

# The lives of 7/8-year-olds: findings from the fourth wave of the Infant Cohort

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# *Growing up in Ireland* - Introduction

- ❖ ***Growing up in Ireland*** recruited almost 20,000 children, young people, their families, teachers, school principals and other caregivers in 2007/2008
- ❖ Funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) with a contribution from The Atlantic Philanthropies
- ❖ Overseen and managed by the DCYA, in conjunction with the CSO and an inter-departmental Project Team and Steering Group
- ❖ Implemented by a consortium of researchers led by the ESRI and Trinity College



# *Growing up in Ireland -* Introduction

- ❖ Preliminary findings from the 7/8-year-olds in the '***Infant Cohort***'
- ❖ Face-to-face interviews with the children and their families at:
  - 9 months of age
  - 3 years
  - 5 years
- ❖ Postal interview at 7/8 years of age – *details reported by mother*
- ❖ Face-to-face interviews *currently* at 9 years of age.
- ❖ Three Key Findings being launched
  1. **School and learning**
  2. **Health and development**
  3. **Socio-emotional development, relationships and play**



# *Key Finding No. 1*

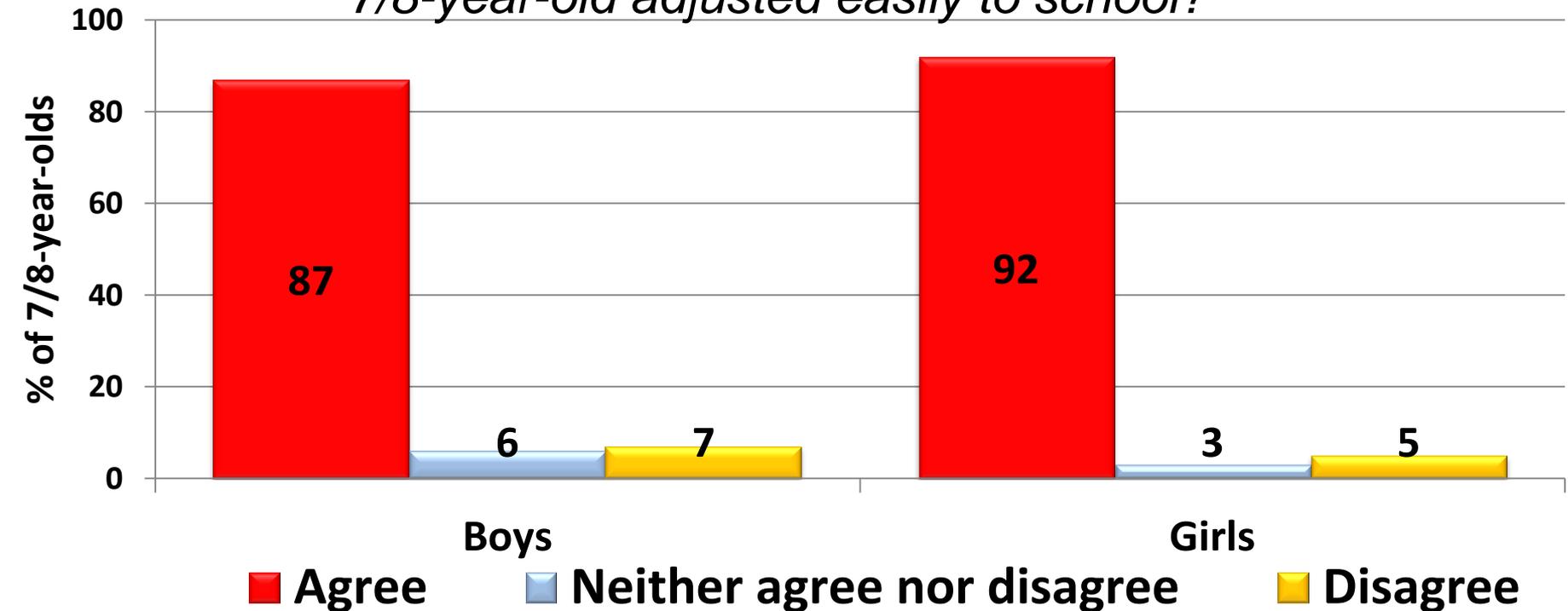
# **School and Learning**

# School and Learning

## Adjusting to school by 7/8 years of age

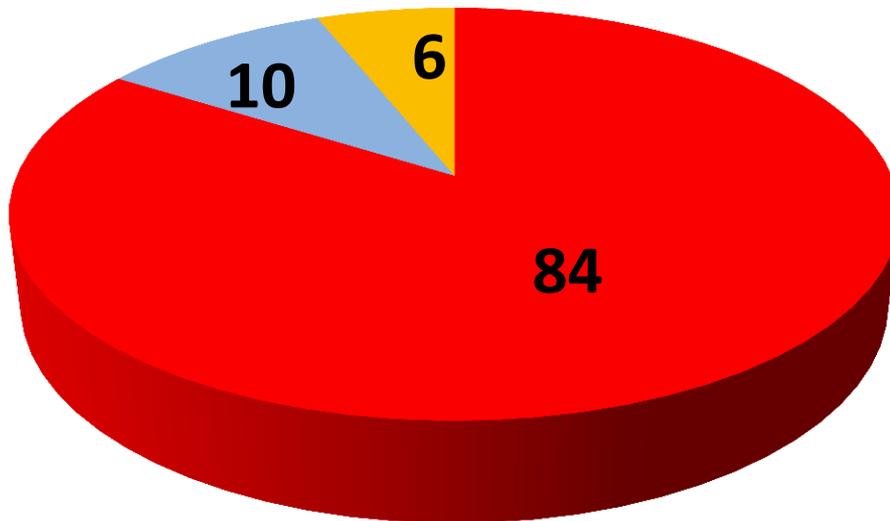
- ❖ Most children reported to have adjusted easily to school
- ❖ Girls somewhat better than boys

*7/8-year-old adjusted easily to school?*

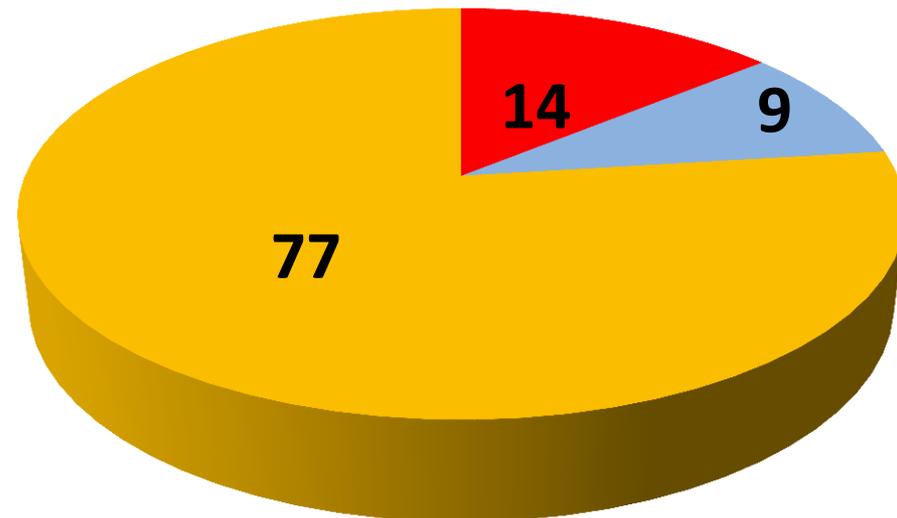


# School and Learning

**Teacher knows and supports  
child well**



**Child finds it hard to sit and  
listen in class**



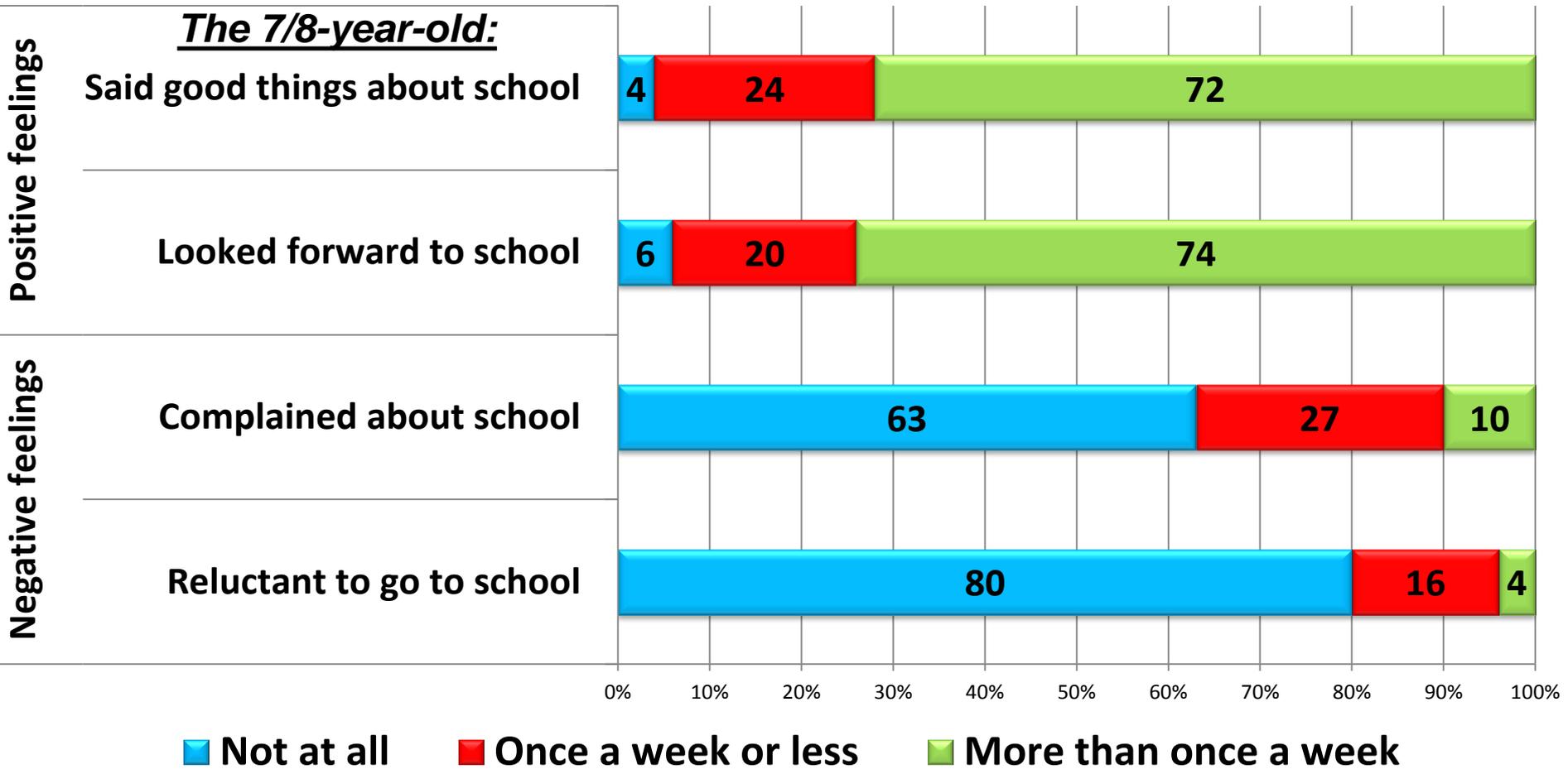
❖ **Boys find it harder to sit and  
listen in class (19% vs. 8%)**

■ Agree   ■ Neither agree nor disagree   ■ Disagree



# School and Learning - Liking and getting on at school

❖ Mothers report most children are positive about school





# *School and Learning - Liking and getting on at school*

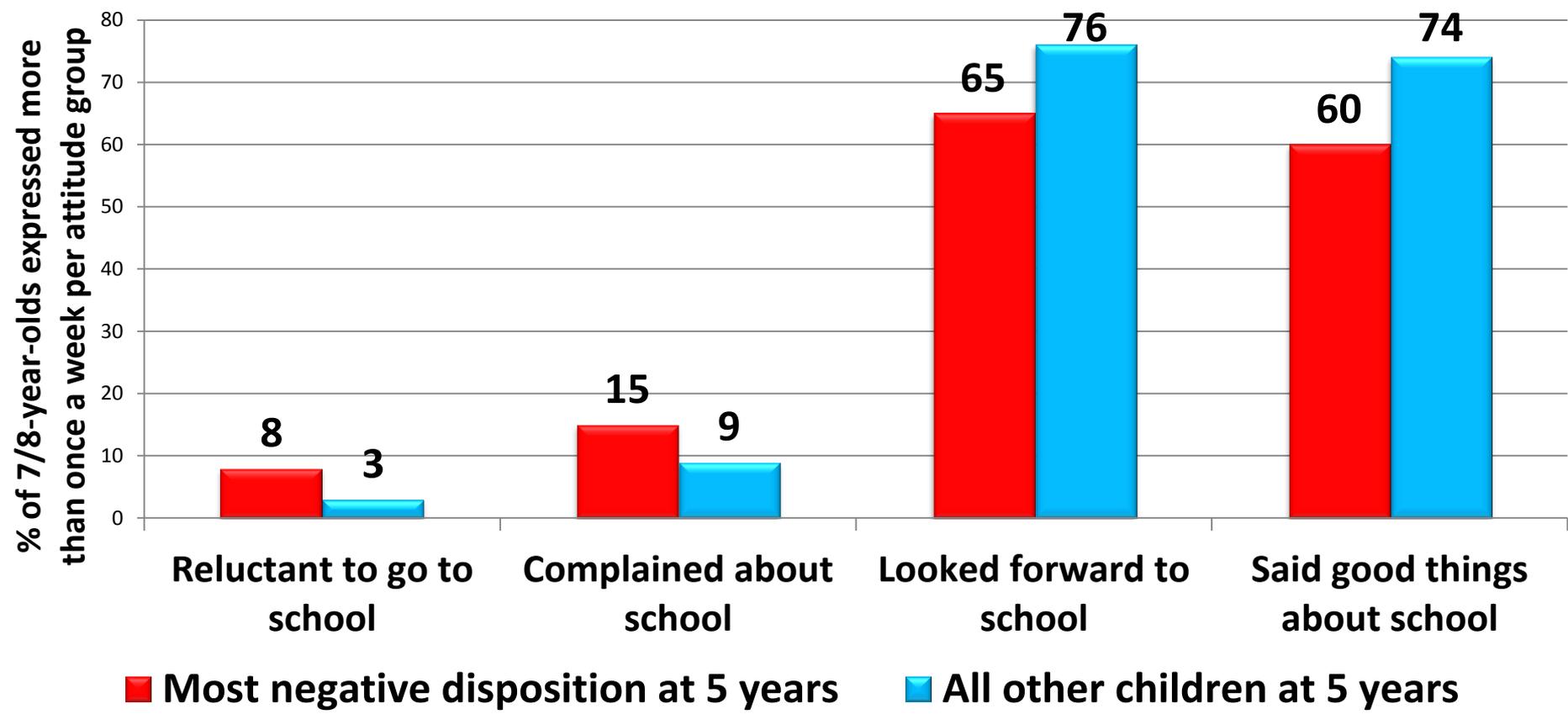
- ❖ Boys complained about school more often than girls – 43% vs 31%
- ❖ Boys more likely to be reluctant to go to school – 22% vs 17%

- ❖ 7/8-year-olds from educationally disadvantaged families more likely to have negative attitudes to school than those from more advantaged families



# School and Learning - Liking and getting on at school

❖ Their teacher provided details on the child's dispositions/attitudes to school at 5 years of age. Children's attitudes to school at 5 years of age strongly related to attitudes at 7/8-years (bottom decile of attitudes at 5 years)

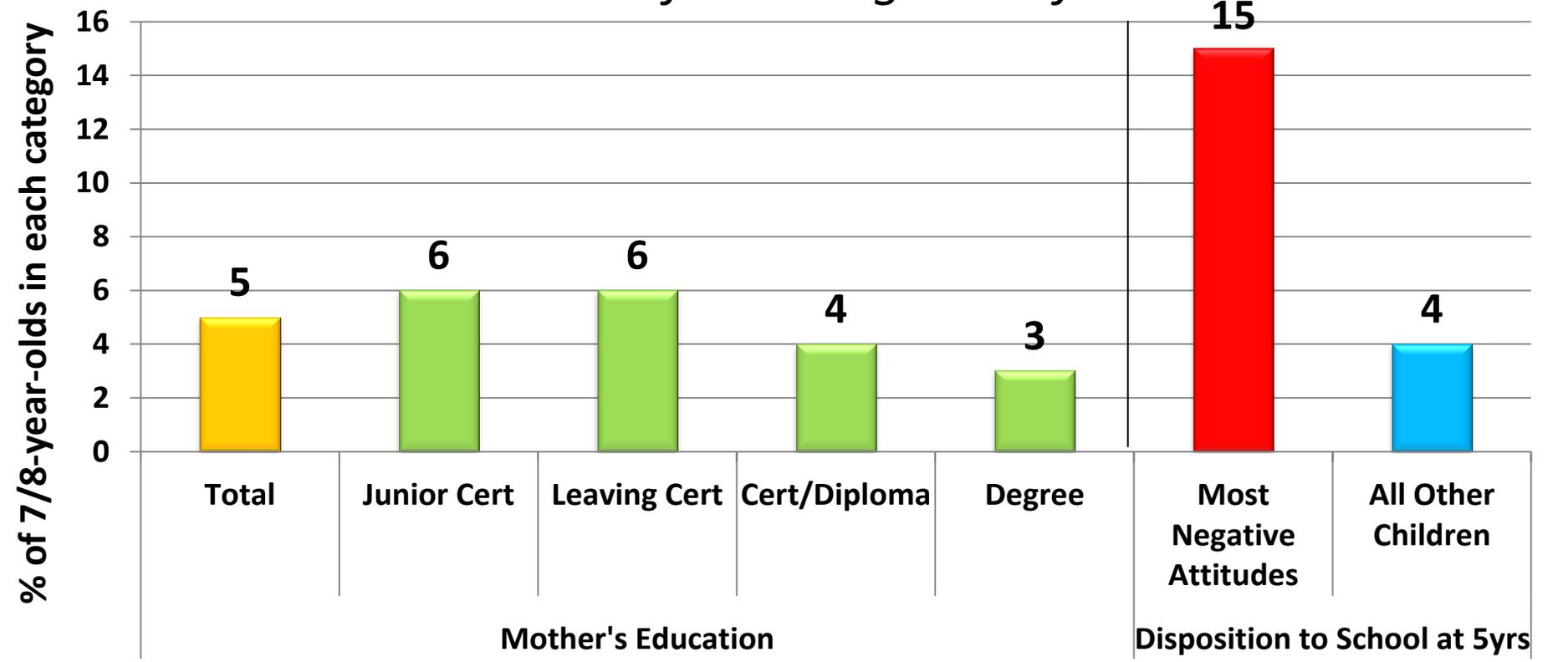




# School and Learning – Pace of Learning

❖ **86% mothers said pace of learning *just right* for their 7/8-year-old – 5% said *too fast* 9% *too slow*. Related to mother’s education and child’s attitudes to school at 5 years**

*Pace of Learning is too fast*

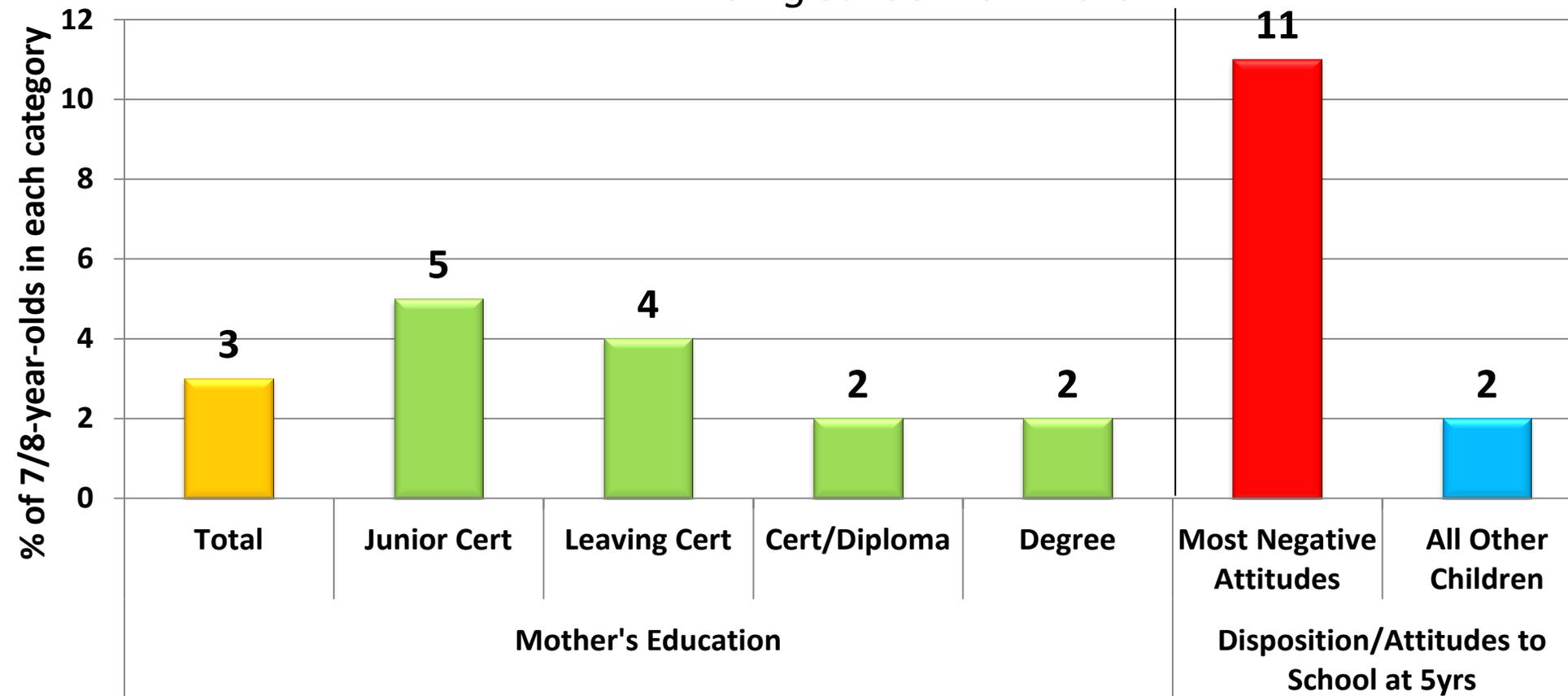




# School and Learning – Finding Schoolwork Hard

❖ **52% children *never* found their schoolwork hard, 3% *usually* found it hard and 45% *sometimes* found it hard. Related to mother’s education and disposition at 5 years**

*Finding schoolwork hard*





# *Key Finding No. 2*

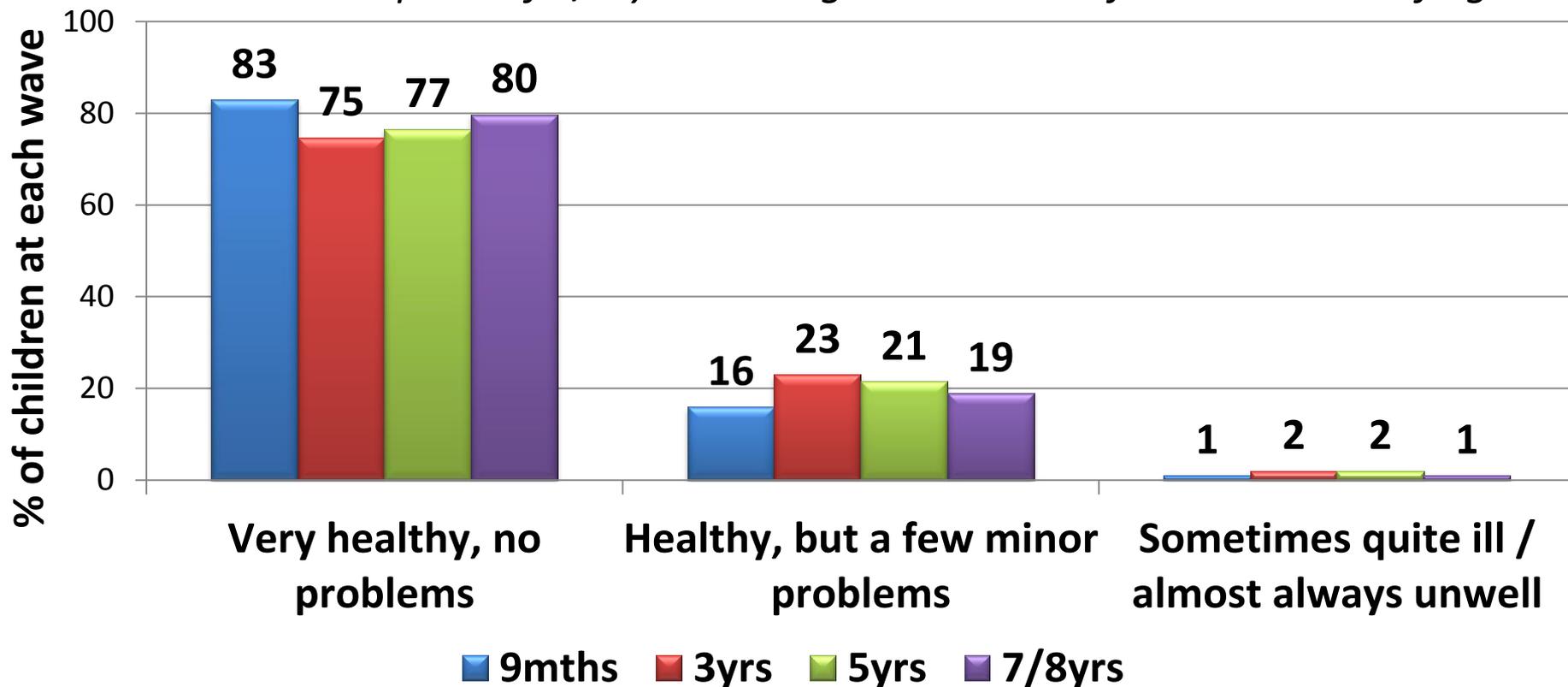
# **Health and Development**



# Child's health & development – Mother's rating of general health

❖ Most 7/8-year-olds are healthy – 80% *very healthy, no problems*  
19% *healthy, but a few minor problems*.

*Mothers' reports of 7/8-year-old's general health from 9 months of age*

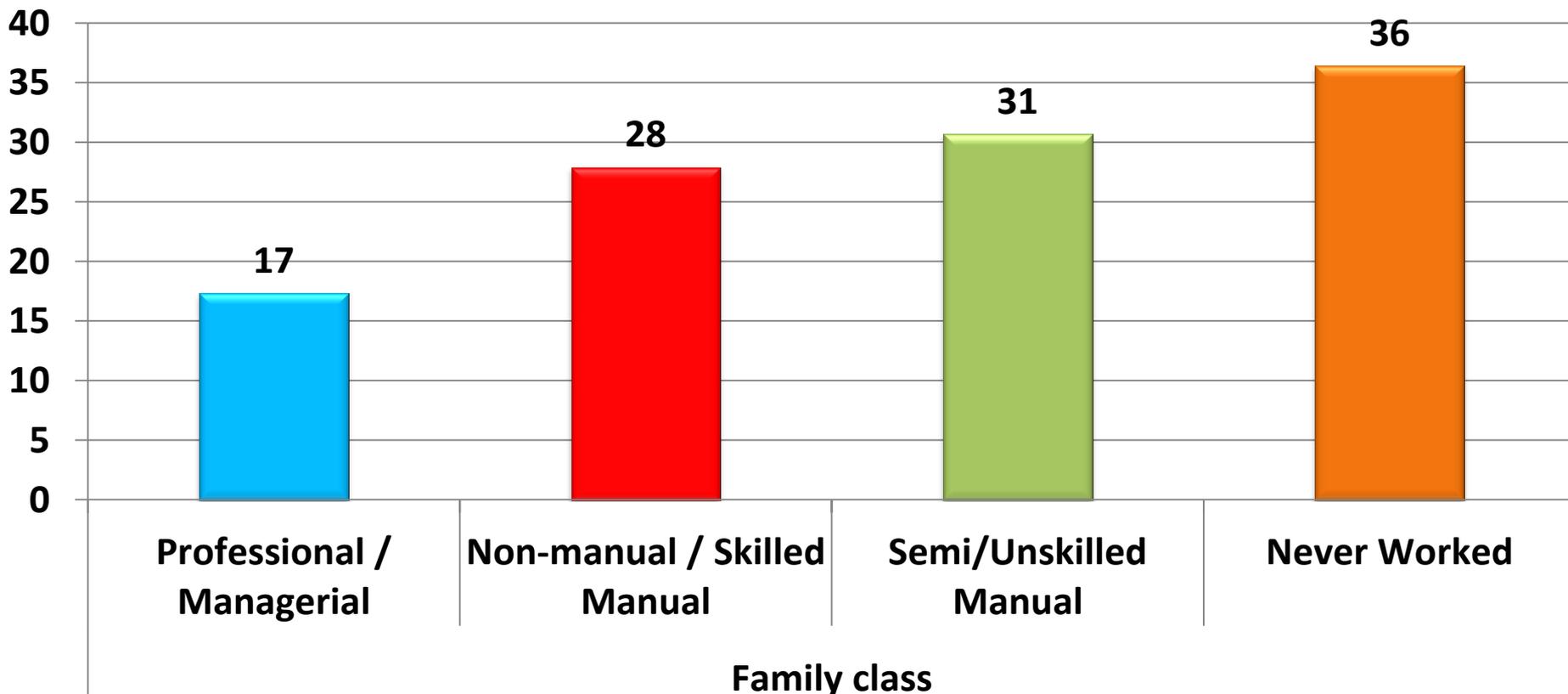




# Child's health & development – Dietary quality

- ❖ Mothers recorded consumption of 15 food items in previous 24 hours – used to create dietary quality index. Scores split into quartiles (25%).

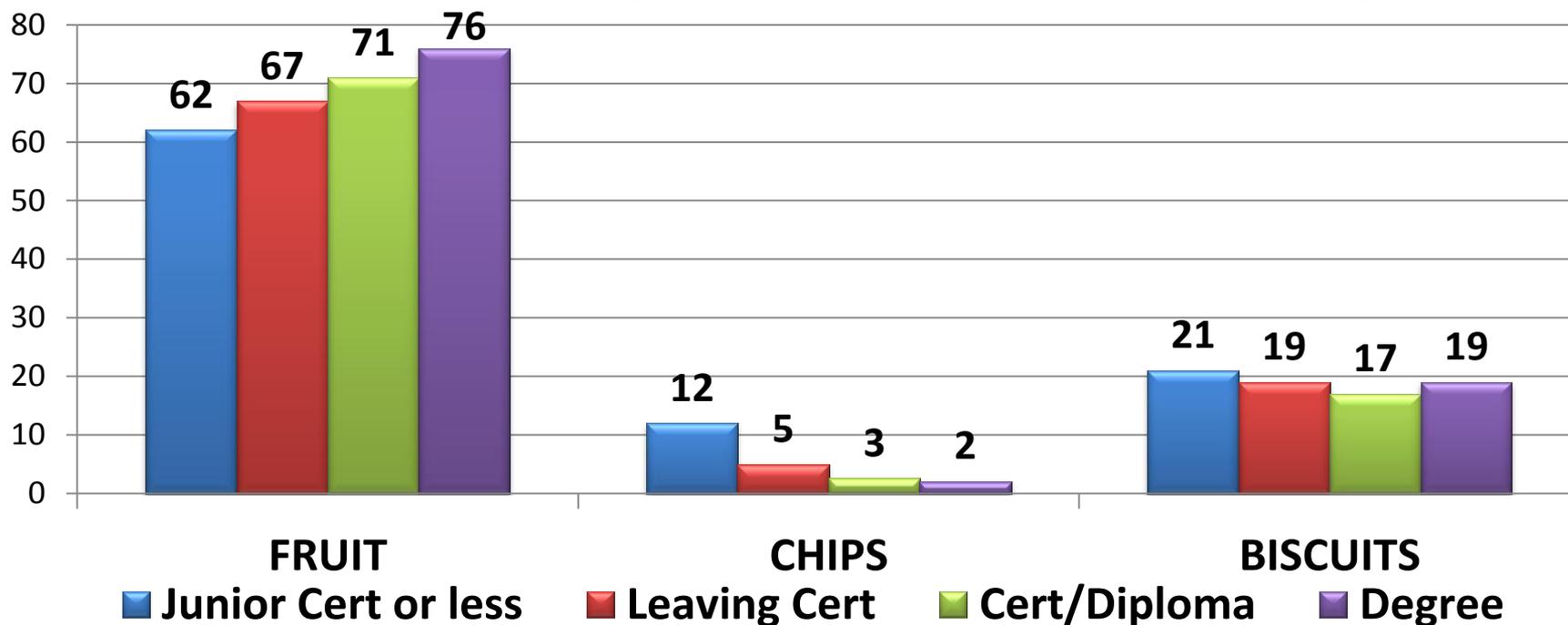
*Per cent of 7/8 year-olds in lowest quartile of dietary quality by family social class*



# Child's health & development – Dietary quality

- ❖ Consumption of some foods socially profiled – related to measures of family advantage/disadvantage

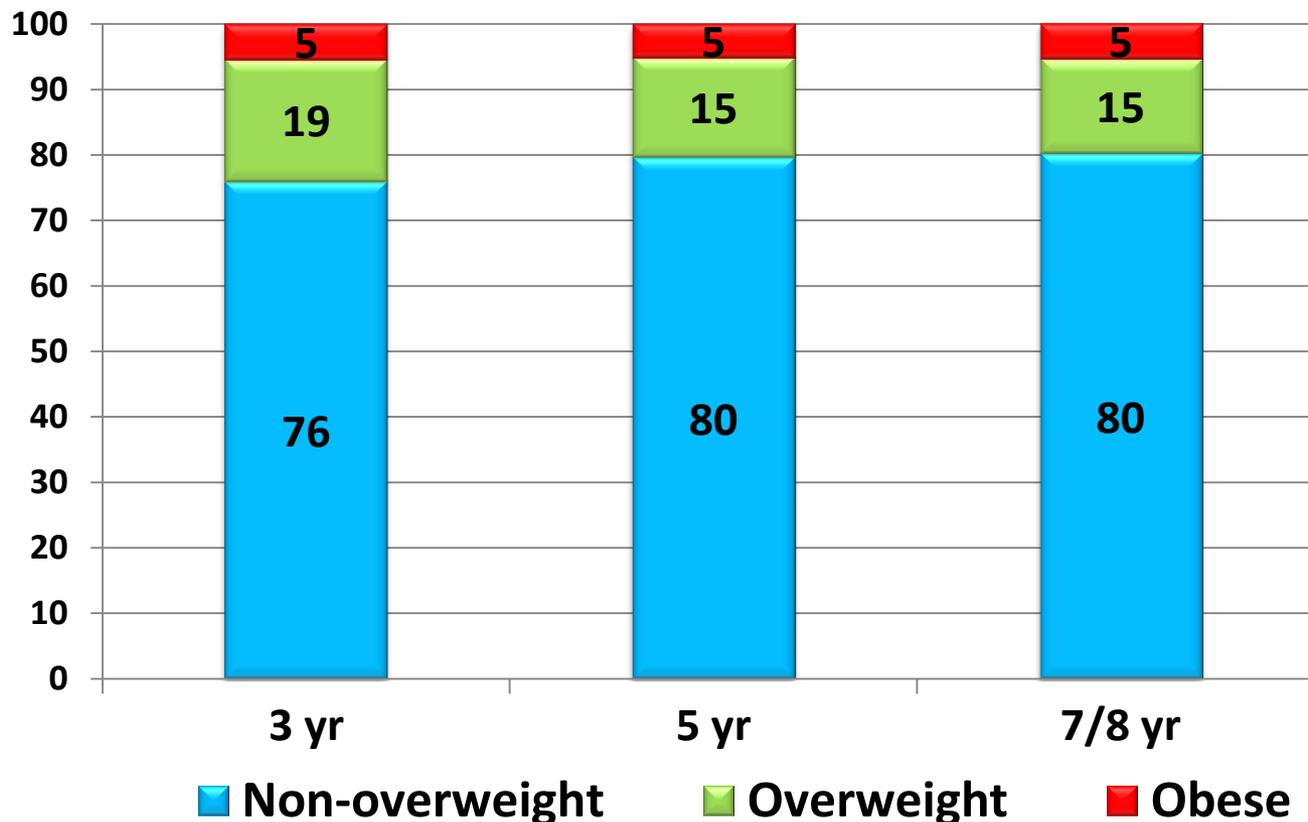
*Per cent of 7/8 year-olds eating item more than once per education group*



# Child's health & development – Body Mass Index (BMI)

- ❖ 20% of 7/8-year-olds were overweight or obese – the same proportion as at 5 years

*BMI status at 3, 5 and 7/8 years of age*

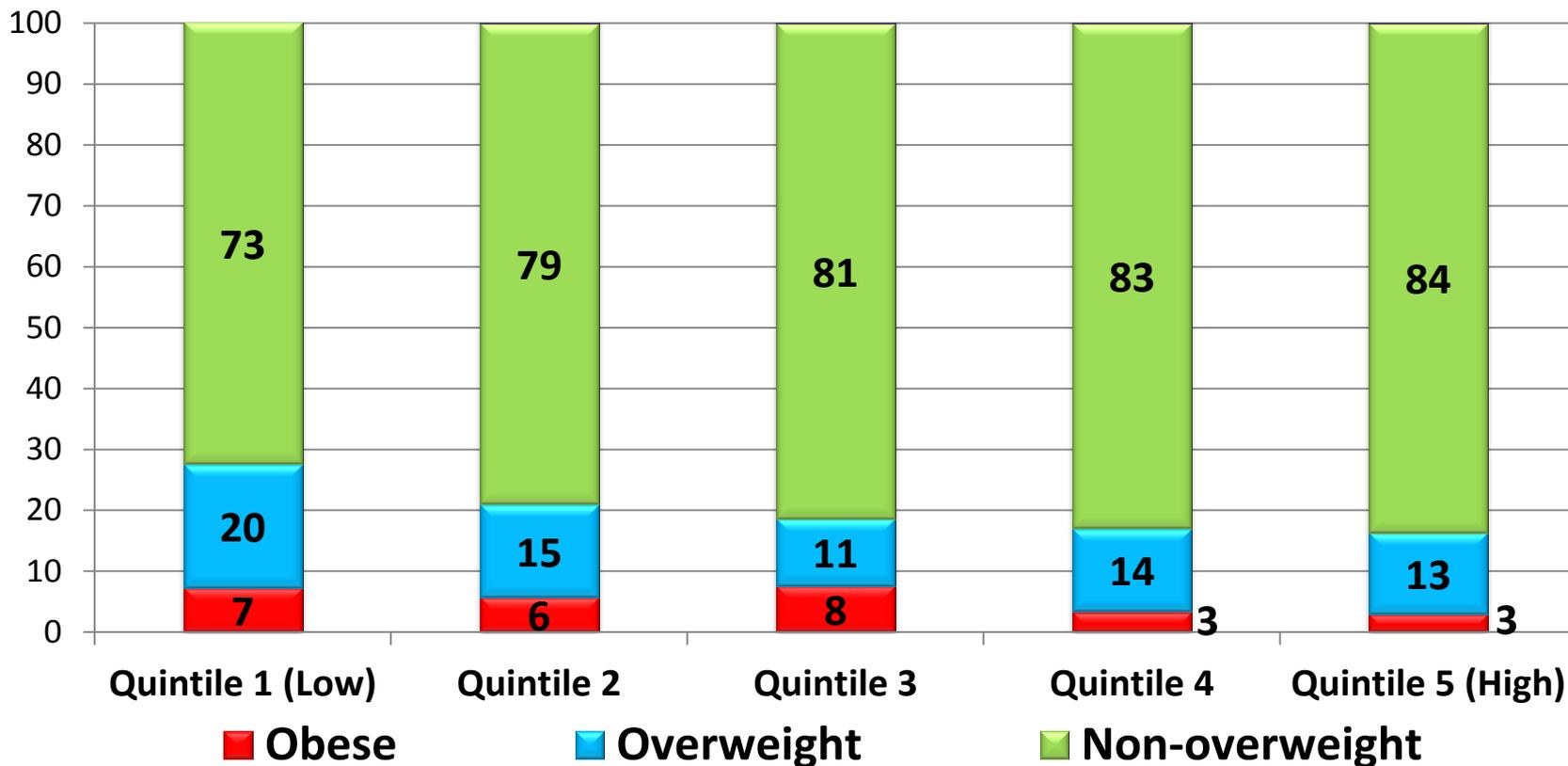




# Child's health & development – Body Mass Index (BMI)

❖ Social gradients in 7/8-year-old's BMI status – (below based on family income)

*BMI status at 7/8 years of age, by family income quintile.*

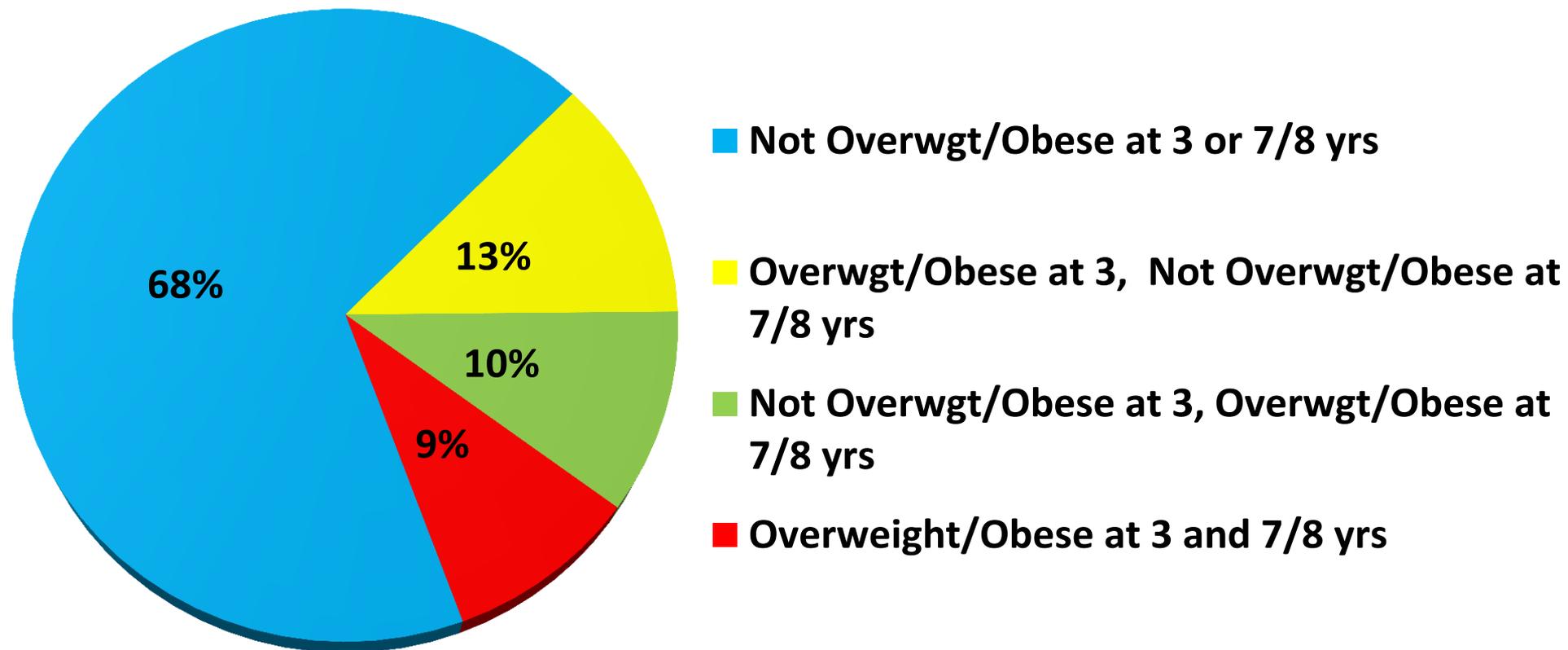




# Child's health & development – Body Mass Index (BMI)

❖ **Some changes in BMI status in children over four year period**

*Changes in BMI status between 3 and 7/8 years of age*





# *Key Finding No. 3*

## **SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT, RELATIONSHIPS AND PLAY**

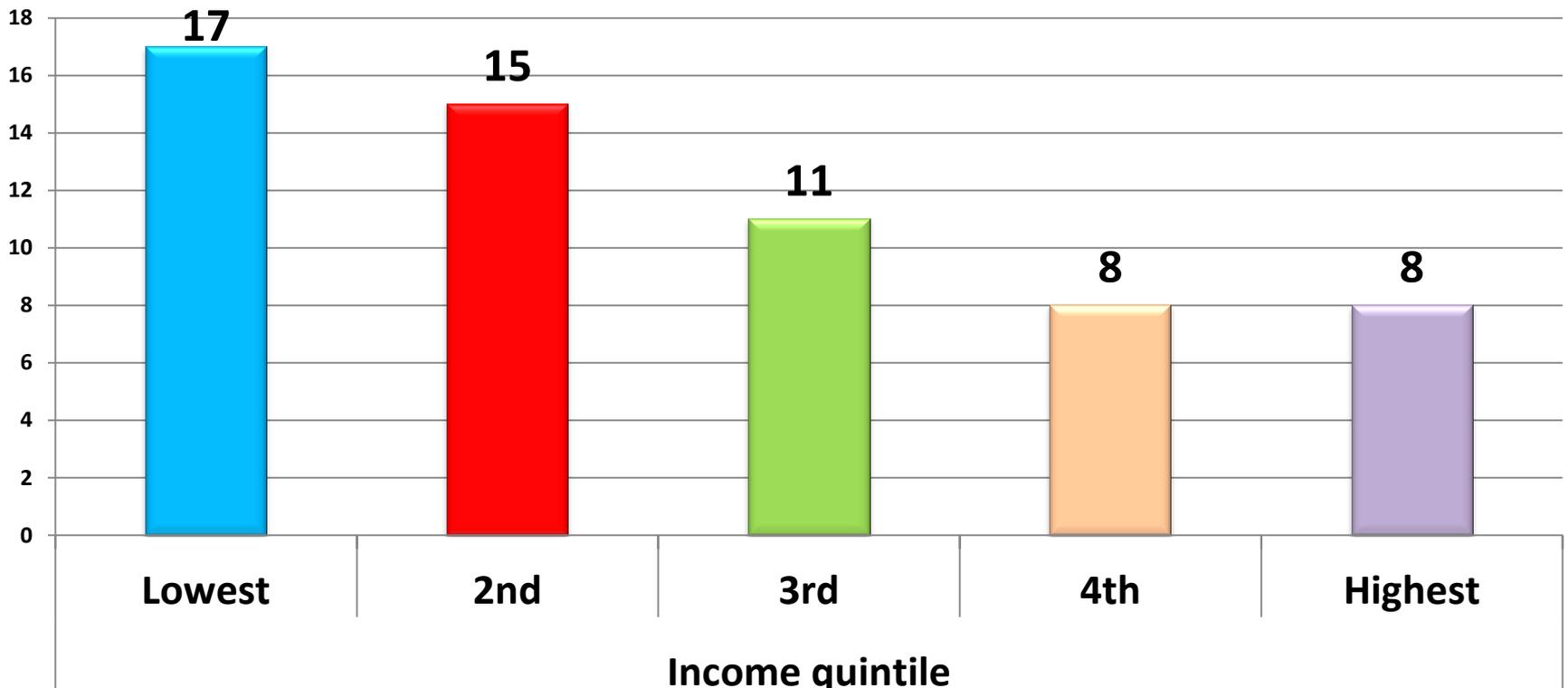


# Child's socio-emotional well-being

## Mother's rating of socio-emotional well-being

- ❖ Based on widely used Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire most 7/8-year-olds are doing well in their socio-emotional development
- ❖ Disadvantaged mothers more likely to report difficulties

*Percentage of 7/8-yr-olds in top decile of the SDQ problematic area, by family income*

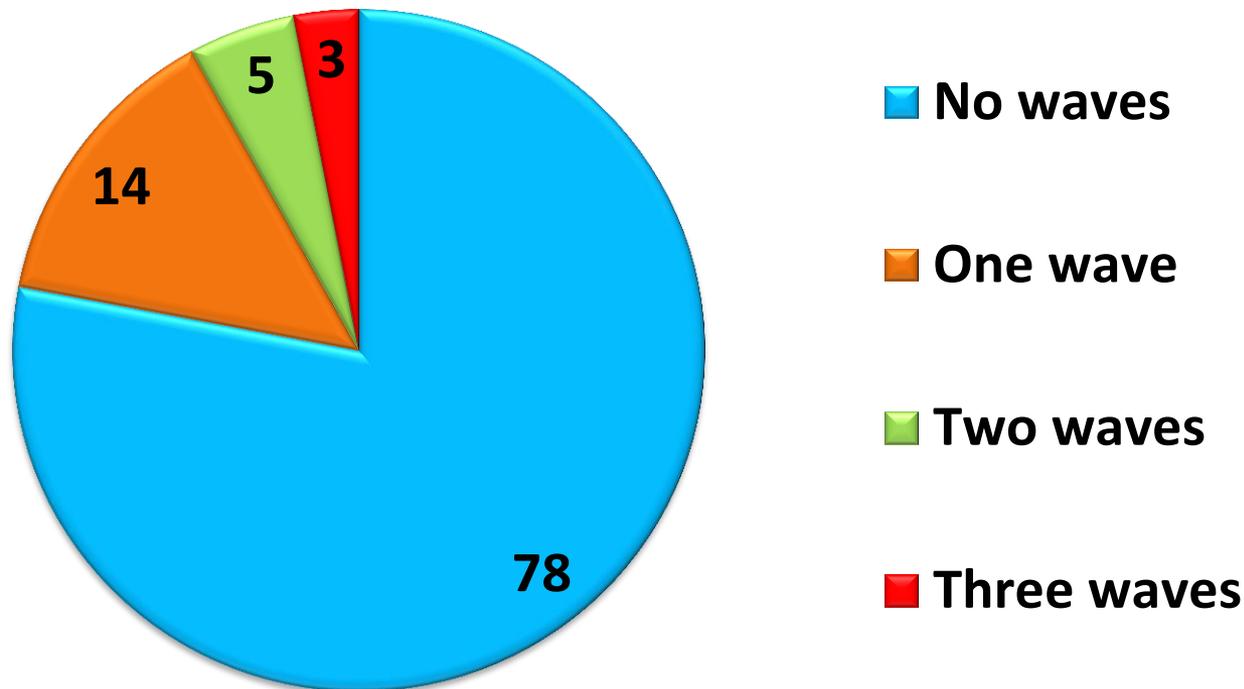


# Child's socio-emotional well-being

## Mother's rating of socio-emotional well-being

- ❖ 3% of children were in the 'potentially problematic' total difficulties decile at 3, 5 and 7/8 years of age.
- ❖ Children who had a high score on the SDQ scale in one year were more likely to have a high score in subsequent years.

*Persistence of high SDQ scores*



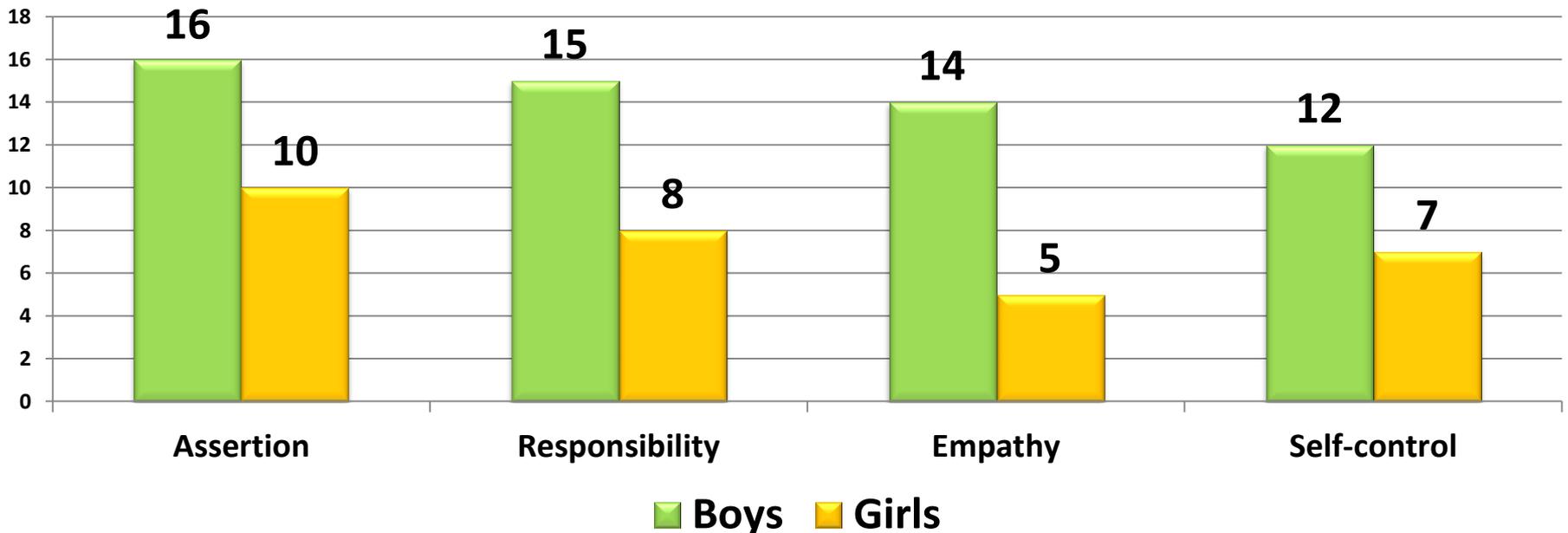


# Child's socio-emotional well-being – Social Skills Improvement Scale (SSIS)

❖ **Widely used SSIS used to assess 7/8-year-olds social skills in terms of :**

- **Assertion:** *'expresses feelings when wronged'*
- **Responsibility:** *'is well-behaved when unsupervised'*
- **Empathy:** *'shows concern for others'*
- **Self-control:** *'stays calm when teased'.*

*Percentage of boys and girls in lowest 'decile' on different aspects of social skills*

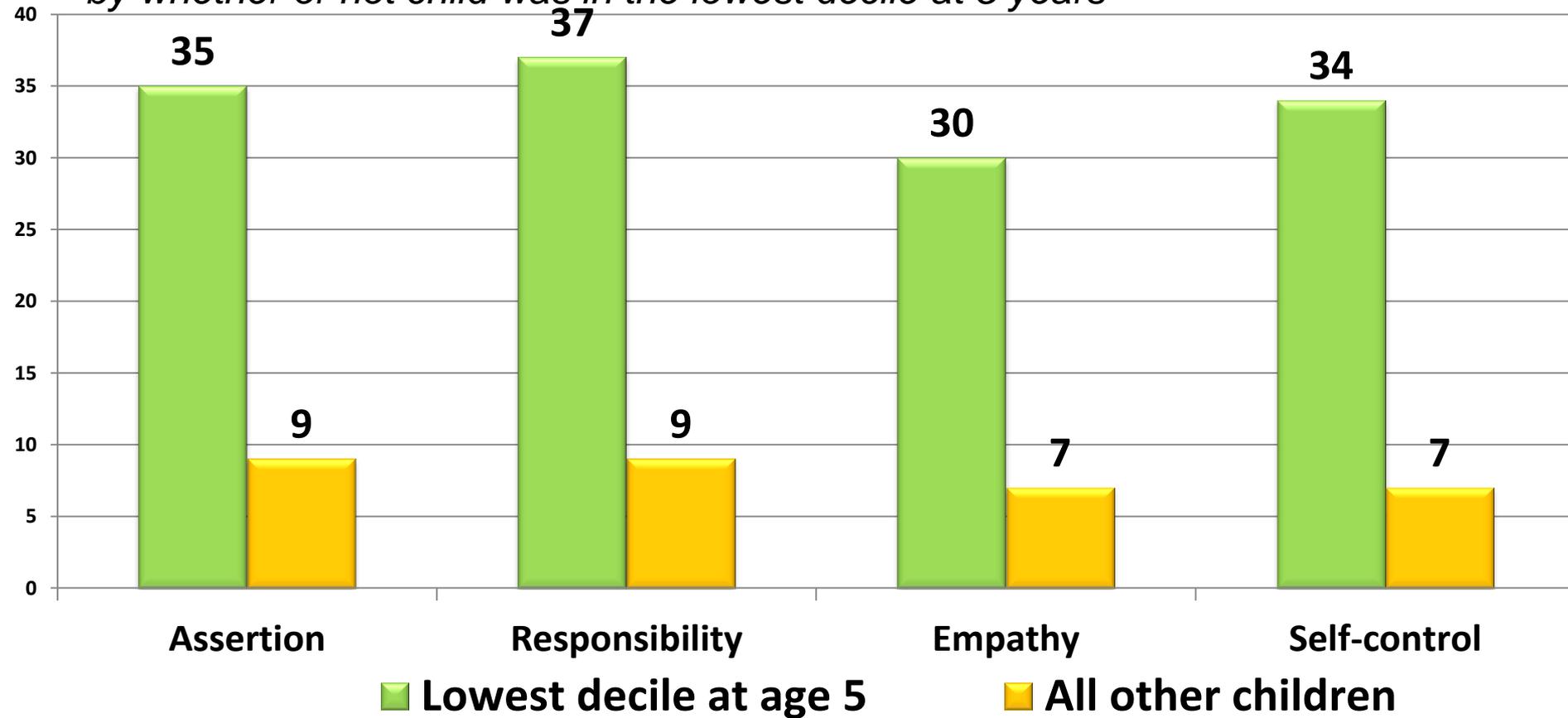




# Child's socio-emotional well-being - Social Skills

❖ **Children with poorer social skills at 5 years were more likely to get poorer scores again at 7/8 years of age.**

*Percentage of children with scores in lowest decile of social skills at 7/8 years, by whether or not child was in the lowest decile at 5 years*





# Summary (1 of 2)

- ❖ Most children adjusted well to school by 7/8 years of age
- ❖ Boys less well adjusted than girls – complain more about school and find it more difficult to sit and listen in class
- ❖ Children from socially disadvantaged families more likely to have negative attitudes to school
- ❖ Children who were identified early (at 5 years of age) by their teacher as having worst attitudes to school were reported to find it to more difficult to adjust by 7/8 years – importance of early identification and support
- ❖ 86% of mothers felt the pace of learning was right but strongly associated with mother's education and whether teacher identified child as having a negative disposition to school at 5 years. These children also more likely to find schoolwork more difficult



# Summary (2 of 2)

- ❖ Aggregate levels of 7/8-year-old's health fairly stable since 9 months of age. 1-2% *sometimes quite ill/almost always unwell*
- ❖ Strong social gradients in dietary quality
- ❖ Elevated BMI continues to be a health problem among 7/8-year-olds – 5% obese and 15% overweight. Same levels as at 5 years
- ❖ BMI patterns socially profiled – e.g. 27% elevated BMI among children in lowest income quintile compared with 16% in the highest quintile
- ❖ Socio-emotional development also related to family's social advantage/disadvantage. 17% of 7/8-year-olds in lowest income quintile in potentially problematic' zone of the SDQ compared to 8% of those in the highest income group
- ❖ Boys had lower scores on social skills than girls. Persistence in poorer social skills at 5 and 7/8 years of age was evident.



# *Thank-you*

- ❖ Drs. Fergal Lynch and Claire Finn from DCYA for launching today's reports and officials from the DCYA, especially Dr. Clare Farrell and Mr Michael Geraghty
- ❖ Members of the Project Team and Steering Group
- ❖ National and international assessors and numerous referees
- ❖ Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) and other stakeholder groups
- ❖ The Research Ethics Committee (REC)
- ❖ Professor Yvonne Kelly, UCL for her Keynote address
- ❖ Teachers, school Principals and other school staff
- ❖ Data users – come to a data workshop
- ❖ All *GUI* staff and field interviewers
- ❖ **Biggest thanks to all CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES**