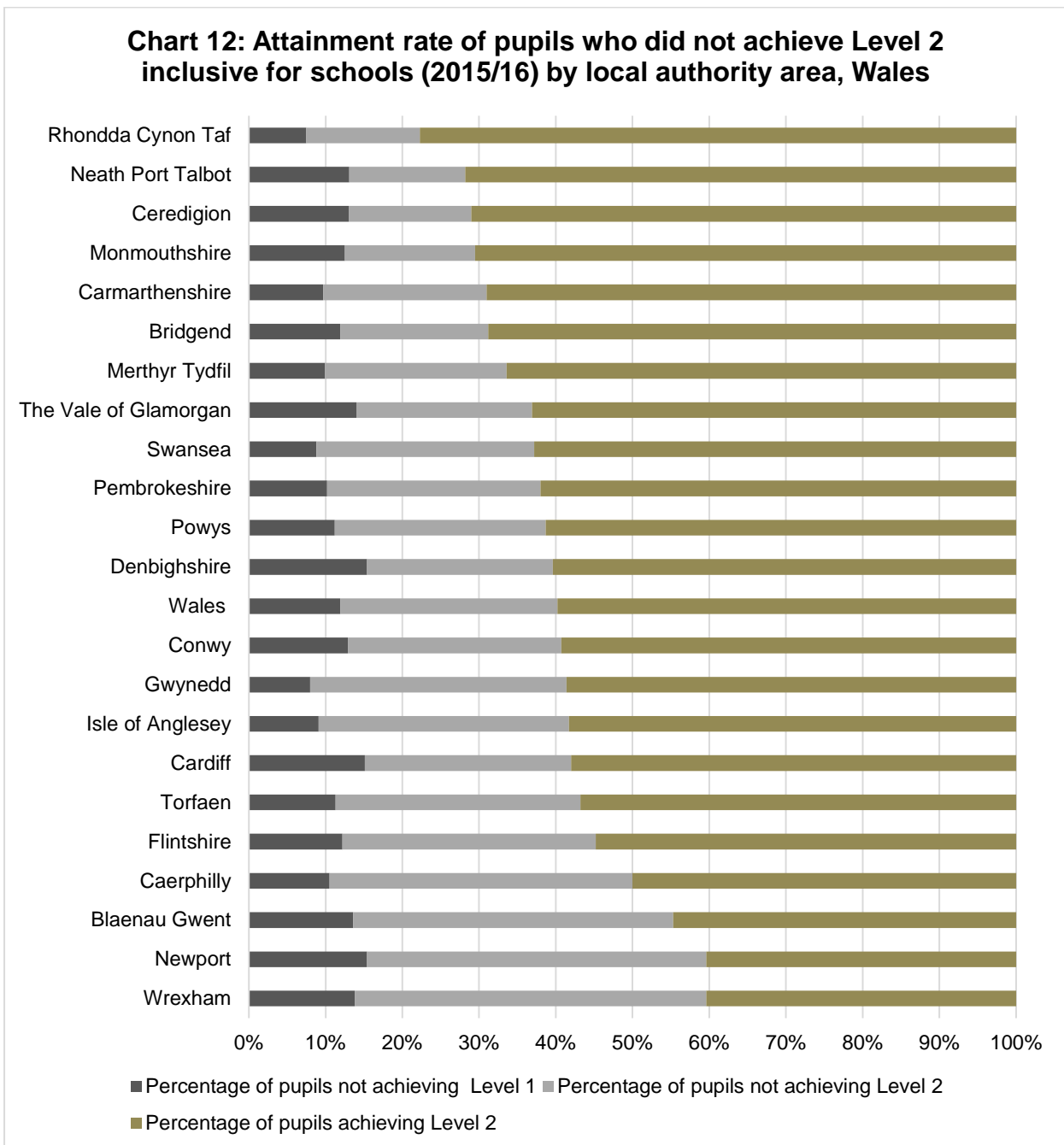


Source: Welsh Government (2016), Statistics: Examination Results, Tables - 2015/16: Table 1: Headline indicators for pupils in Year 11/ aged 15 at the start of the academic year

Attainment rates by Local Authority

Across Wales' local authority areas, there was significant variation in the attainment levels of pupils leaving school without achieving Level 2 inclusive in 2015/16. In Rhondda Cynon Taf, just over one in five pupils who did not achieve Level 2 inclusive finished compulsory schooling without achieving Level 2, compared to three in five pupils in Wrexham and Newport – a 38 percentage point difference.

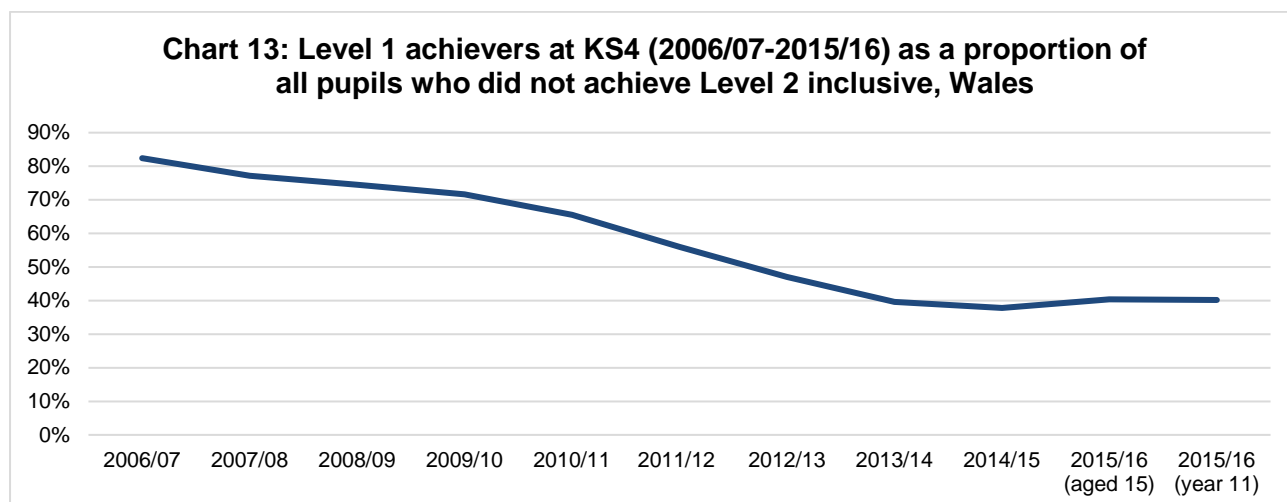
There was less variation in the proportion of pupils finishing KS4 without achieving Level 1, which accounted for less than one in five of the cohort who did not achieve Level 2 inclusive for all local authority areas.



Source: Welsh Government (2016), Statistics: Examination Results, Tables - 2015/16: Table 3: Pupils in Year 11 at the start of the academic year, 2015/16, by LA

Level 1¹ and 2² achievers

In 2015/16, Level 2 was the highest attainment benchmark reached by just over one in five pupils at the end of their compulsory education. Approximately one in 10 pupils achieved Level 1 by this stage – around two in five of all pupils who did not achieve Level 2 inclusive. In the past decade there has been a dramatic reduction in the proportion of pupils who do not reach Level 2, as illustrated by Chart 11.



Source: Welsh Government (2016), Statistics: Examination Results, Tables - 2015/16: Table 1: Headline indicators for pupils in Year 11/ aged 15 at the start of the academic year

For pupils that did not achieve Level 2 inclusive in 2016:

- There was a gender gap of 8.9 percentage points for attainment of Level 2, with boys continuing to be at greater risk than girls of not achieving it.
- Pupils from Gypsy/Gypsy Roma backgrounds were at greatest risk of not achieving Level 2 – the only group where this was the case for over half of the cohort.
- Only one in five pupils from Chinese and Chinese British backgrounds did not achieve Level 2.
- For pupils on the SEN register, just under half did not reach Level 2, although this was the case for 68.6% of pupils with a statement of SEN.
- Again, the same trend for absenteeism applied to Level 2 attainment, over 85% of pupils who did not reach Level 2 inclusive did not achieve qualifications equivalent to Level 2.
- 94.2% of pupils at Pupil Referral Units did not achieve Level 2 – again, making this the group of students at greatest risk.³

¹ 'Level 1 achievers' refers to the group of pupils who achieved a volume of qualifications equivalent to or above the requirements for the Level 1 benchmark, but below the volume required to reach the Level 2 benchmark.

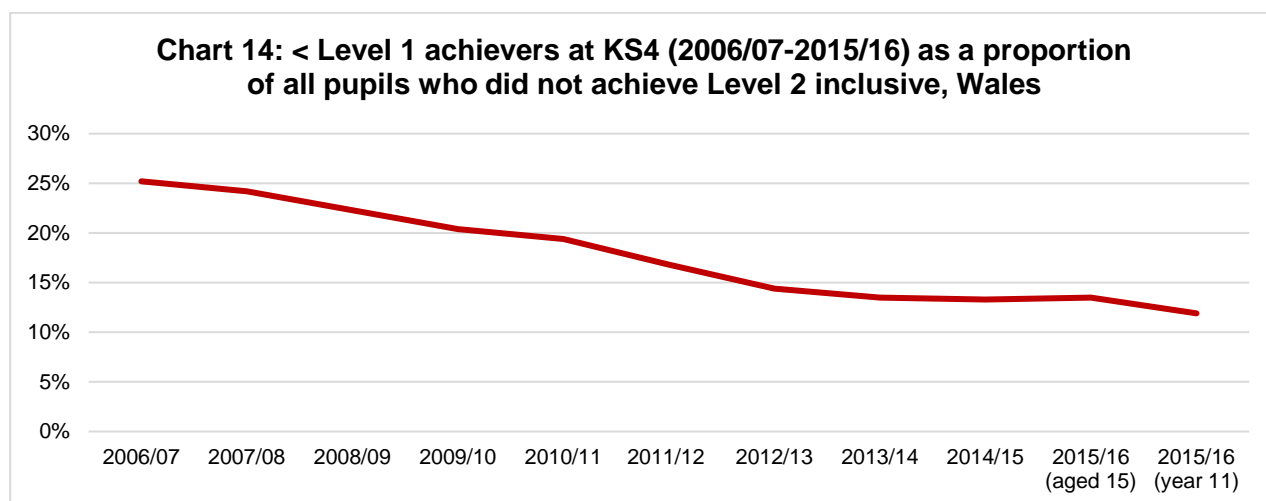
² 'Level 2 achievers' refers to the group of pupils who achieved a volume of qualifications equivalent to or above the requirements for the Level 2 benchmark, but below the volume required to reach the Level 2 inclusive benchmark.

³ Welsh Government (2017), Academic achievement by pupil characteristics, Table 4: Key Stage 4 by gender, 2012-2016; Table 8: Key Stage 4 by ethnic background, 2014-2016 (aggregated); Table 16: Key Stage 4 by Special Educational Need provision, 2012-2016; Table 24: Key Stage 4 by overall absence rates, 2014-2016; Table 29: Key Stage 4 results for pupils in Year 11 or aged 15 at the start of the academic year whose main education is at a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)

< Level 1 achievers⁴

< Level 1 achievers are the students who finished their compulsory education with a volume of qualifications equivalent to less than five GCSEs at A*-G grade. In 2015/16, approximately one in every 10 pupils who did not achieve Level 2 inclusive did not reach the Level 1 benchmark.

This proportion has more than halved since 2006/07, when it represented one out of every four pupils who did not achieve Level 2 inclusive at KS4.



Source: Welsh Government (2016), Statistics: Examination Results, Tables - 2015/16: Table 1: Headline indicators for pupils in Year 11/ aged 15 at the start of the academic year

For pupils that did not achieve Level 2 inclusive in 2016:

- The gender gap was slightly narrower, at 4.6 percentage points, for non-attainment of Level 1.
- Pupils from Gypsy/Gypsy Roma backgrounds and 'Other White' backgrounds were at greatest risk of not achieving Level 1 – this was the case for approximately one in four pupils from these backgrounds.
- Just over one in 10 pupils on the SEN register did not achieve Level 1.
- The same trend for absenteeism applied to Level 1 attainment, with half of pupils who did not achieve Level 2 inclusive not reaching the Level 1 benchmark.
- Approximately seven in 10 of those studying mainly at Pupil Referral Units did not achieve Level 1 – again, making this the group of students at greatest risk.⁵
- Welsh medium schools narrowly out-performed English medium schools for Level 1 attainment rates, although this trend could no longer be observed once effect of the proportion of eFSM pupils was discounted.⁶

⁴ '< Level 1 achievers' refers to the group of pupils who achieved a volume of qualifications below the requirements of the Level 1 benchmark.

⁵ Welsh Government (2017), Academic achievement by pupil characteristics, Table 4: Key Stage 4 by gender, 2012-2016; Table 8: Key Stage 4 by ethnic background, 2014-2016 (aggregated); Table 16: Key Stage 4 by Special Educational Need provision, 2012-2016; Table 24: Key Stage 4 by overall absence rates, 2014-2016; Table 29: Key Stage 4 results for pupils in Year 11 or aged 15 at the start of the academic year whose main education is at a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU).

⁶ Source: Welsh Government (2016), Statistics: Examination Results, Tables: Key Stage 4 benchmarking, 2016: Table 9: Welsh Speaking Schools - Summary table; Table 10: English Speaking Schools - Summary table; Table 11: All Schools - Summary table

Equality and Social Justice Briefings

This briefing is one of a series produced bi-monthly on key topics produced exclusively for Bevan Foundation subscribers. Find out more about this service and the other benefits we offer our subscribers by visiting www.bevanfoundation.org or email info@bevanfoundation.org.

We have made every effort to ensure that the data in this briefing is accurate and up to date at the time of writing. However we cannot be held responsible for any error or omission in the briefing or change in the source data.

About the Bevan Foundation

The Bevan Foundation develops ideas to make Wales a fairer, prosperous and sustainable place. We are independent of government or any political party, and are funded by subscriptions, donations, grants from charitable trusts and foundations and commissions.



145a High Street, Merthyr Tydfil, CF47 8DP

www.bevanfoundation.org

info@bevanfoundation.org

T.: 01685 350938

Registered charity no. 1104191

Company no. 4175018