



## Key Inequalities in Education

The Commission recognises the importance of educational, home and community environments. We are aware of the pro-active steps taken by a range of bodies, including Government Departments across all the sectors, to promote equality in education and welcomes progress made in advancing outcomes. However, it is clear that significant challenges remain.

This document summarises the 6 key inequalities set out in our *'Statement on Key Inequalities in Education in Northern Ireland'*.

### **Bullying, including prejudice-based bullying, in schools is a persistent problem.**

A number of equality groups are more vulnerable to prejudice-based bullying, or more likely to be bullied, in schools. Research has identified that: over two fifths of minority ethnic students having been the victims of racist bullying and harassment<sup>1</sup>; over six out of ten trans pupils, and students with same sex attraction have been called hurtful names related to their sexual or gender identity<sup>2</sup>; over two fifths of pupils with a disability being bullied<sup>3</sup>; and students with SEN also experience bullying.

### **Males continue to have lower levels of attainment than females, beginning in primary school and continuing throughout schooling to GCSE and A Level. Fewer male school leavers enter higher education than do females.**

Although there have been overall increases in the levels of attainment, in 2014/15 there were attainment gaps, to the detriment of males, of eight percentage points for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs and 16 percentage points for those obtaining 2 + A Levels. Furthermore, just over a third of male school leavers went on to higher education, compared to just over a half of females<sup>4</sup>.

### **Protestants continue to have lower levels of attainment than Catholics at GCSE, GCSEs including English and Maths, and A Level. Fewer Protestant school leavers enter higher education than do Catholics.**

Despite overall increases in the attainment levels of all students, there is a persistent and overarching trend of higher proportions of Catholics achieving the education targets in all three areas (5+ GCSEs (A\*-C), 5+ GCSEs (A\*-C) including Maths and

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<sup>1</sup> NCB, NI and ARK YLT (2010) Attitudes to Difference: Young people's attitudes to, and experiences of contact with people from different minority ethnic and migrant communities in Northern Ireland. p.55..

<sup>2</sup> O'Hara M (2013) Through our Minds: Exploring the Emotional health and Wellbeing of lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people in Northern Ireland. The Rainbow Project: Belfast

<sup>3</sup> RSM McClure Watters (2011) The nature and extent of pupil bullying in schools in the North of Ireland. DENI: Bangor.

<sup>4</sup> School leavers - 2013/14 statistical bulletin, published: 21 May 2015, at [www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-leavers-201314-statistical-bulletin](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-leavers-201314-statistical-bulletin) and School leavers - 2014/15 statistical bulletin, published: 26 May 2016 at [www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-leavers-201415-statistical-bulletin](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-leavers-201415-statistical-bulletin)

English and 2+ A Levels (A\* - E), than both Protestants and 'Others'<sup>5</sup>. This is a persistent inequality. The lower achievement of Protestants, as measured by an attainment gap, remained between 2007/08 and 2014/15 for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs at (A\*-C), or 2+ A Levels Grades (A\* - \*-E), with a slight reduction in the gap for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs (A\*-C) including Maths and English<sup>6</sup>.

**There is persistent underachievement and lack of progression to further and higher education of school leavers entitled to free school meals, particularly Protestants, notably Protestants males<sup>7</sup>.**

In 2014/15, just over a quarter of Protestant males entitled to free school meals attained 5+ GCSEs (incl. English and Maths)(A\*-C) compared with over four in ten of all school leavers entitled to free school meals, and almost three quarters of all school leavers not entitled to free school meals<sup>8</sup>.

**Children from the Traveller community and Roma children have some of the lowest levels of attainment of all equality groups.**

Over the 2007/08-2014/15 period, anywhere between a half to over eight in ten Irish Traveller children left school with no GCSEs. This is in stark contrast to the proportions of all school leavers with no GCSEs, which has reduced from 3.5 percent in 2007/08 to 0.5 percent in 2014/15<sup>9</sup>.

**Students with SEN or a disability<sup>10</sup> have lower attainment levels<sup>11</sup> than students without any SEN or disability, and are less likely to go on to higher education.**

Between 2007/08 and 2014/15, there have been increases in attainment levels for all SEN and/or pupils with a disability, and in particular for SEN 1-4 school leavers. The attainment gap, for those obtaining 5+ GCSEs Grades A\*-C, between SEN 1-4 pupils and those with no SEN decreased from 46 to 23 percentage points. While SEN 5 pupils have also experienced increases in attainment, it has not been to the same extent as for SEN 1-4 pupils. The attainment gap between SEN 5 pupils and those with no SEN decreased from 59 to 48 percentage points<sup>12</sup>.



For further information, including a 10-page *summary* and *full version* of our *Statement* – visit [www.equalityni.org/KeyInequalities-Education](http://www.equalityni.org/KeyInequalities-Education)

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<sup>5</sup> 'Other' refers to those all those who do not identify as Protestant or Catholic and therefore could include those of other/unknown religions and those of no religion.

<sup>6</sup> Analysis of DE data (2007/08-2011/12) by Burns et al. (2015). ECNI analysis of DE school leaver statistical bulletins for 2013/14 and 2014/15

<sup>7</sup> This key inequality is primarily supported by Burns et al (2015) analyses of Department of Education (DE) data on free school meals entitlement. However, in this *Statement*, 'working class' is also used to refer to the discussion in literature around 'Protestant working class'.

<sup>8</sup> DE supplied bespoke tables 'Qualifications of school leavers, FSME and Non-FSME, by gender and pupil religion' (2014/15).

<sup>9</sup> DE supplied bespoke tables 'Qualifications of school leavers by ethnic origin sub-categories (2007/08-2014/15)

<sup>10</sup> In some cases, the nature of the need / disability itself can impact upon the pace and/or extent of educational attainment and/or progression. A core focus on maximising equality of opportunity thus remains paramount.

<sup>11</sup> Attainment data presented in this report only covers SEN pupils in mainstream schools. There is no data available on attainment of pupils in special schools.

<sup>12</sup> DE school leaver statistical bulletins for 2013/14 and 2014/15 at [www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-leavers-201415-statistical-bulletin](http://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-leavers-201415-statistical-bulletin) & Burns et al (2015).