

A decorative graphic on the left side of the slide, consisting of a vertical black line intersecting a horizontal black line. To the left of the vertical line are three overlapping squares: a blue one at the top, a red one in the middle, and a yellow one at the bottom. To the right of the vertical line are two overlapping squares: a blue one at the top and a yellow one at the bottom.

# Junior cycle education: insights from students

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# Introduction: Reimagining Learning

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- Evidence about 'what is' to discuss 'what can be'
- Young people's own perspectives
- Findings from a longitudinal study of 900 students in 12 case-study schools
- Insights into the experiences of students as they move through junior cycle and beyond



## Introduction (2)

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- How does the structure of the education system influence student engagement?
- How do schools influence student engagement?
  - Organisation of learning
  - School climate



# Impact of the structure of the education system on experiences?

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1. Adjustment to the new school setting
2. Second year – drift or engagement?
3. Preparation for the exam



# First year

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- Important differences between primary and post-primary schooling
- Most settle in relatively quickly
- Positive about 'new' subjects but issues around curriculum continuity in English, Irish and Maths
- Lack of challenge in first year is associated with later underperformance (streaming)



# First year (continued)

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- What makes a difference to settling in?
  - Preparation: realistic expectations
  - Student integration programmes, especially student mentors
  - Positive social climate: teachers and students
  - Curriculum continuity



# Second year

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- Often seen as 'in-between' year
- But crucial year for student engagement – emergence of important differences
- Second year influences are key for later achievement
- Negative interaction with teachers; misbehaviour; both lead to lower JC grades
- Capacity to cope with school-work; those who struggle in 2<sup>nd</sup> year achieve lower JC grades



# Third year: gearing up for the exam?

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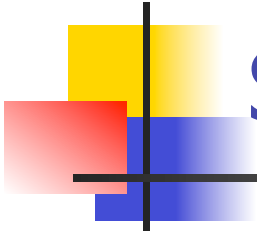
- Teaching methods
- Student workload
- Emphasis on exam preparation
- Use of grinds
- School climate



# Teaching methods

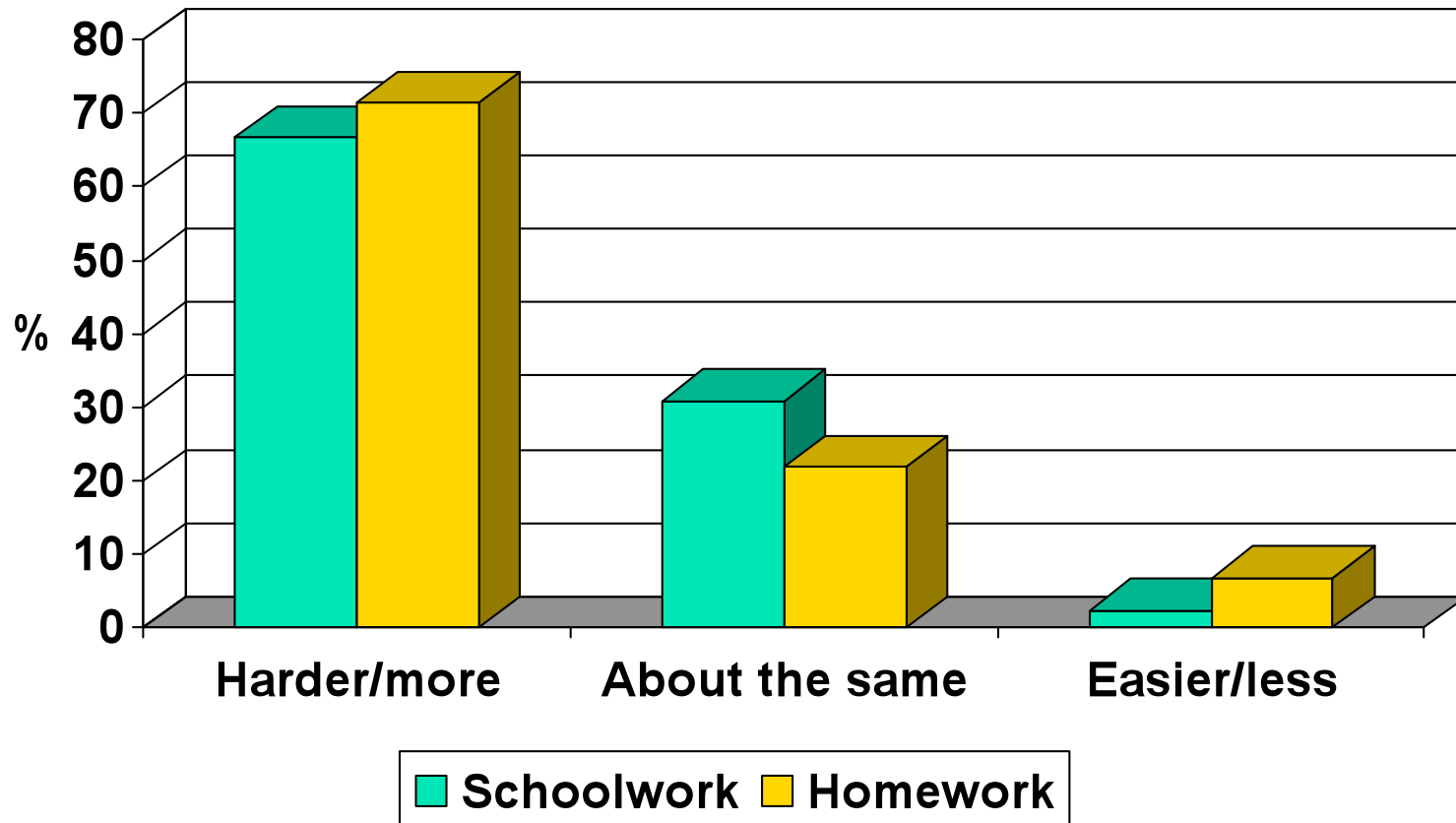
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- Students saw 'good teaching' as: clear explanation, making learning fun and more student involvement  
In practical subjects like ... when they get you to figure out yourself it's much better because then you remember doing it yourself instead of just listening to [the teacher]. (Coed school, middle-class intake)
- But in third year, less diverse teaching methods  
You used to do fun things in class, they'd come in and say let's play games. If you say it this year you get like stared at, what do you think you are?  
They definitely tell you, if you're talking or something, they tell you stop talking you're a third year, you should know better.  
It relates to everything, the exams, you're doing your Junior Cert, you shouldn't be talking, you'll miss out on stuff (Girls' school, middle-class intake)



# Student workload

Schoolwork and homework more challenging





## Being in third year

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Like in first and second year you got no homework and in third year you're just getting a whole pile of it.

You know what, we came into third year just thinking it was like first and second year, we hadn't got a clue, because we got it so easy in first and second year we just hadn't got a clue what this year was going to be like, and we haven't still like adapted to it.

(Girls' school, working-class intake)



## Source of stress

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- Exam pressure seen as stressful, especially for girls

It gets mentioned a lot, "You're in third year now, it's not second year, you've to knuckle down".

It's very stressful, it's really stressful. (Harris Street, girls' school, middle-class intake)

Some days I go home and I won't be able to go out with the amount of homework. (Girls' school, working-class intake)

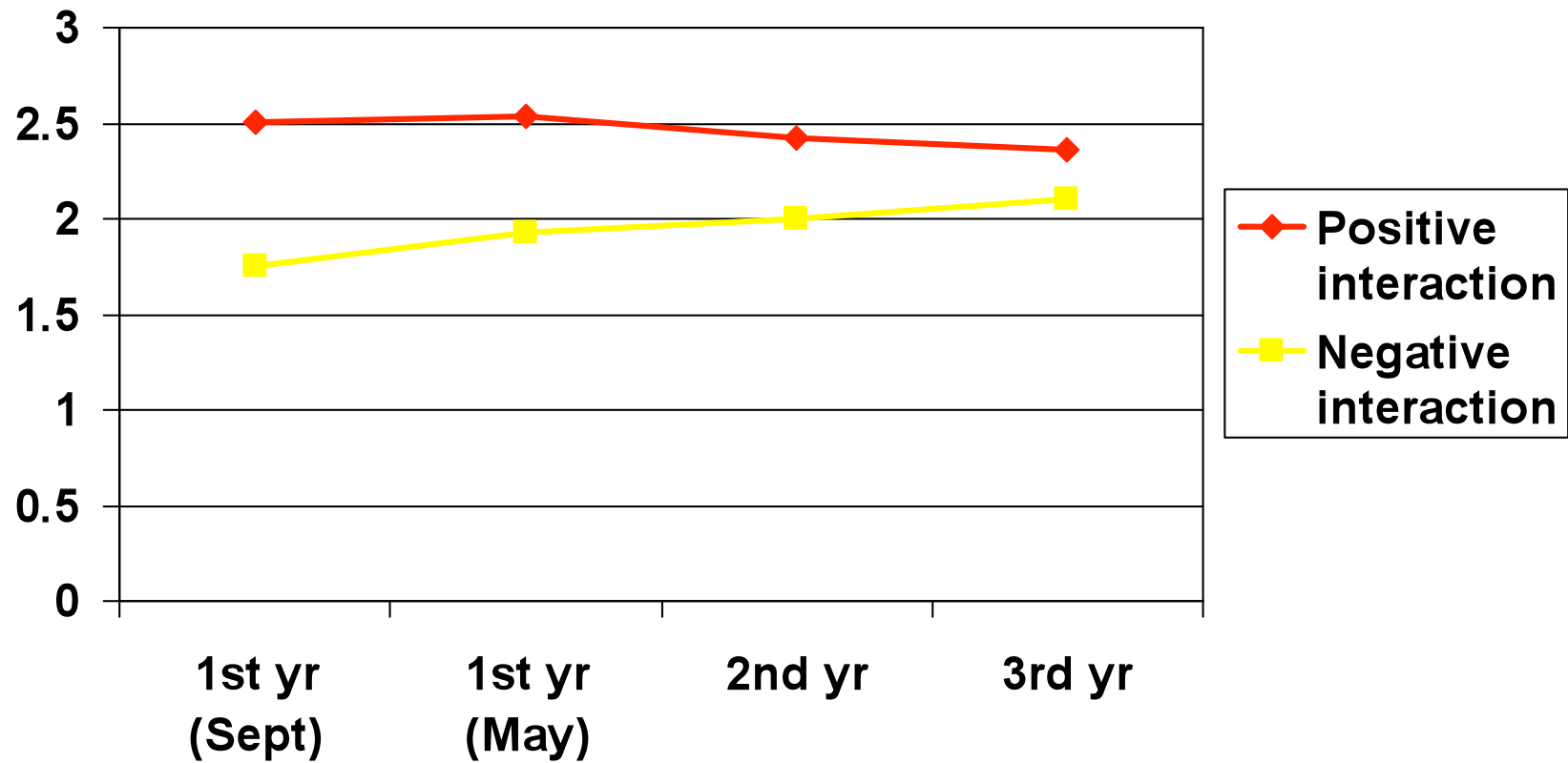
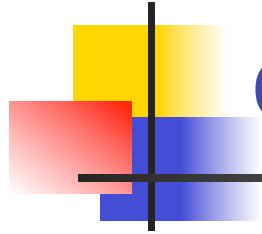


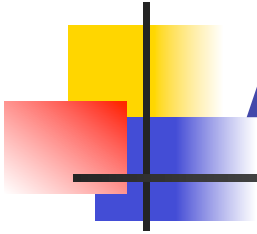
## Private tuition ('grinds')

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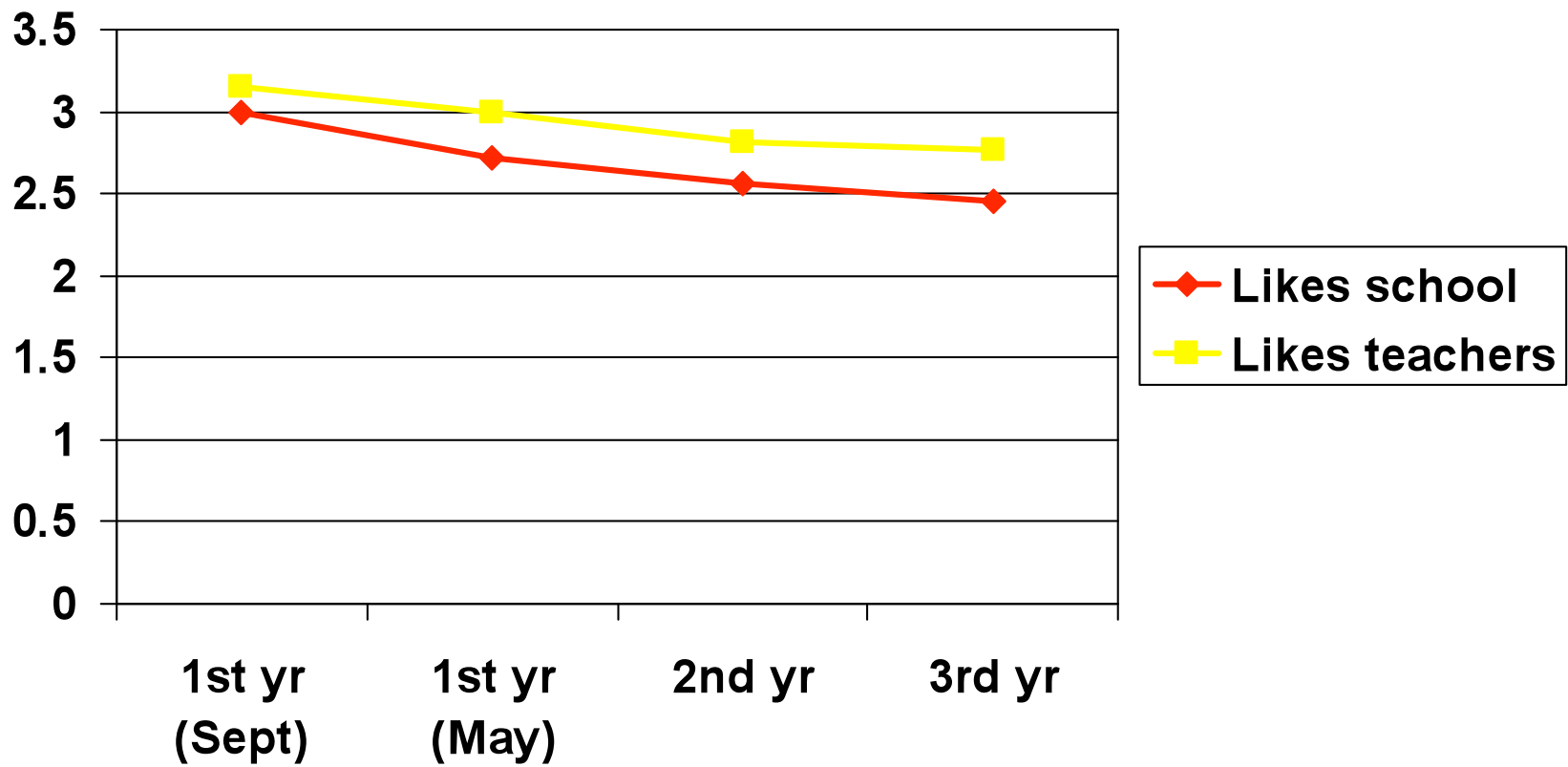
- A quarter took private tuition outside school
- Related to being bad at a subject or poor quality of teaching
- Peer influence:  
I don't think you really need to do grinds for the Junior Cert but other people are and then if you think oh my god I need to have grinds now as well. (Coed school, mixed intake)

# Trends in school and classroom climate





# Attitudes to school over time





# How do schools influence student engagement?

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- Organisation of learning: ability grouping and access to subject levels
- School climate



# Lower streamed classes

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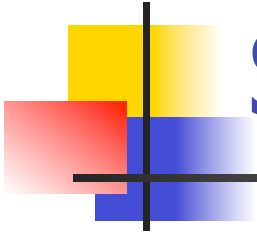
- Usually foundation/ordinary level
- Slow pace of instruction
- Lower expectations

We don't do our homework so we don't get it.  
Teachers know we don't do it so they don't bother checking it.

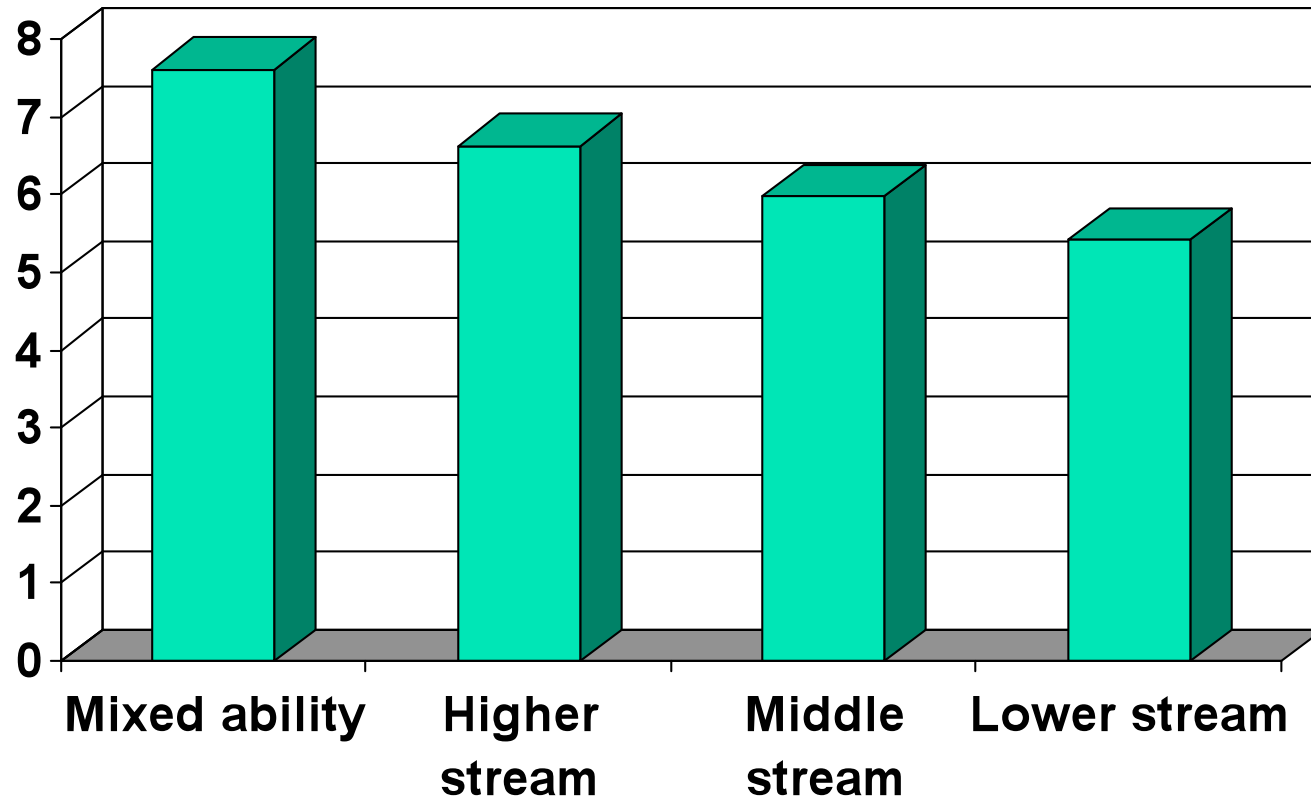
We don't get homework.

We never did get homework.

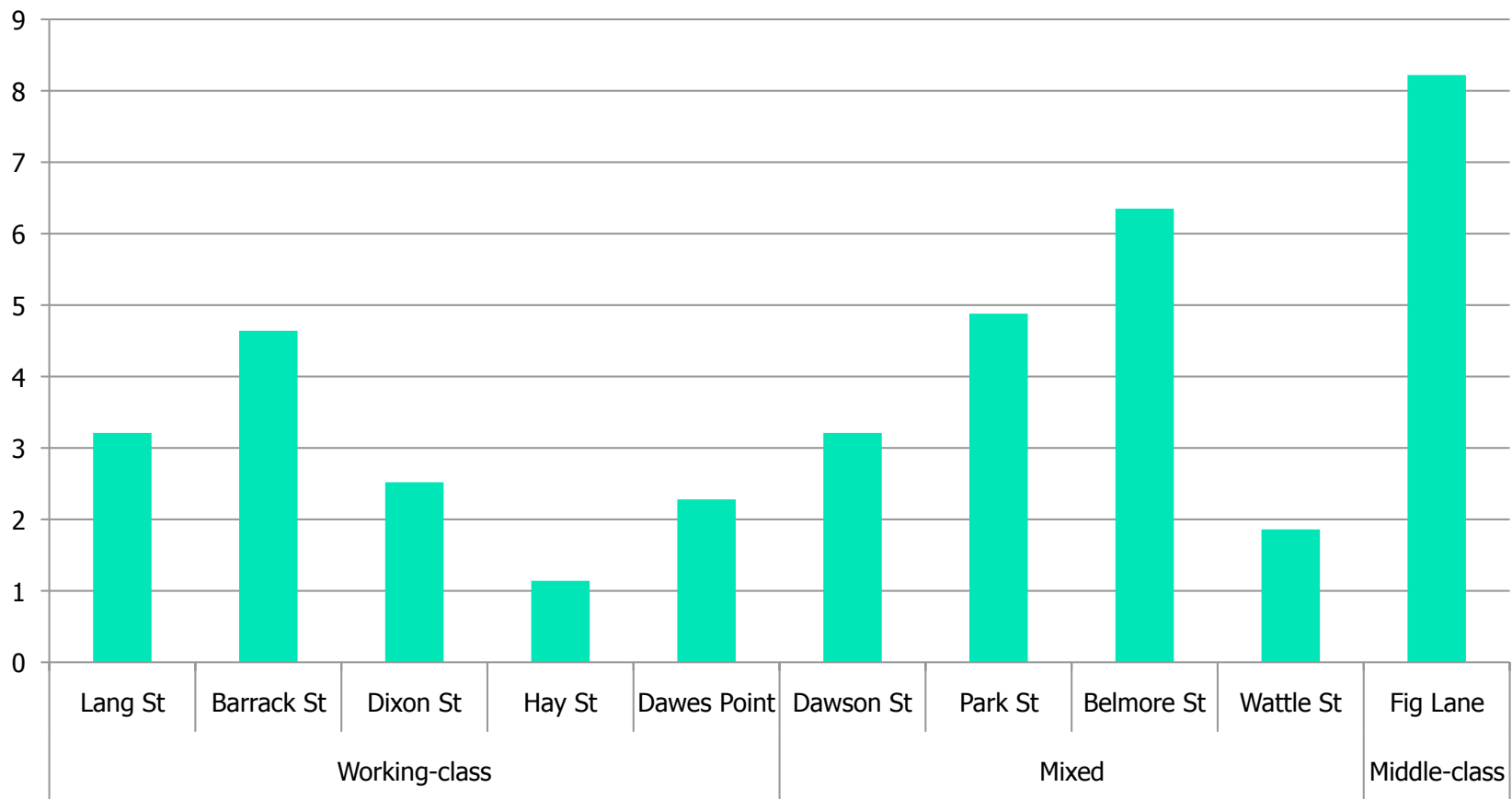
We're sort of the thick class. (Lower/middle streams, coed school)



# Streaming and JC Grades



# Number of higher level subjects by school (second lowest reading quintile)





# School climate

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- Quality of teacher-student and student-student interaction
- Significant impact on educational achievement and school retention
- Negative interaction increases more in working-class schools and in lower streamed classes



# Consequences of junior cycle experiences

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- Access to senior cycle programmes
- Access to senior cycle subjects
- Access to subject levels at senior cycle (can move 'down' but not 'up')
- Staying in school
- Leaving Certificate performance
- Post-school opportunities



# Implications for policy development

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- Continuity and discontinuity between the primary and post-primary systems
- 'Back wash' effect of Junior Certificate exam on teaching and learning
- Curriculum
  - Coverage v. active teaching methods
  - Subject levels



# What can schools do?

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- More flexible approach to ability grouping
- Promote access to higher level subjects
- Actively engage students in lessons; use diverse teaching methods
- Positive social climate
- Positive behaviour policy; student involvement in school life