



Age or Stage? Influences on the Transition to Junior Cycle Education

Emer Smyth, ESRI



Introduction

- Large body of research on changes in school engagement and self-concept over the transition to second-level education
- Difference of opinion over whether this reflects:
 - Adolescent development, with a decline in subjective well-being as children and young people grow older
 - Lack of consistency between primary and second-level schooling in terms of curriculum, approach to teaching and learning, and social relationships
 - Mismatch between developmental needs and educational structures (Eccles)



Introduction (2)

- **But are changes in engagement related only to the transition period?**
- **Previous research on student experiences in second-level education indicates that second year is *the key year* for student engagement.**
- **Experiences at this stage have longer term effects on student outcomes into senior cycle and even beyond.**
- **But is it age or stage?**



GUI Study

- **Advantage of GUI child cohort wave 2: young people are the same age but evenly divided between first and second year of junior cycle**
- **Outcomes:**
 - School engagement (subjective): attitude to school
 - School engagement (objective): attendance
 - Engagement with learning: intellectual and school status (Piers-Harris subscale)
- **Use of multilevel models to take account of sampling within schools at primary level**

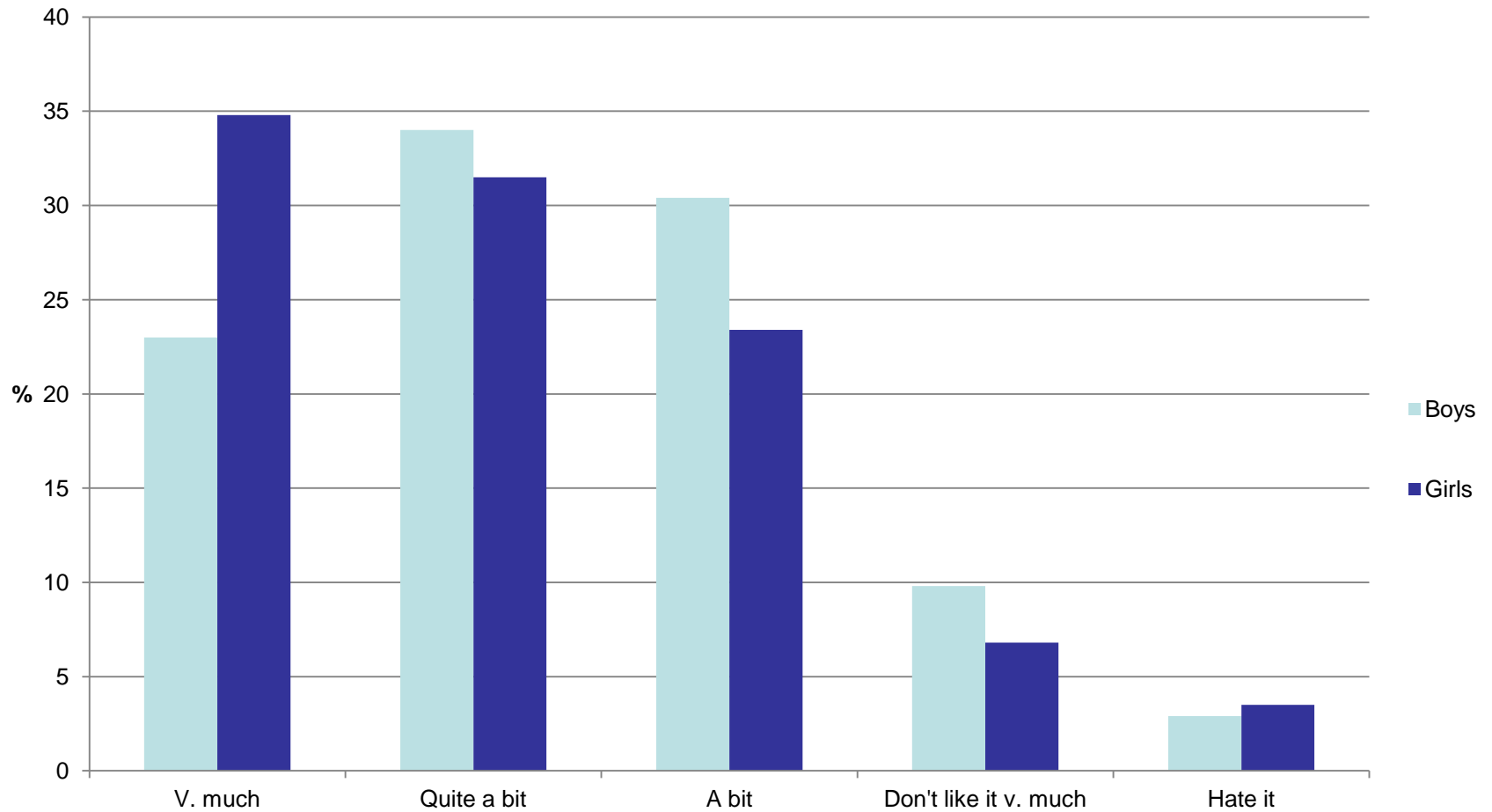


Explanatory variables

- **Background factors:**
 - Gender
 - Social class
 - Mother's education
 - Immigrant
 - SEN
- **Primary school experiences (age 9):**
 - School engagement
 - Reading and maths achievement
- **Second-level experiences:**
 - Transition difficulties
 - Quality of interaction with teachers

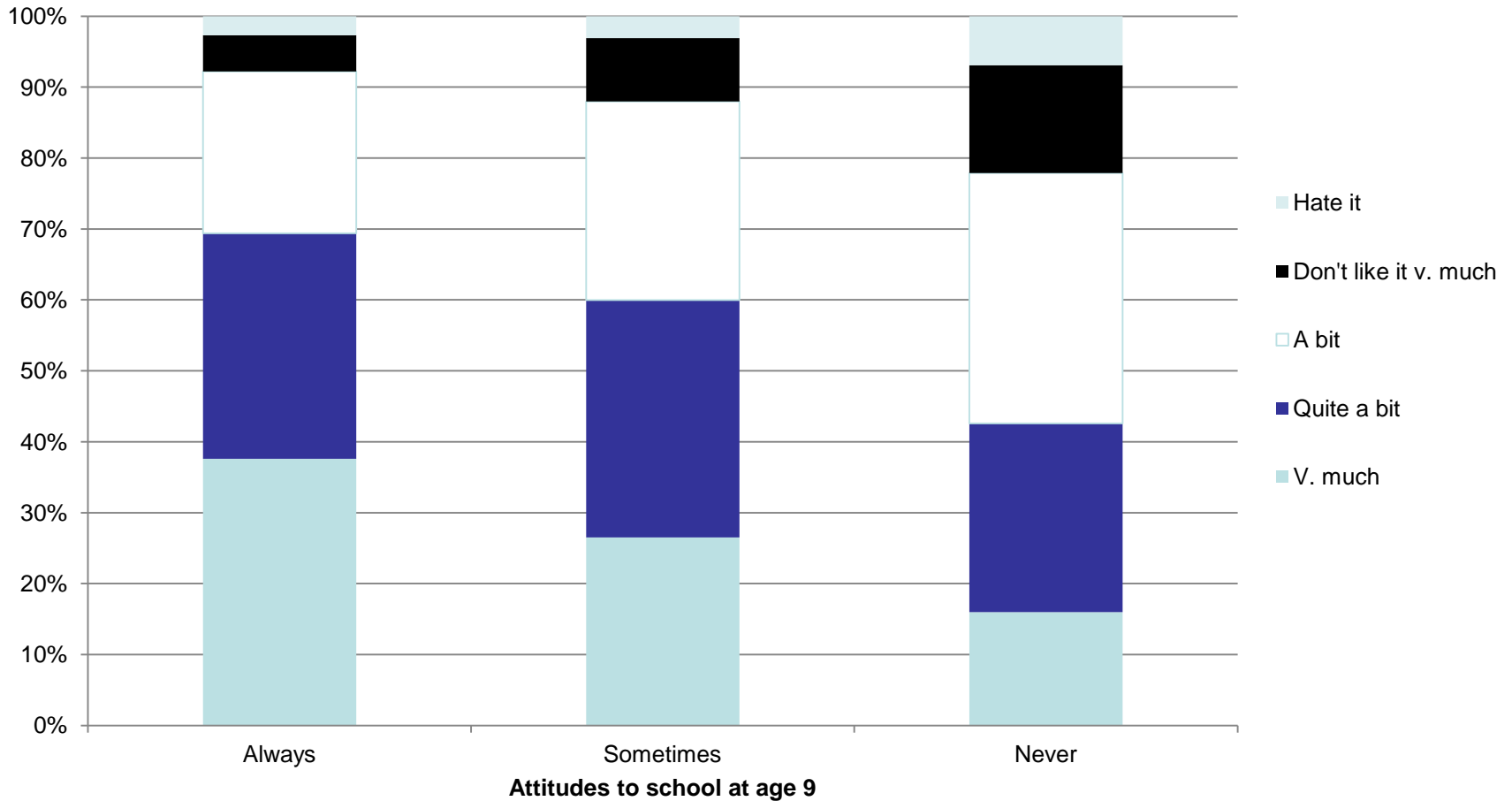


Liking school





Attitudes at 13 by attitudes at 9



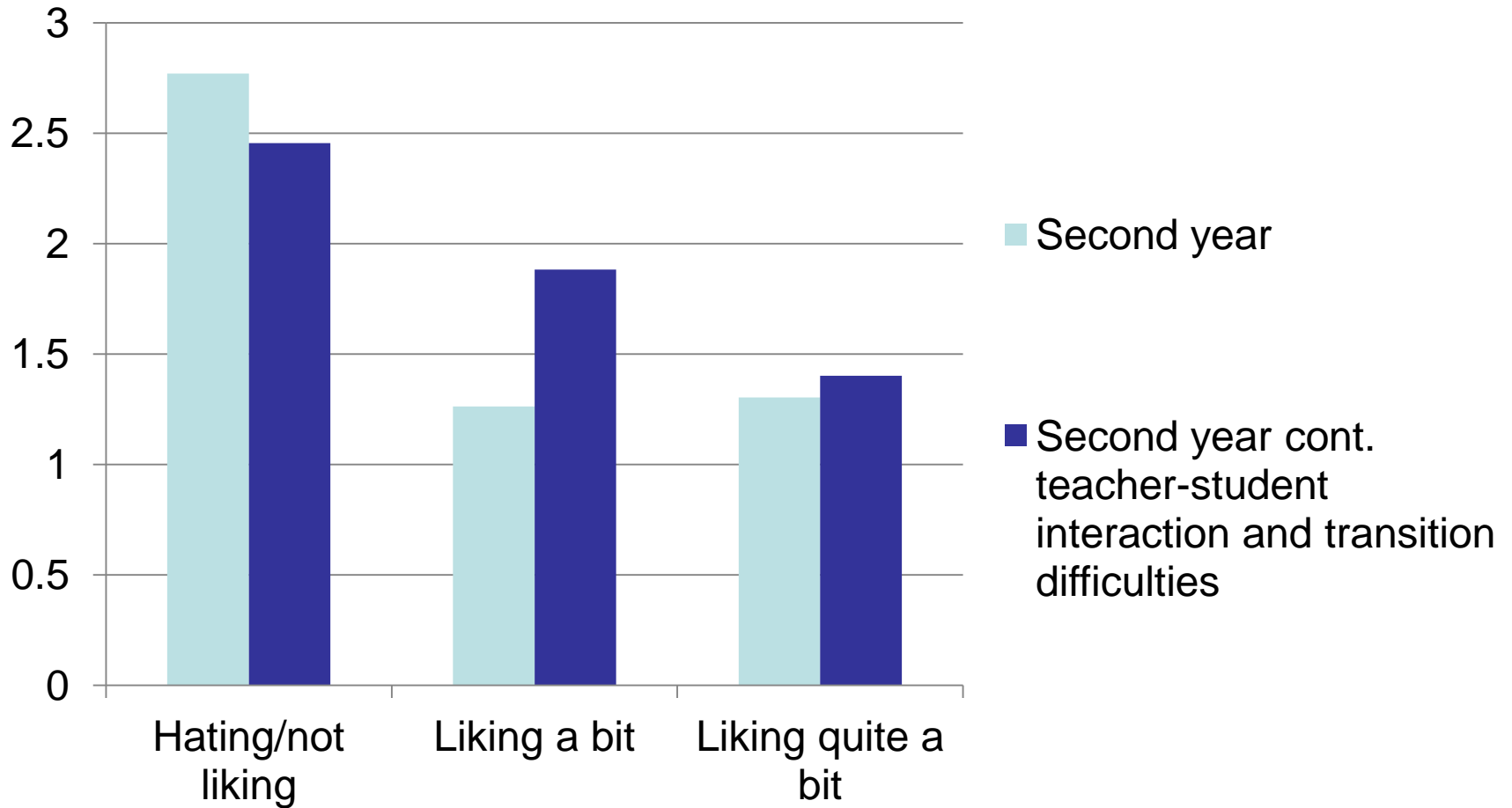


Influences on attitudes at 13

- **Gender**
- **SEN**
- **Social background: mother's education, lone parents**
- **Primary school experiences:**
 - Attitudes to school
 - Relationship with teacher
 - Liking reading and maths
 - Reading achievement: lowest quintile v. others
- **Second-level experiences:**
 - Transition difficulties
 - Quality of interaction with teachers

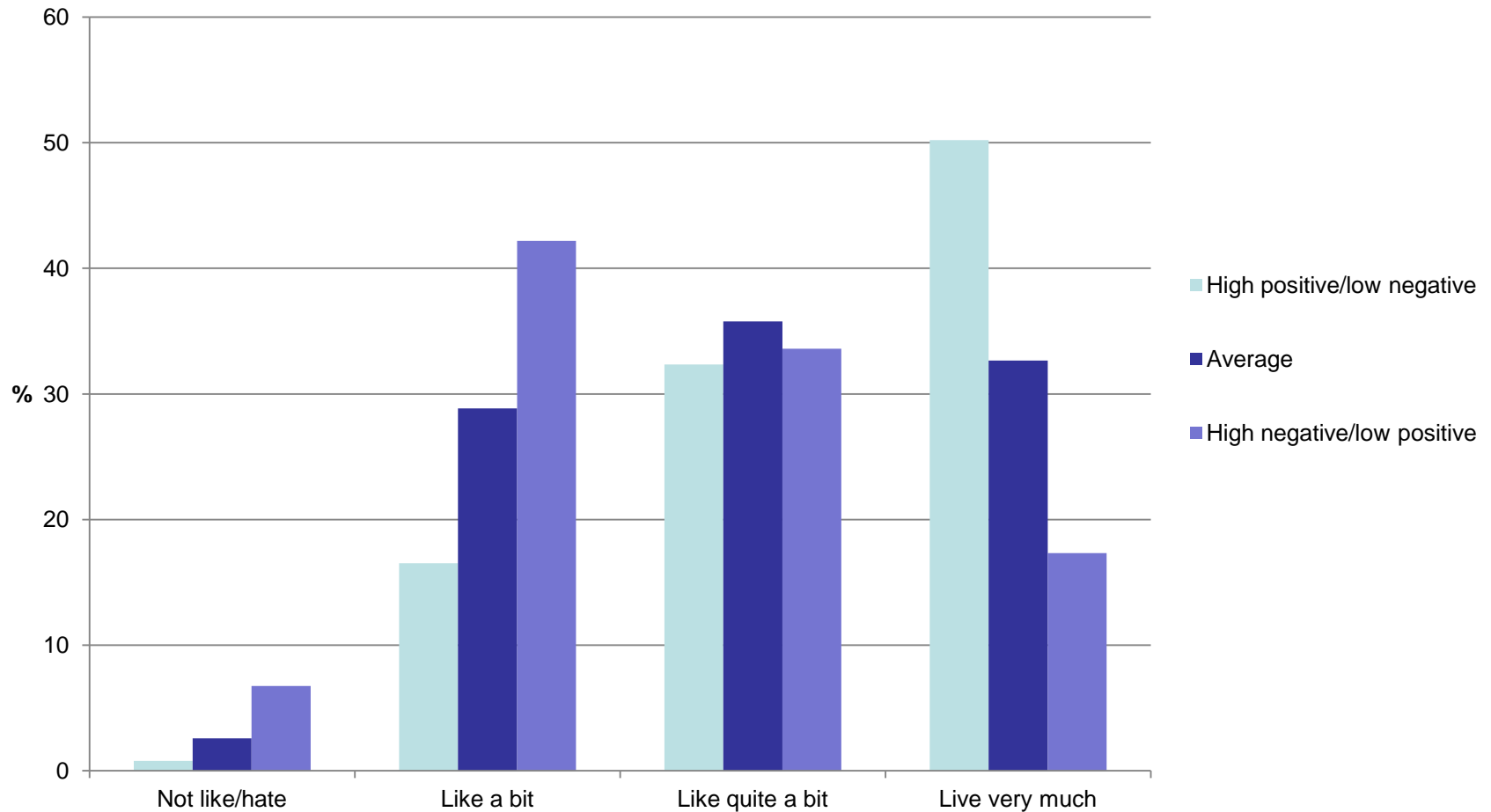


Year group and liking school



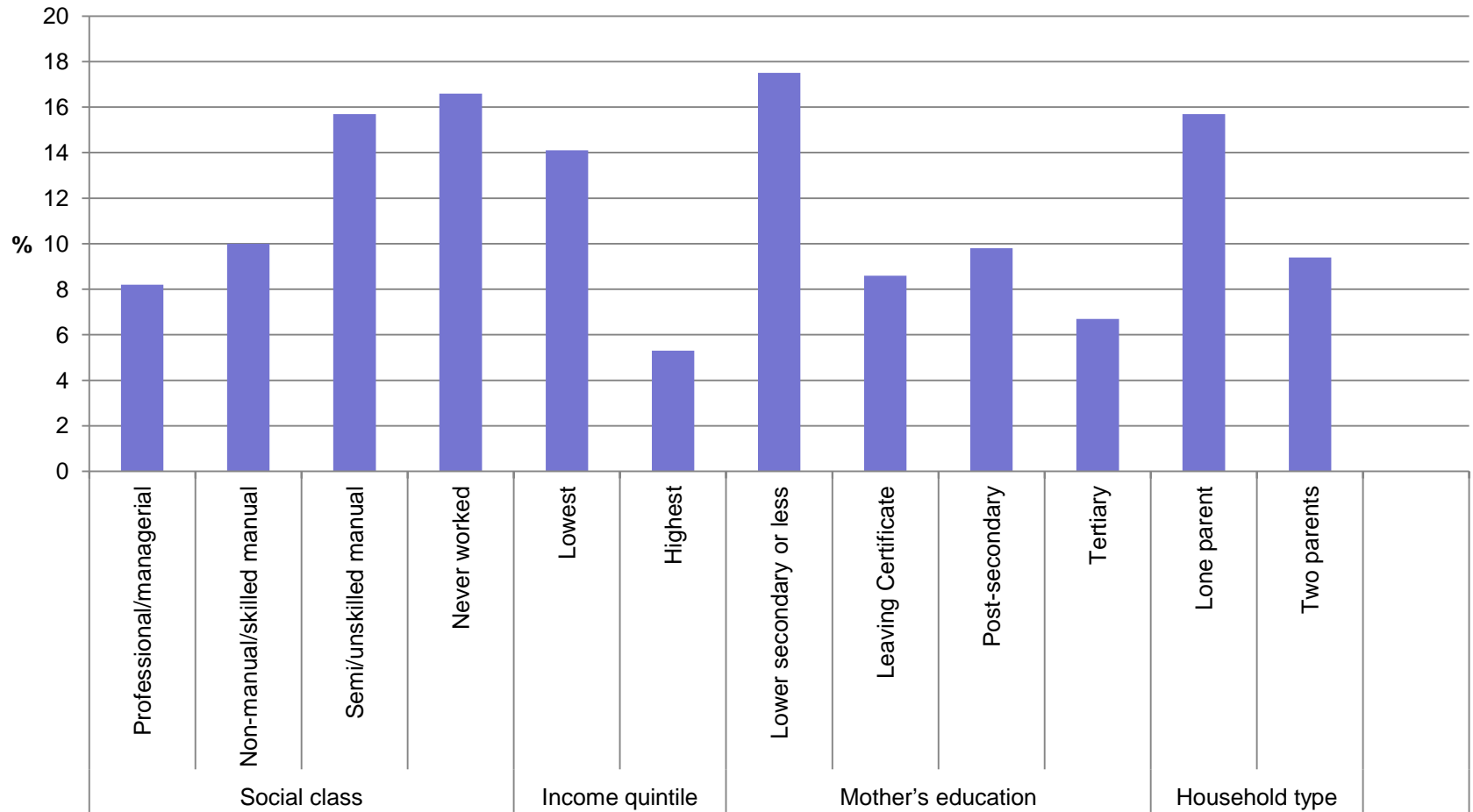


Liking school and teacher-student interaction





Absent for 11+ days



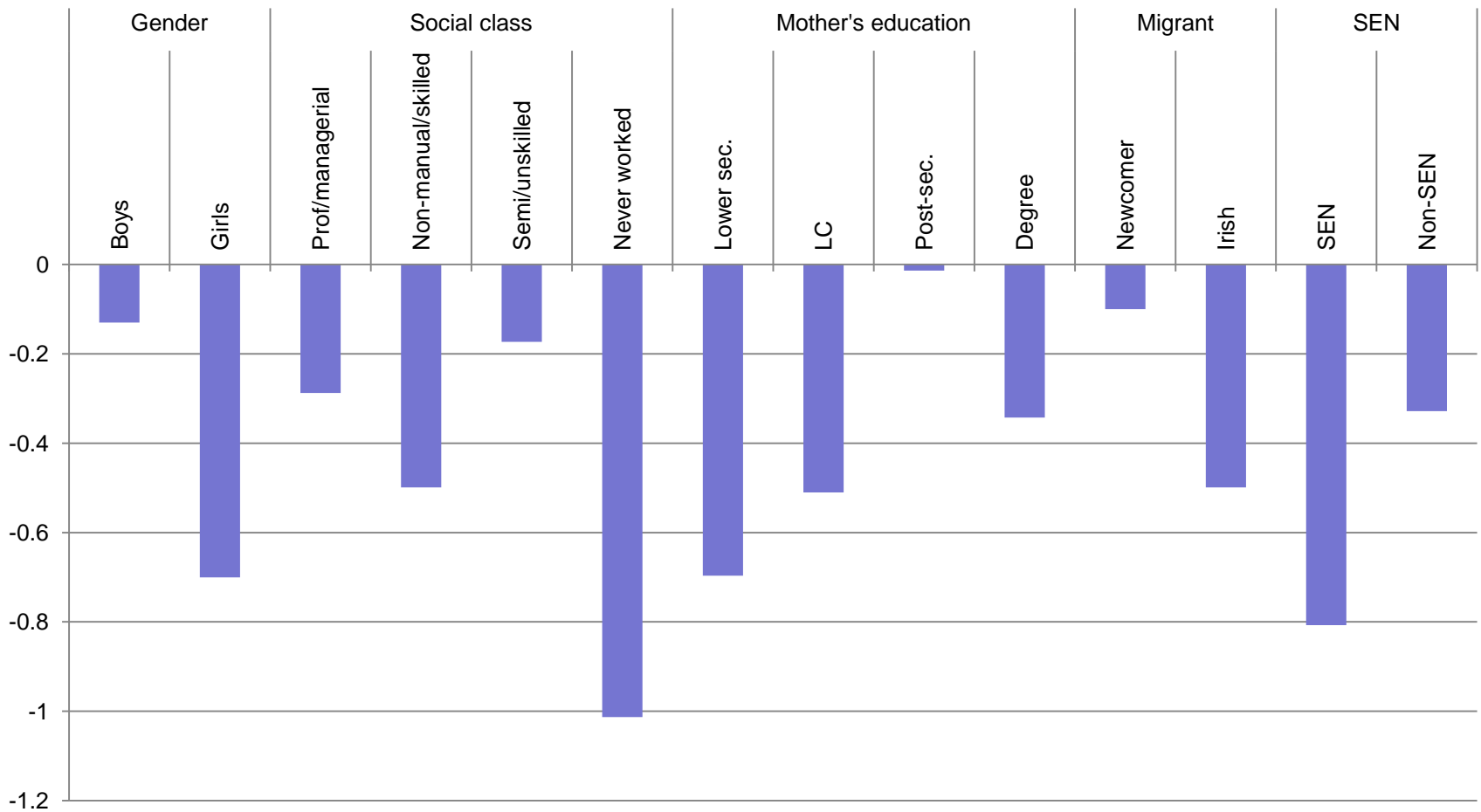


Attendance and school experiences

- **Primary experiences:**
 - Significant relationship with attendance at age 9
 - School engagement at age 9
 - No consistent relationship with prior achievement
- **Second-level experiences:**
 - Year group: absenteeism is significantly higher among those in 2nd year
 - Transition difficulties
 - Quality of interaction with teachers



Piers-Harris Intellectual Status 9-13



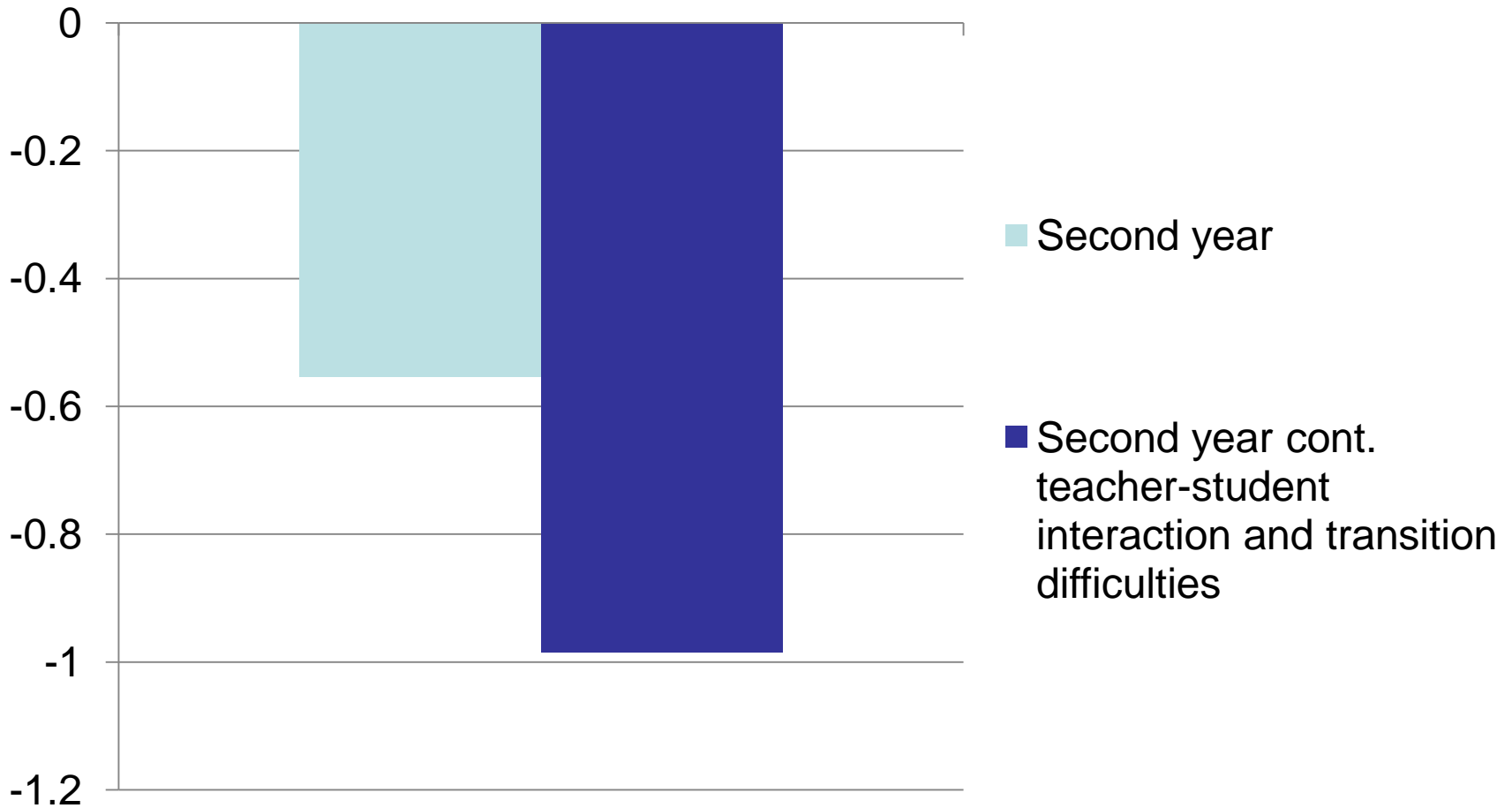


Academic self-image

- **Intellectual status at age 9 – stability and fluidity**
- **Primary school experiences:**
 - School engagement
 - Relationship with teacher
 - Liking reading and maths
 - Maths achievement
- **Second-level experiences:**
 - Transition difficulties
 - Quality of teacher-student interaction
 - Difficulty of, and interest in, second-level subjects



Year group and intellectual status





Conclusions

- **Stage within the junior cycle matters: second years are less positive about school and their capacity to cope with schoolwork than first years**
- **This difference partly reflects more negative interaction with their teachers**
- **Engagement at primary level has longer term effects on second-level engagement**
- **Second-level school climate (quality of teacher-student interaction) is highly predictive of student engagement – implications for policy (junior cycle reform) and practice**