

# Early entry to GCSE examinations

## Early entry to GCSE examinations

There has been a significant increase in the number of pupils being entered early for GCSEs (i.e. at the end of year 10 or part way through year 11) particularly in mathematics and English. Whilst there has been a long history of this practice for the highest achieving pupils, the trend is increasing for pupils of all abilities. For many, this can be detrimental to their overall performance.

The aim of this paper is to present the statistical information on the difference in final grades between those that do and do not enter early and therefore raise awareness of the potential impacts associated with early entry that should be taken into consideration when deciding whether to enter a pupil early for their GCSE examination(s), weighed up against the benefits of encouraging studying a broader curriculum within the subject.

The main argument against early entry is that statistically, early entry candidates perform worse overall than those who do not enter early, even when taking account of resits (see below for precise figures). This suggests that some students are being entered for GCSEs before they are ready. Also, candidates could be 'banking' their grade as soon as they get C or above and as a result not achieve their full potential.

There are also other factors to consider:

- Dropping the subject part way through the year may lead to pupils losing interest in the subject and therefore less likely to progress beyond GCSE.
- Early entry could lead to the programme of study being delivered over a compressed time period, which in turn could result in coaching to the test rather than delivery of a broad curriculum.
- Early entry also increases the number of retakes (to secure the required grade) which has additional cost implications. It is better to ensure pupils are adequately prepared for the exam first time round.

## Headline information

- The number of early entries has seen huge increases between 2008 and 2010 (in 2007, approximately 5% of the English and mathematics GCSE cohorts entered the exam early. By 2010, this proportion had risen to around 25% of the cohorts).
- In both English and mathematics, early entrants overall perform worse than pupils who do not enter early. For example, in GCSE mathematics and English in 2010:

Grade	Percentage of early entrants (2010 cohort) <b>mathematics</b>	Percentage of all pupils (2010 cohort) <b>mathematics</b>	Grade	Percentage of early entrants (2010 cohort) <b>English</b>	Percentage of all pupils (2010 cohort) <b>English</b>
A*	5%	6%	A*	2%	5%
A	9%	13%	A	9%	13%
B	14%	18%	B	19%	22%
C	36%	28%	C	38%	29%
G	4%	4%	G	2%	1%
U	1%	1%	U	1%	1%

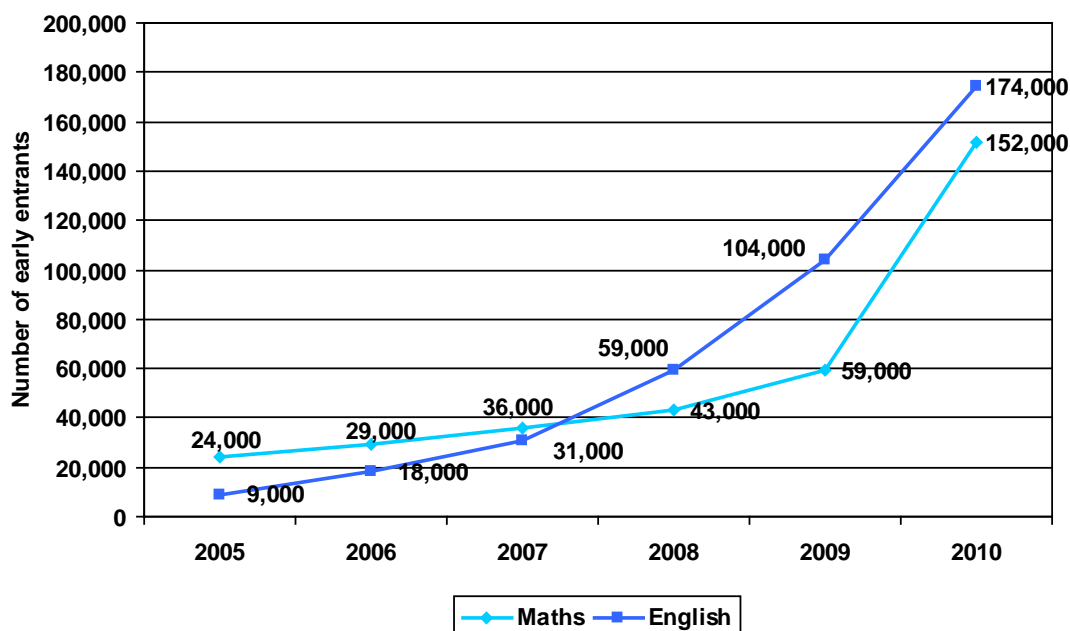
- The figures quoted above are for the final grade achieved, including any re-sits taken. A large proportion of pupils who achieve a grade D or worse in their early attempt go on to retake the subjects. In 2010 68% of early entrants in mathematics went on to retake at the end of year 11, only 45% of whom achieved a higher grade at retake.
- For pupils who entered GCSE mathematics at the end of year 10, and did not achieve the expected level in KS2 mathematics, the majority of pupils did not achieve a grade C and retook; but very few subsequently achieved a grade C. Many high attainers at Key Stage 2 (those who achieve a level 5 in mathematics) who enter early do not perform as would be expected in GCSE mathematics, with fewer pupils achieving the highest grades. Only a minority of the high attainers who achieved a grade A in their early attempt were allowed to retake (even though they would have been expected to achieve A\*).
- The prior attainment of the school seems to be an important factor in the number of early entrants at the school. Lower attaining schools are more likely to have early entrants, and are more likely to have a large proportion of their pupils entering early. Independent schools were least likely to have early entrants. In 2010 almost half of the below floor schools had at least 50% of pupils entering mathematics early. This is against a figure of 20% of all schools.
- The statistical evidence so far indicates that for lower achieving pupils, there is little discernable benefit in early entry other than increasing opportunities to re-take before the end of KS4 which still does not improve the overall comparative result. For pupils who achieve level 4 or above at KS2 (and would therefore be

expected to achieve grade A\*-C at GCSE) the average final grade is lower for early entrants. Higher attaining pupils are therefore being disadvantaged by entering early and not achieving their full potential.

## Early entrants in GCSE English and mathematics – full data

**Chart 1** (below) shows how early entries have increased since 2005.

**Chart 1: Early entries in GCSE maths and English**

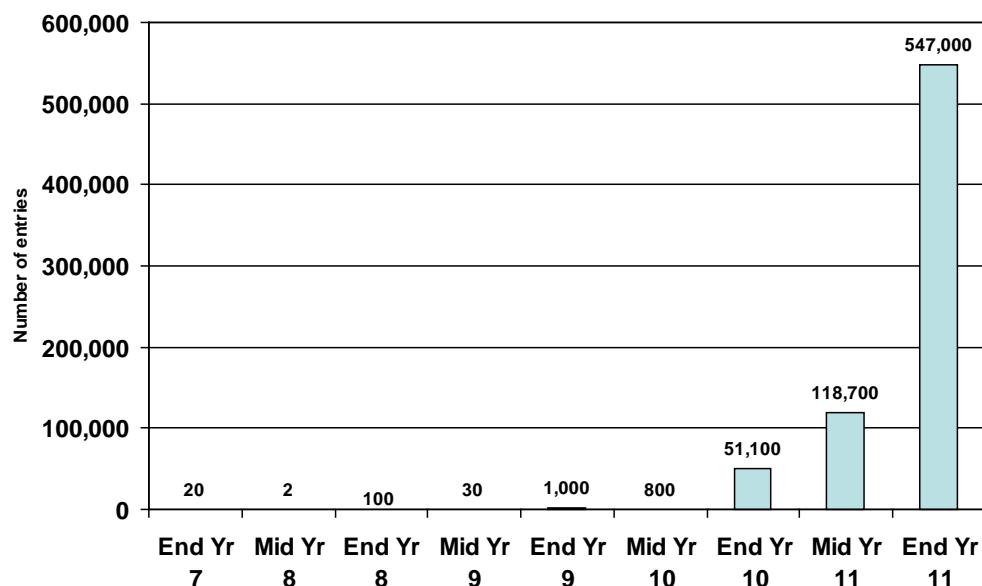


In 2005 less than 5% of the GCSE cohort entered mathematics early, with only 2% of the cohort entering English early. Early entries in both subjects steadily increased from 2005 to 2007, although the proportion of the cohort entering early in either subject was still only about 5% in 2007.

Since 2008 early entries in English began to rise dramatically, with entries almost tripling between 2008 and 2010. In mathematics the number of early entries continued to increase steadily up to 2009, but between 2009 and 2010 there was a huge increase of almost 100,000 extra pupils entering early. In 2010 almost a quarter of pupils entered mathematics early and just over a quarter entered English early.

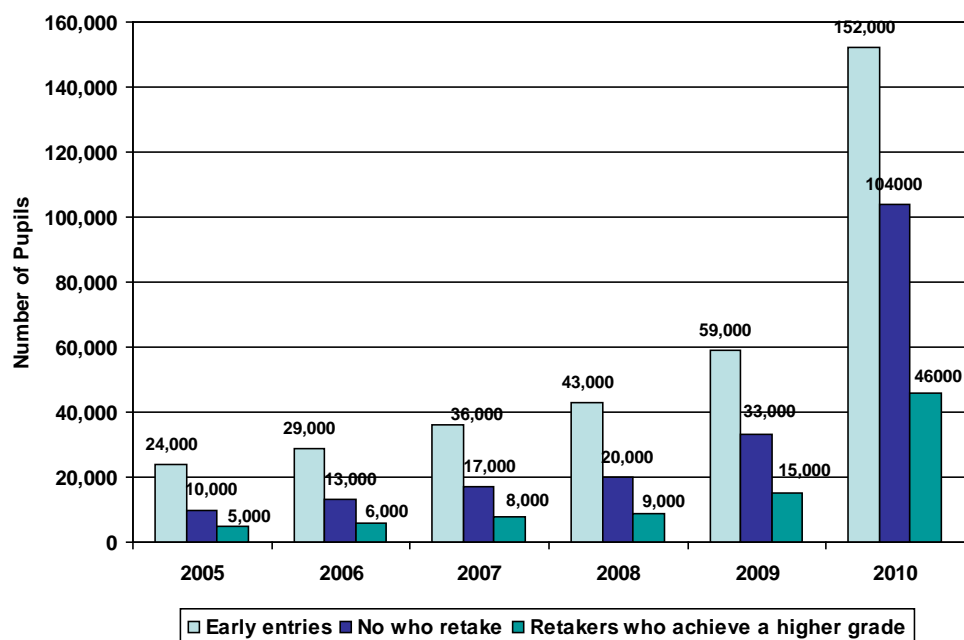
**Chart 2** shows when pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 in 2010 entered GCSE mathematics. The majority of pupils do enter at the end of year 11, although significant numbers also enter at the end of year 10 and midway through year 11. Pupils were entered as early as the end of year 7.

Chart 2: GCSE mathematics entries



**Chart 3** below shows the number of early entries who retake at the end of year 11, and the number of these retakers who achieve a higher grade. In 2010 68% of pupils who enter early retook at the end of year 11, with 45% of these pupils achieving a higher grade in the retake.

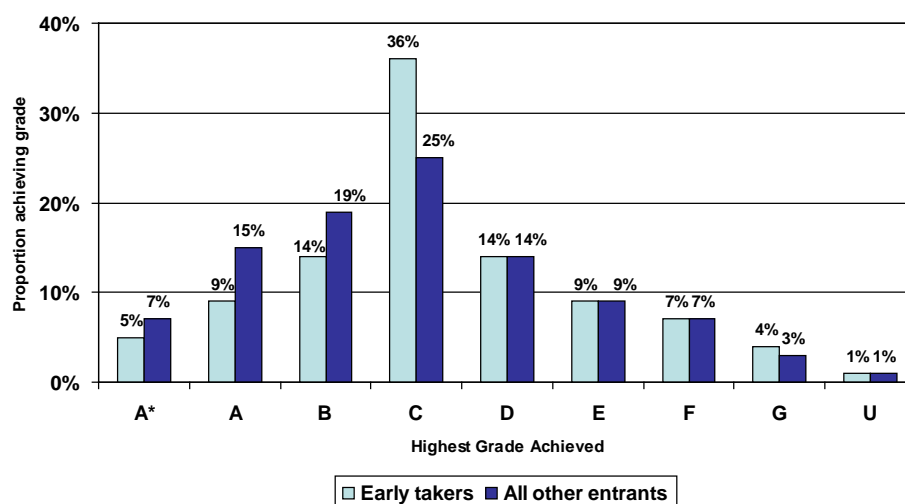
Chart 3: Early entries and retakers in mathematics



## Attainment of early entrants

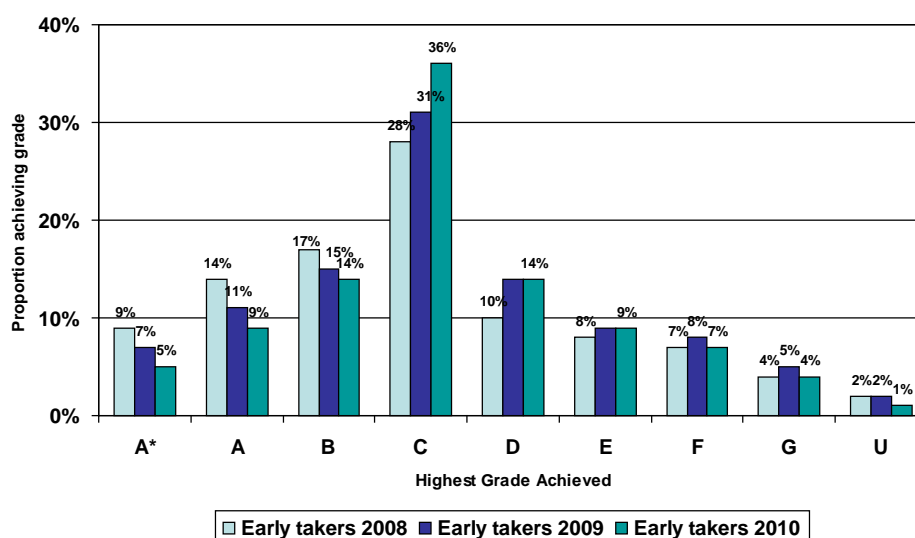
**Chart 4** below shows the performance of early entrants, compared to the performance of all pupils. The chart shows the highest grade achieved by the pupil, so uses the grade achieved in the retake if the pupil achieved a higher grade. Evidently the attainment of early entrants is less than that of other pupils, with a lower proportion achieving A\*, A and B grades. While 41% of pupils who do not enter early achieve these grades, only 29% of early entrants do likewise. Half of early entrants achieve C or D grades.

Chart 4: Performance of early entrants, compared to the performance of all pupils



The performance of early entrants has dropped over recent years, as shown in **chart 5**. In 2008 early entrants were more likely to achieve A\*-B grades, and less likely to achieve C or D grades. This suggests there has been a change in the ability of pupils who are entered early in GCSE mathematics, with those pupils around the grade C/D borderline more likely to enter early than in previous years.

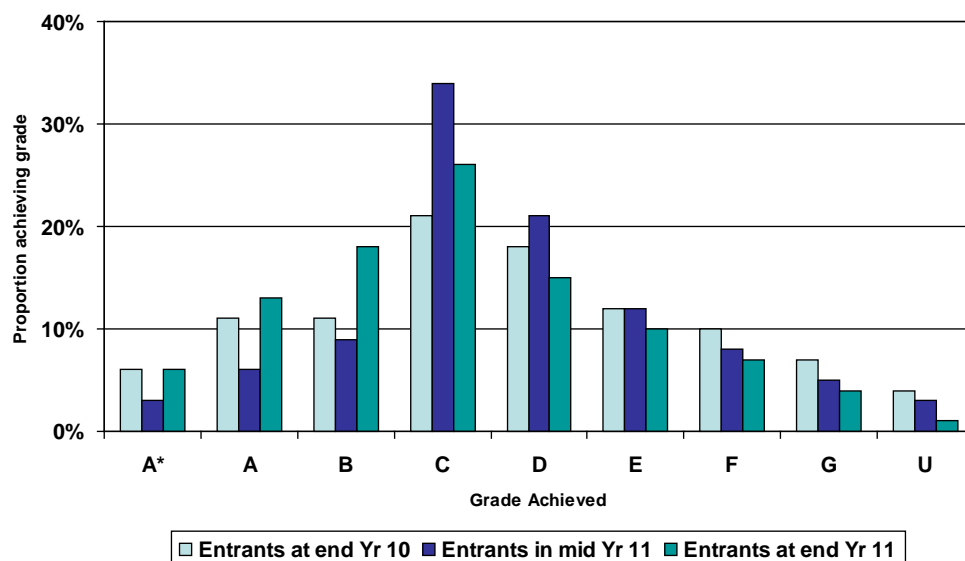
Chart 5: Performance of early entrants, 2008 to 2010



There was quite a big difference in performance depending on when the pupil

attempted GCSE mathematics. As shown in chart 2 almost all pupils enter either at the end of year 10, midway through year 11 or at the end of year 11. **Chart 6** shows how performance differed depending on when the pupil entered.

Chart 6: Performance of early entrants depending on time of entry



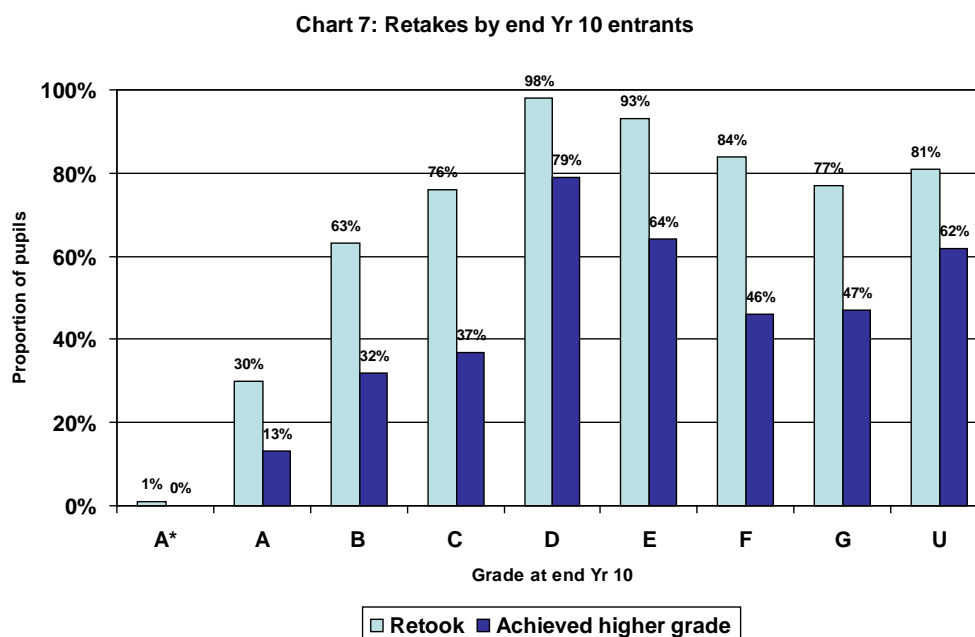
Pupils entering at the end of year 10 did not perform as well as those who did not enter early, with considerably more pupils achieving D grades or worse. However, a greater proportion of these pupils achieved A\* grades than those who did not enter early, and these pupils were much more likely to achieve A\*-C grades than those who entered mid way through year 11.

The majority of pupils entering midway through year 11 achieved C or D grades, and less than a fifth achieved a B grade or higher.



## Pupils entering at the end of year 10

**Chart 7** shows, for pupils who entered GCSE mathematics at the end of year 10, the proportion who retook, and achieved a higher grade, depending on the early grade they achieved.



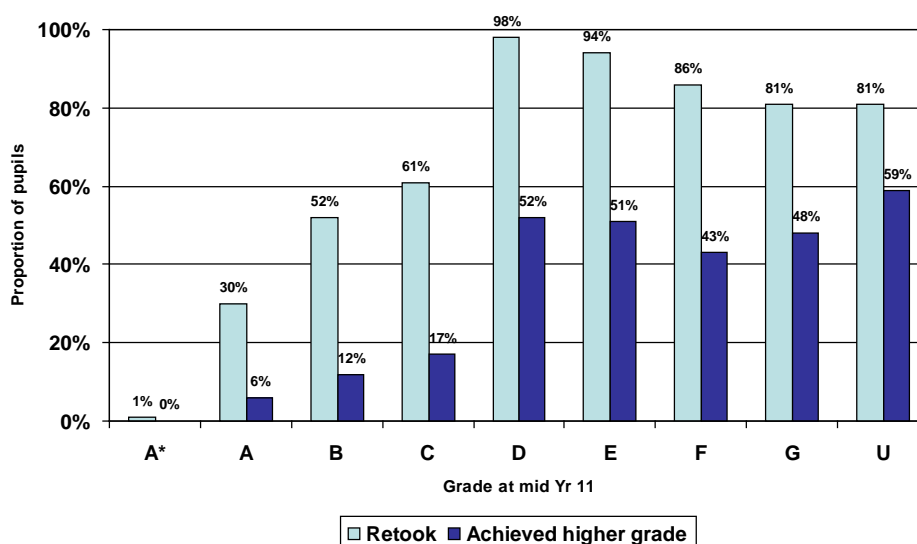
A high proportion of pupils achieving D grades or worse were given the opportunity to retake, with 98% of D grade pupils retaking.

Pupils who achieved an A\*-C grade were less likely to be given the opportunity to retake and potentially achieve a higher grade. Over three quarters of C grade pupils did retake, as did almost two thirds of B grade pupils; but only 30% of A grade pupils did likewise. These pupils may well have achieved an A\* grade if they had been given the opportunity to retake, and pupils achieving this grade are more likely to progress to A level mathematics than pupils who achieve an A grade.

# Pupils entering midway through year 11

**Chart 8** shows the proportion of mid year 11 entrants who retook. Compared to those pupils who entered at the end of year 10, mid year 11 entrants were similarly likely to retake, but were less likely to go on to achieve higher grades.

**Chart 8: Retakes by mid year 11 entrants**



For example 79% of the pupils who achieved a grade D at the end of year 11 and retook, subsequently went on to achieve a higher grade whereas only just over half of the mid year 11 grade D pupils did likewise. Proportions were lower for all other grades as well, with pupils achieving A-C grades unlikely to achieve a higher grade when they retook.

## Multiple entrants

The table below shows the number of entries attempted in GCSE mathematics by pupils who were at the end of Key Stage 4 in 2010:

**Table 9: multiple entries in GCSE mathematics**

Number of entries	Number of pupils
1	484,300
2	98,000
3	12,300
4	280
5	40
6	2

Over 80% of pupils who took GCSE mathematics only attempted the subject once, with a further 16% entering twice.

# English

## Numbers entering GCSE English early

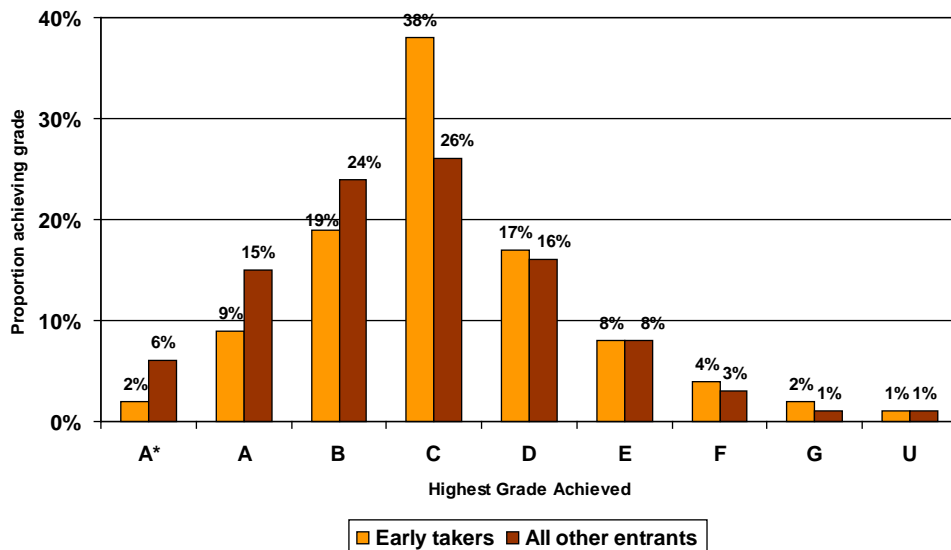
Like in mathematics the majority of attempts in GCSE English are taken at the end of year 11. Almost all early attempts are at the end of year 10 or the middle of year 11. About 80% of early entries are taken in the middle of year 11.

54% of those pupils who took English early retook the subject at the end of year 11, which is less than the proportion of early entrants in mathematics who retook. 45% of these English retakers achieved a higher grade in the retake.

## Attainment of early entrants

As was also the case for early entrants in mathematics, early entrants in English do not perform as well as those pupils who do not enter early.

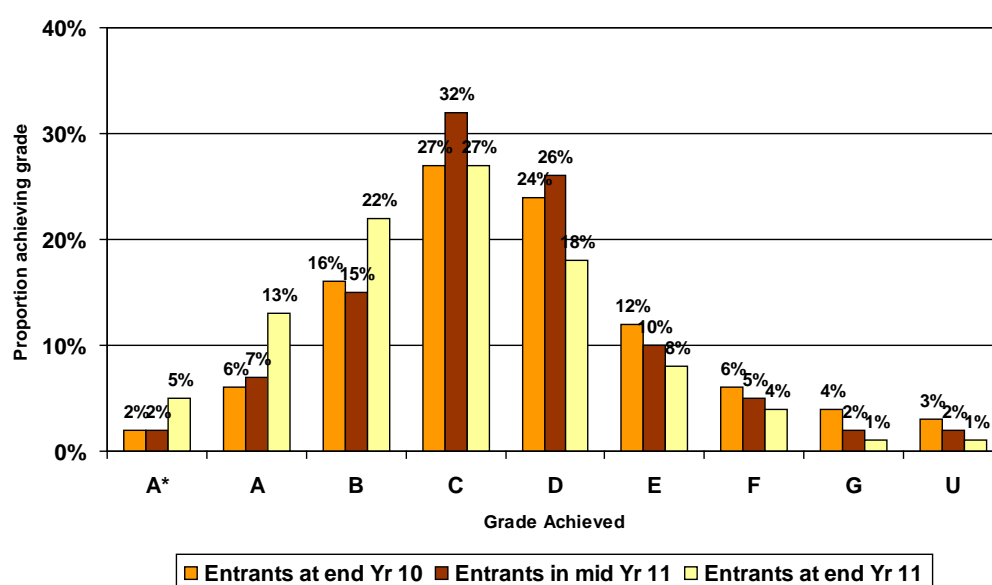
Chart 10: Performance of early entrants in GCSE English



45% of pupils who do not enter early achieve an A\*-B in English, with 21% achieving an A\* or an A grade. These proportions for early entrants were 30% and 11% respectively. Over half of early entrants achieved a C or a D grade.

For English, whether a pupil entered at the end of year 10 or in the middle of year 11 had less effect on performance, as shown in **chart 11**. Mid year 11 pupils were more likely to achieve a C or a D grade while end of year 10 entrants were more likely to achieve a D or lower.

Chart 11: Performance of early entrants depending on time of entry



## Early entries in other GCSE subjects

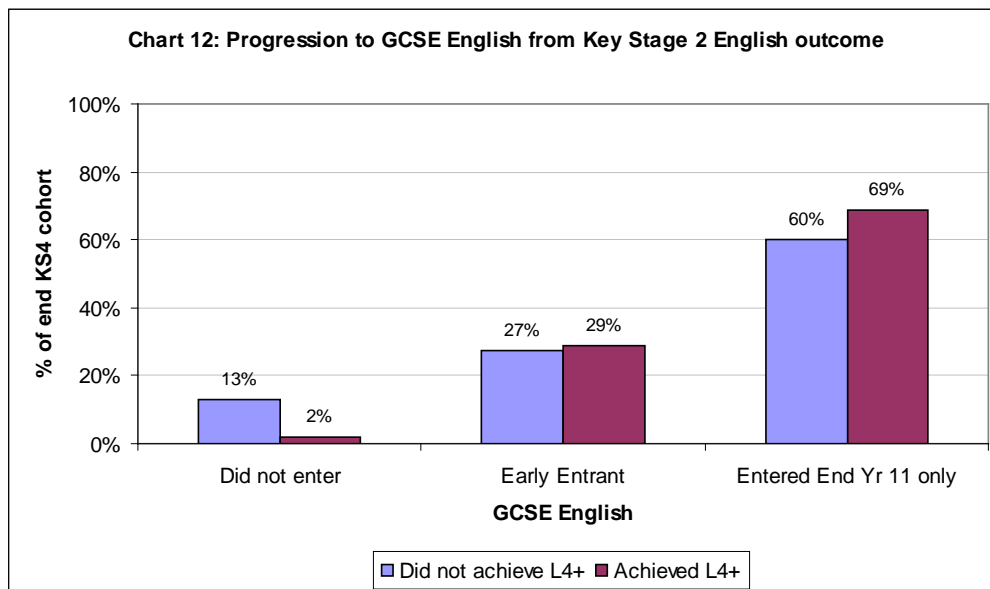
For the three separate sciences, history and geography, the proportion of early entries has remained low and constant for the past four years. In 2010 only 1% of entrants entered these subjects early.

Larger proportions of entries are early for modern foreign languages and the proportion has been growing although at a much slower than has been seen for English and mathematics. In 2010 around 10% of entrants entered French early, and just under 10% entered German and Spanish early.

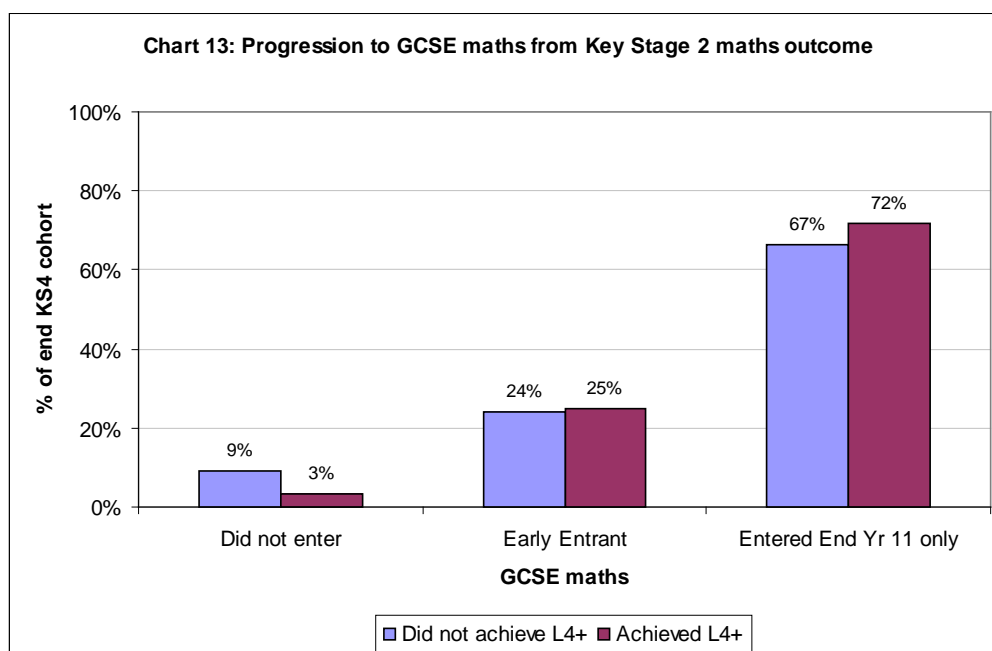
## Prior attainment of early entrants

### Number of early entrants

The proportion of pupils entering English early was similar for both those pupils who achieved a level 4 in English, and for those who didn't, as shown in **chart 12** below.

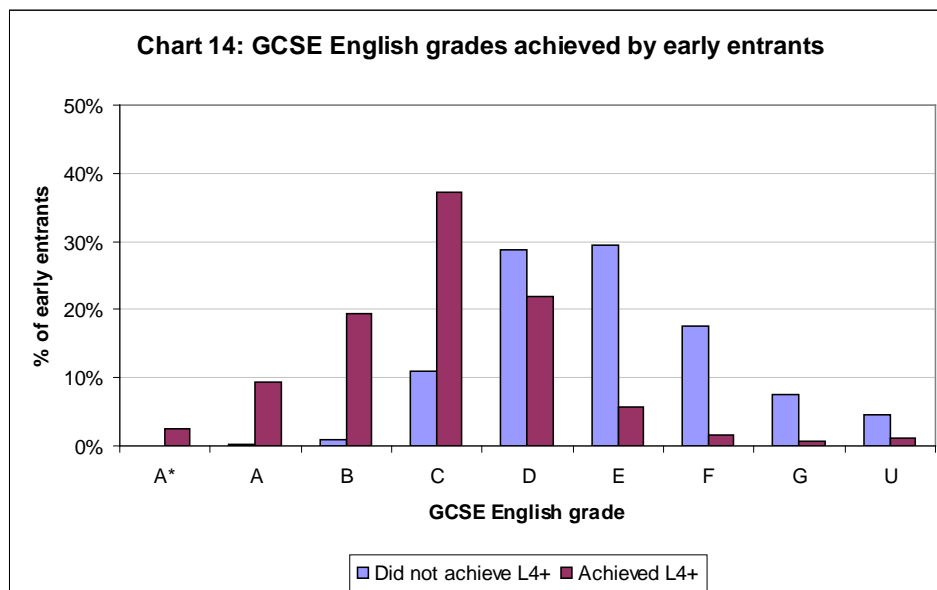


It is a similar story for mathematics:



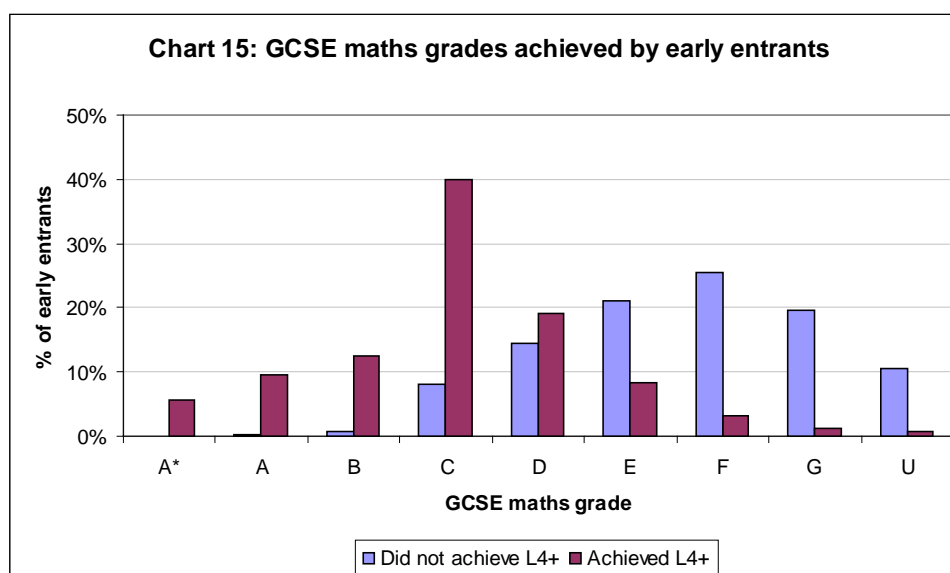
## Performance of early entrants

As one would expect the GCSE English grades achieved by early entrants who did not achieve a level 4 in English at key stage 2 were worse than the grades for those who did achieve at least a level 4:



Only 12% of early entrants who did not achieve a level 4 in KS2 English progressed to achieve a C or higher in GCSE English. Almost a third of pupils who did achieve the expected level at KS2, and therefore would be expected to progress to a grade C or higher at GCSE, did not achieve this grade in their early attempt.

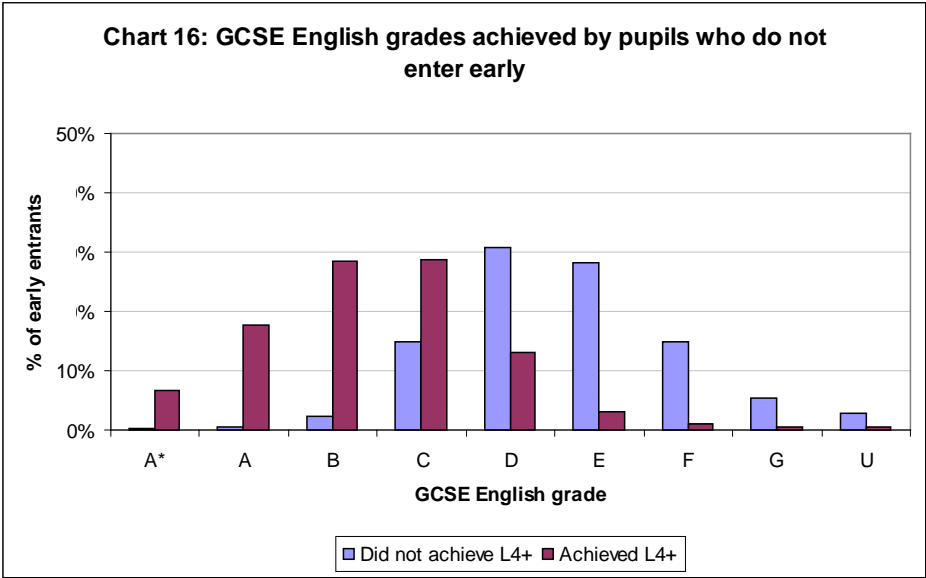
The figures were slightly worse for mathematics early entrants:



Only 9% of those lower achievers in KS2 mathematics achieved a grade C or higher in GCSE mathematics, and these pupils were also more likely to

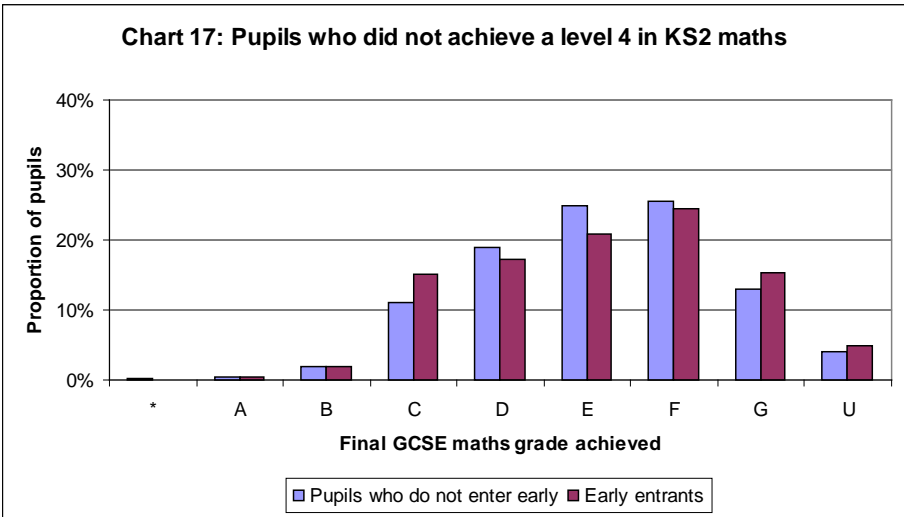
achieve the lowest grades than the early entrants in GCSE English. Over half achieved a grade F or worse in GCSE mathematics; the figure for English is 30%.

For both mathematics and English the performance of early entrants (in their early attempt) was not as good as the performance of pupils who did not enter early. Those who achieved a level 4+ in the subject at KS2 were less likely to achieve A\* and A grades at GCSE, and those who did not achieve a level 4 were less likely to achieve a D or better at GCSE. This chart shows the grade distribution for English for those pupils who did not enter early.



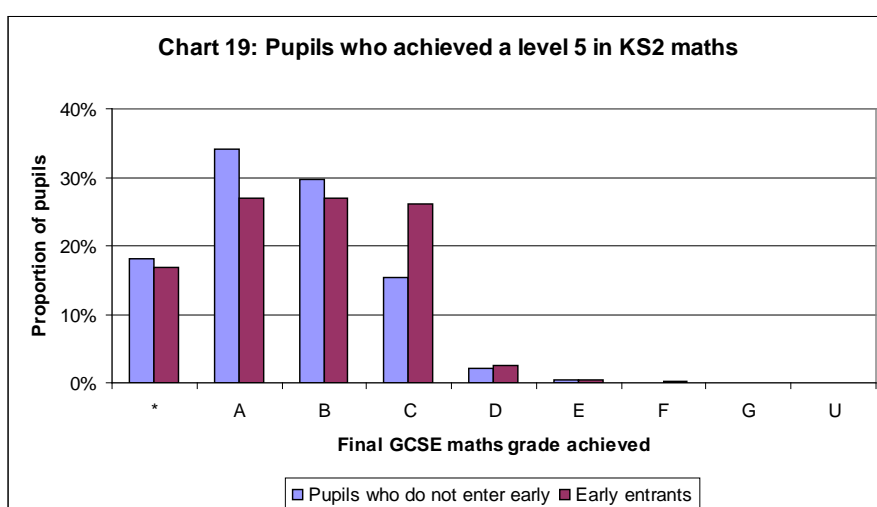
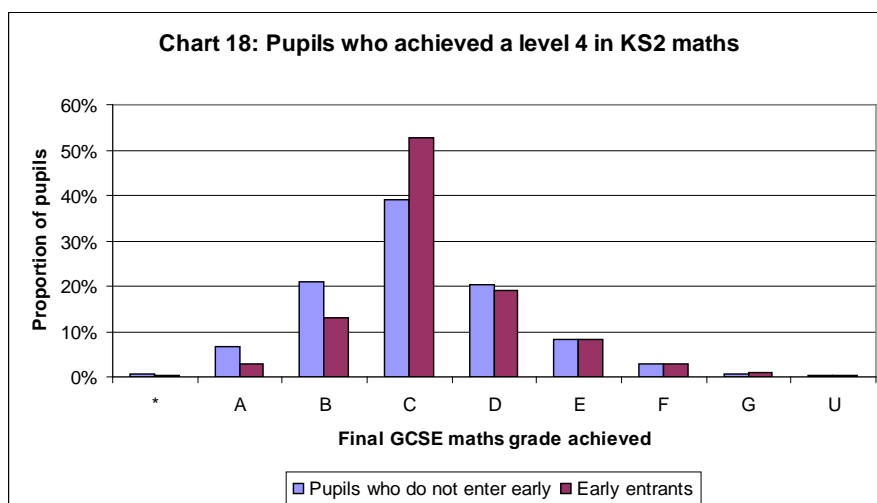
The final outcomes of most pupils did vary depending on whether they were early entrants or not, with similar figures for English and mathematics.

**Chart 17** shows the final GCSE mathematics results achieved by pupils who did not achieve a level 4 or higher in KS2 mathematics:



Early entrants performed slightly better than those pupils who did not enter early, although over 80% of these pupils achieved a D grade or lower. So

although there did seem to be a small group of pupils for whom entering early did increase the likelihood of them achieving a C grade for the majority of pupils there seemed little reason for them to enter early, and entering early was of no obvious benefit.



The charts for pupils achieving a level 4 or a level 5 in KS2 mathematics present a different picture of the effects of early entry:

Both charts suggest that, despite starting from the same prior attainment level, pupils who do not enter early are more likely to achieve higher grades than pupils who enter early.

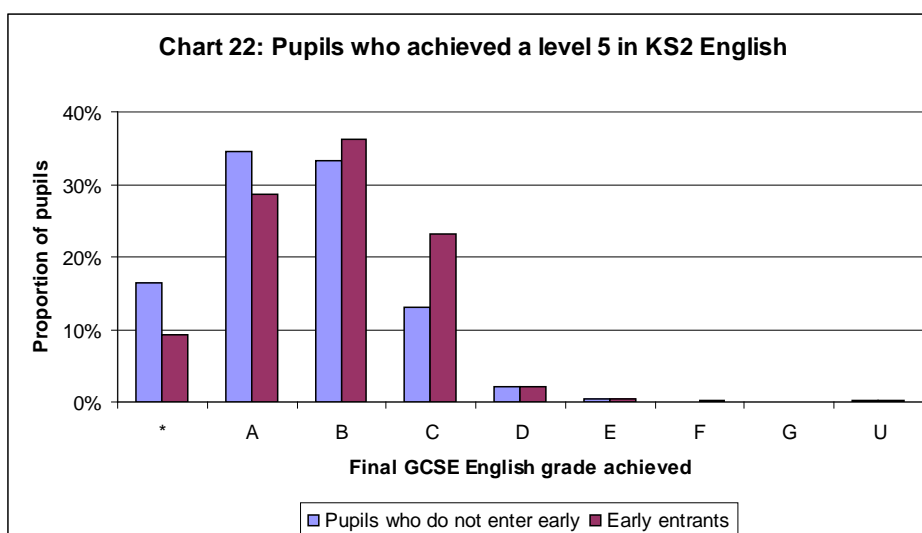
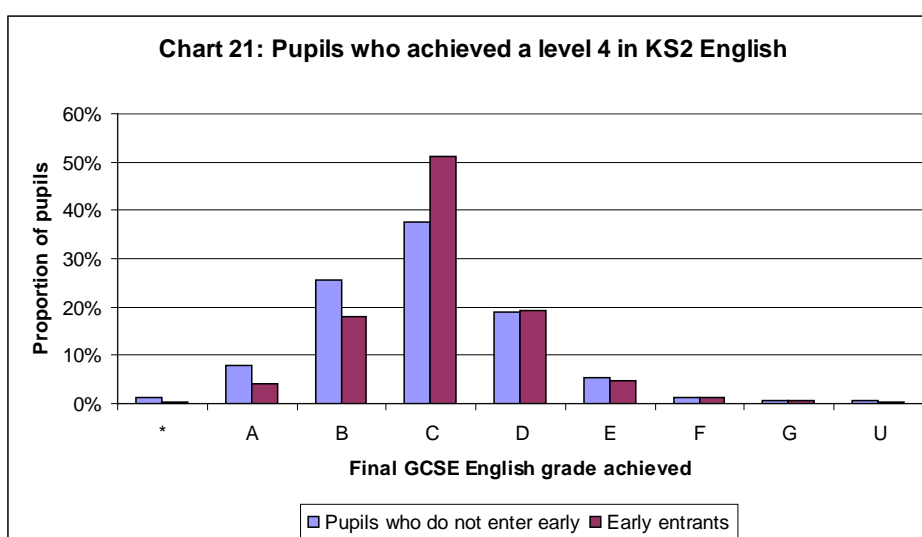
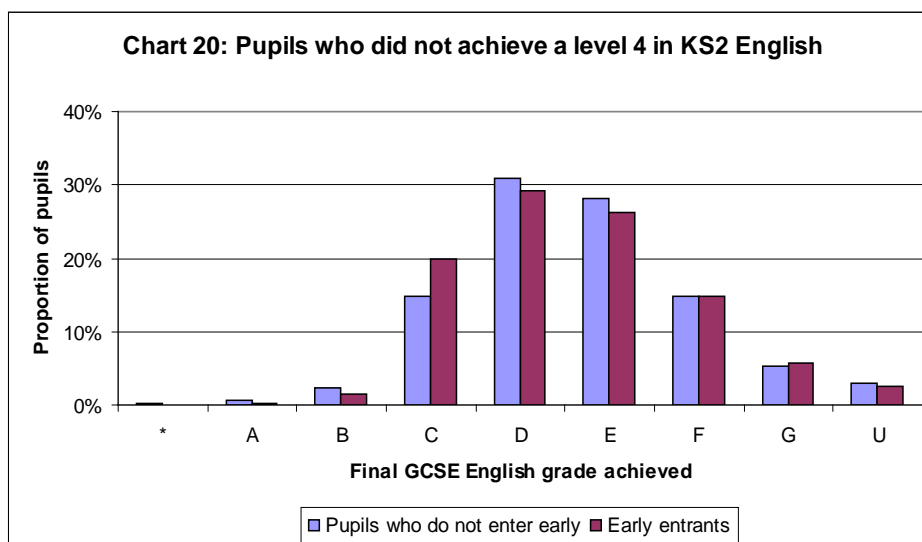
Of those who achieved a level 4 in KS2 mathematics, 28% of pupils who did not enter early achieved an A\*-B grade in GCSE mathematics, compared to 16% of early entrants; the figures for KS2 level 5 pupils were 82% and 71% respectively. Early entrants were much more likely to achieve C grades, when many should have been capable of achieving higher grades – of the level 5 KS2 pupils, all those achieving a grade C did not make expected progress from KS2).

The final performance of level 4 and 5 pupils entering early is worse than the



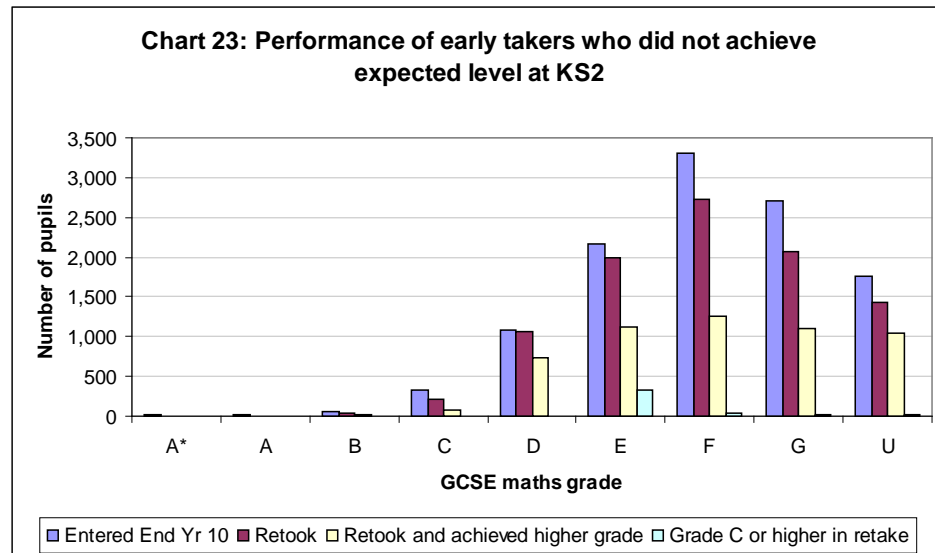
performance of those pupils who do not enter early.

The results for English present a similar case:



## Pupils entering at the end of Year 10

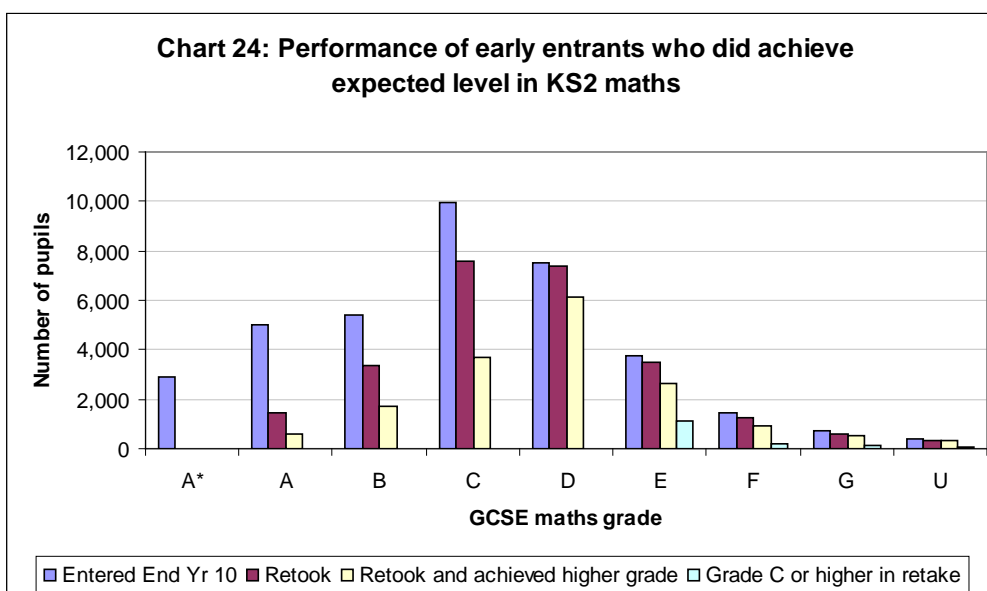
**Chart 23** shows the number of pupils who did not achieve the expected level in KS2 mathematics, but who went on to take GCSE mathematics at the end of Year 10 – there were over 11,000 such pupils.



As stated above most of these pupils achieved a grade D or worse, but it is clear from the chart that the majority of these pupils retook. The proportion of pupils who retook did depend on the grade the pupil achieved; 97% of those who achieved a grade D retook, while 76% of those who achieved a grade G did likewise.

The proportion of pupils who retook and achieved a higher grade also varied by grade, with D grade pupils more likely to achieve a higher grade in their retakes than pupils with lower grades. For grades E and lower an extra bar in the chart shows whether the higher grade was a grade C or better; very few pupils managed this, with only 5% of grade E or lower pupils retaking and consequently achieving a grade C or higher, and 10% of grade D or lower pupils doing likewise.

**Chart 24** shows the same information but for those pupils who did achieve a level 4 in mathematics at KS2:



These pupils were more likely to achieve higher grades, which would explain why those pupils who did not achieve a grade C or higher were more likely to retake than those pupils who did not achieve the expected level at KS2.

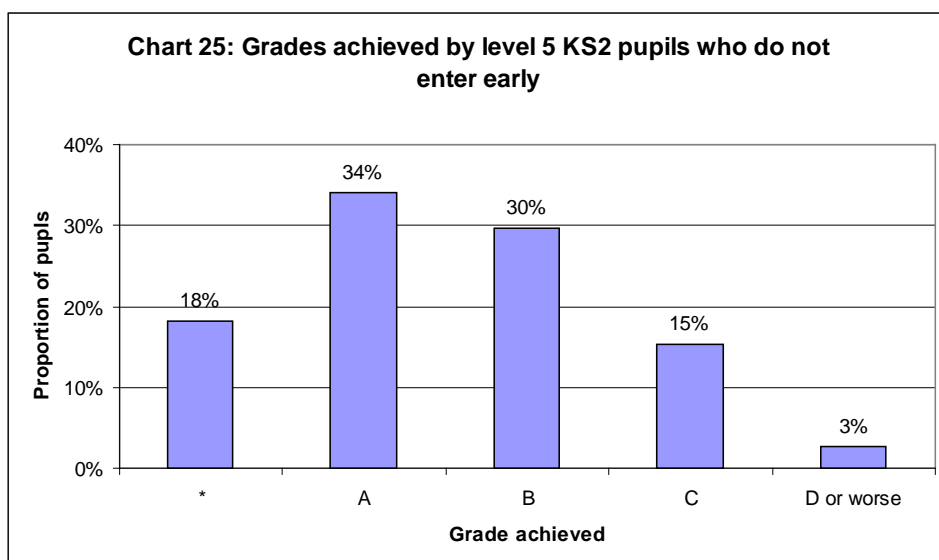
Pupils who achieved a grade D or worse in their early exam are more likely to retake than those pupils who achieve a grade C or higher. The group of pupils who are least likely to retake are those who achieved a grade A or higher – only 29% did so, yet 42% of these improved their grade to an A\* when they did retake.

Pupils achieving A\* grades are much more likely to progress to A level mathematics than those achieving A grades. In 2010 almost 75% of pupils who achieved an A\* in mathematics progressed to A level mathematics, but only 35% of A grade pupils did likewise. The proportion for B grade pupils was only 5% and pupils achieving other grades were very unlikely to progress to A level mathematics.

This suggests that there is a considerable number of pupils who have not reached their potential in GCSE mathematics. If all the pupils who achieved an A grade at the end of year 10 had been allowed to retake, then we would have expected an extra 1,400 or so pupils to have achieved an A\*, and hence these pupils would have been more likely to progress to A level mathematics.

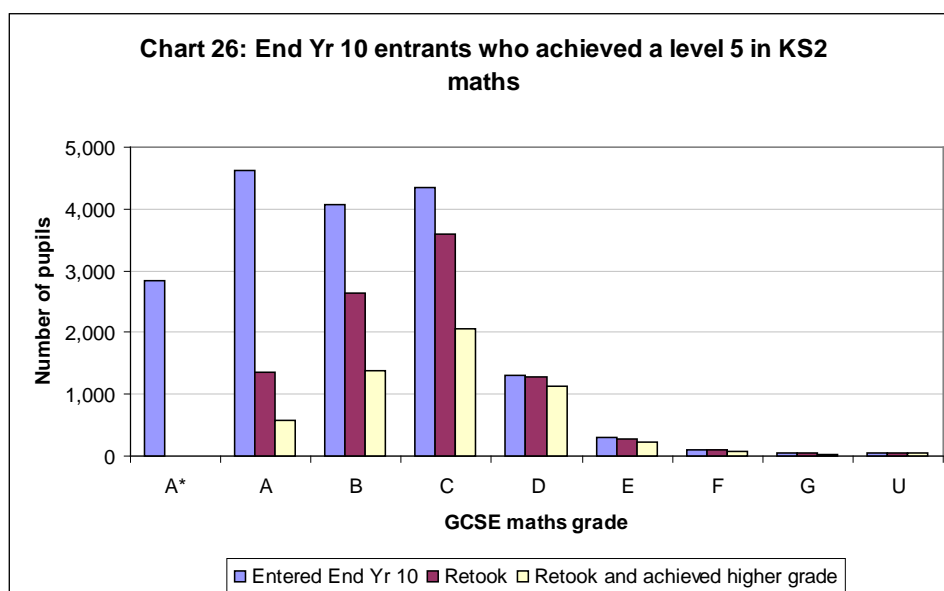
## Highest achievers in Key Stage 2 mathematics

Pupils who achieve a level 5 in KS2 mathematics would be expected to achieve at least a B grade in GCSE mathematics, and many of these pupils will expect to progress to achieve an A\* or an A grade. The **chart 25** shows the performance of those pupils who did not enter early:



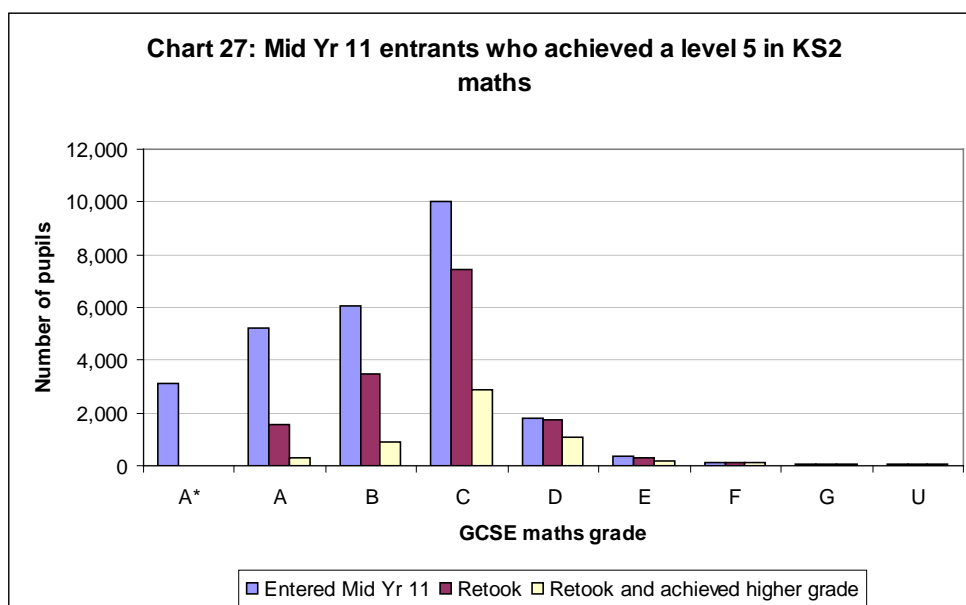
Over half of these pupils achieve an A\* or an A, and over 80% achieve a B or better.

**Chart 26** shows the performance of pupils who enter at the end of year 10:



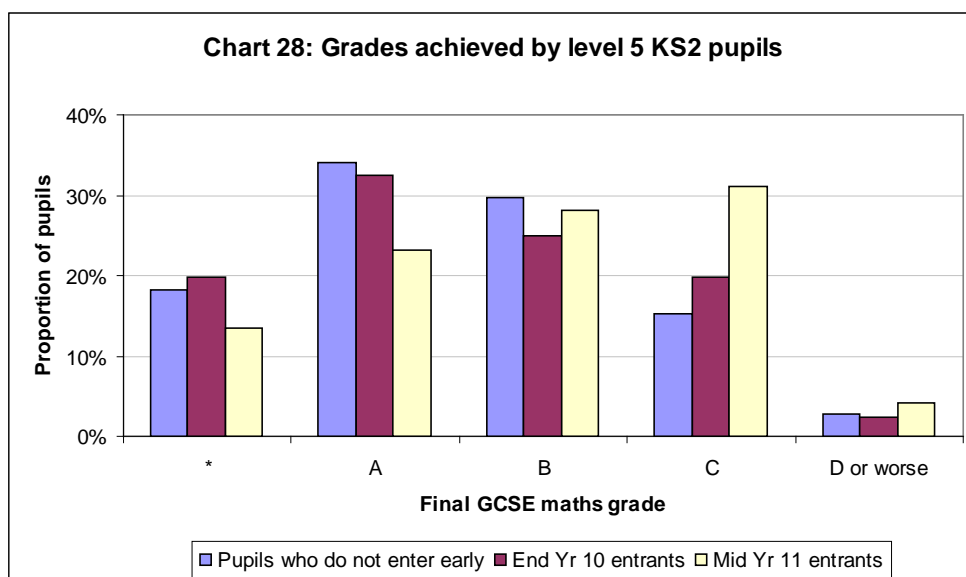
So the performance of these pupils in their first attempt was worse than for those pupils who did not enter early with 16% achieving an A\*, 42% achieving an A or better and 65% achieving a B or better. 10% achieved a D or worse, although almost all these pupils were allowed to retake. Only 29% of those who achieved grade A retook, with over 40% of these then achieving an A\*. 65% of the B grade pupils retook, with over half then achieving a higher grade.

**Chart 27** shows the performance of pupils who enter midway through year 11.



These pupils did considerably worse than both those pupils who did not enter early, and those who entered at the end of year 10. Only 12% achieved an A\*, 31% achieved at least an A and 54% achieved a B or better. These pupils were also more likely to achieve a C grade compared to their peers who entered at the end of year 10 or 11. Again a considerable number of pupils achieving A and B grades did not retake, although the proportion of those who did retake and achieved higher grades was lower than for the end of year 10 entrants (20% for A grade pupils and 25% for B grade pupils).

**Chart 28** compares the final grades of the three set of pupils from above.



After retakes a similar proportion of end year 10 entrants achieved A\* or A grades as did pupils who did not enter early, and they were slightly more likely to achieve an A\*. However the performance of mid year 11 entrants was considerably worse with 15% points fewer pupils achieving A\* or A grades than the other two groups. These pupils were most likely to achieve C grade, meaning these pupils did not make expected progress between KS2 and KS4.

## Early Entries by School Type

Please note data in this section only covers results for GCSEs. Independent schools entering iGCSEs have been excluded from the statistics as we do not hold sufficient data for these schools.

In 2010 1,350 schools (36%) had no pupils entering GCSE mathematics early (with another 16% having less than 5 early entrants).

1,950 (50%) had no pupils entering GCSE English (with 11% having less than 5 early entrants).

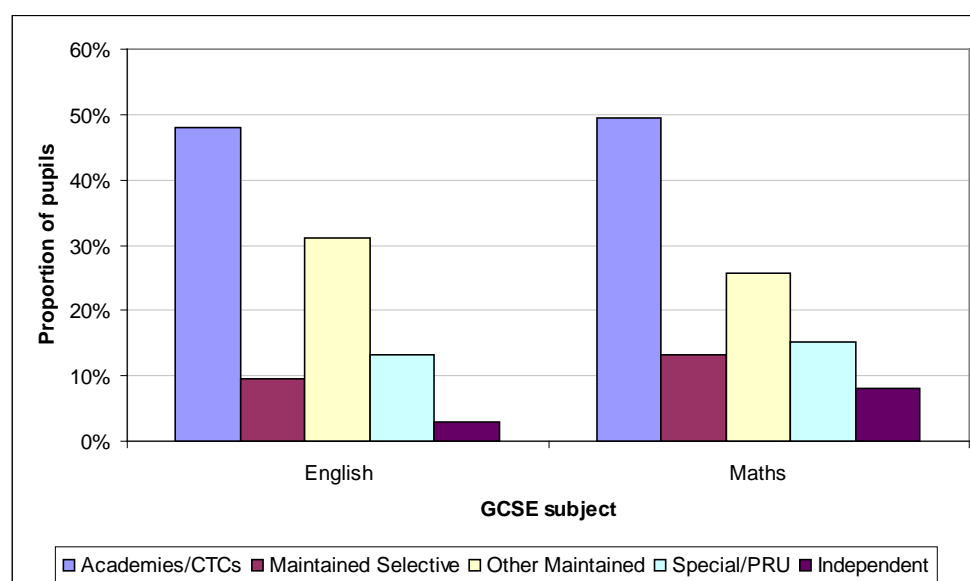
There were 950 schools (26%) with no pupils entering either subject early and 1,500 schools (39%) with less than 5 pupils entering early.

A fifth of schools had at least 50% of pupils entering GCSE mathematics early, with a tenth entering at least 90% early and almost 100 schools entering every pupil early. At least half the pupils entered English early in just over a quarter of schools, with 16% of schools entering at least nine in ten pupils early, and almost 150 schools entering all pupils early. The vast majority of the schools entering all pupils early were comprehensives (including some academies), while a few independent schools also did likewise.

### School Type

The proportion of pupils in each school who entered early did vary widely between different types of schools. The chart below shows the proportion of pupils entering each subject early in the different school types.

Chart 29: Early entries by school type



Pupils in academies/CTCs were much more likely to be early entrants in both

subjects than pupils in selective or independent schools. For example, while almost 50% of academy/CTC pupils entered English early, just 3% of those independent school pupils who entered GCSE qualifications did likewise. Pupils were also more likely to enter early in non-selective maintained schools than selective maintained schools, especially in English.

The table below shows the number of schools which did not have any pupils entering the two subjects early split by the different school types:

**Table 30: schools with no early entries**

	Percentage of schools with <b>NO</b> early entries		
	Mathematics and English	English	Mathematics
<b>Academies/CTCs</b>	11%	28%	18%
<b>Maintained Selective</b>	41%	84%	45%
<b>Other Maintained</b>	20%	41%	31%
<b>Special/PRU</b>	28%	45%	41%
<b>Independent</b>	58%	83%	63%

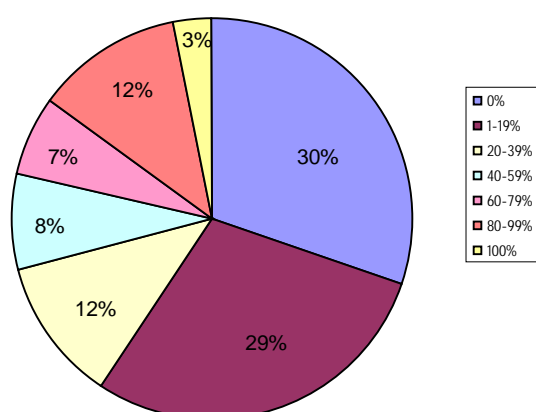
For all school types there were more likely to be schools with no early entrants in English than in mathematics, and this was particularly the case for certain schools types. For example in selective schools, while 45% had no pupils entering mathematics early, 84% had no pupils entering English early.

Only 11% of Academies/CTCs, and 20% of non selective maintained schools, had no early entrants in either subject, compared to 41% of grammar and 58% of independent schools.

## School Performance

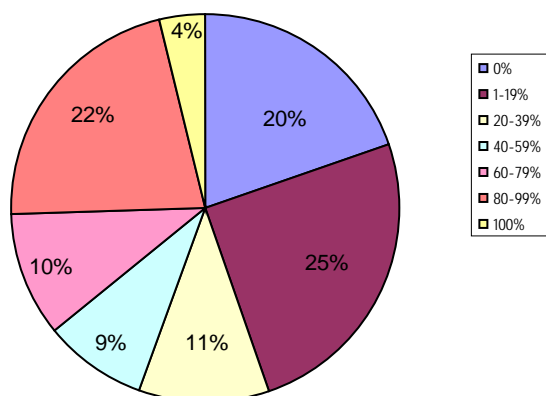
**Chart 31** below shows the school distribution of the proportion of entrants who enter GCSE mathematics early in each maintained school. So, for example, in 12% of schools between 20 and 39% of pupils were entered early. Less than a fifth of pupils were entered early in 60% of schools. At least four in five pupils were entered early in 13% of schools, with all pupils entered early in 2%.

**Chart 31: School distribution of early entrants**



If only lower performing schools are included in this analysis, then the proportions change, with more early entrants in these schools. **Pie chart 32** below shows the school distribution for those maintained schools that had less than 70% of their intake achieving the expected level in Key Stage 2 mathematics (which is about a quarter of schools).

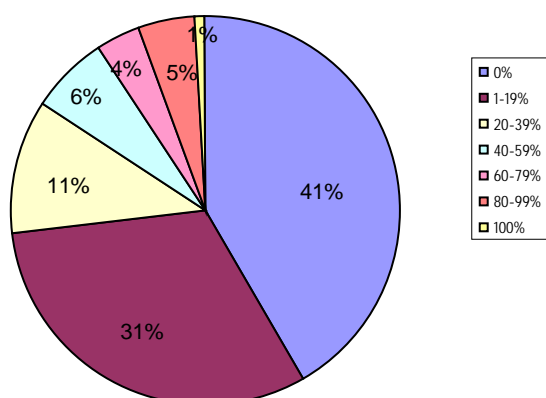
**Chart 32: School distribution of early entrants in lower attaining schools**



A higher proportion of these schools have at least 80% of pupils entering early, compared to the pie chart 15, while smaller proportions have less than 20% of pupils entering early. Almost half of these schools do have less than 20% of pupils entering early, although almost a quarter have more than 80% entering early.

In contrast **pie chart 33** shows these proportions for maintained schools with a high attaining intake – those schools where more than 90% of pupils achieve the expected level at Key Stage 4.

**Chart 33: School Distribution of early entrants in higher attaining schools**



Almost three quarters of these schools had less than 20% of pupils entering early, and two in five of these schools had no early entrants. Only 6% of these schools had at least 80% entering early.



Prior attainment is an important factor in whether a school enters pupils early. Lower attaining schools are more likely to have early entrants, and are more likely to have a large proportion of their pupils entering early.

### **Early entries in underperforming schools**

In 2008 schools were below the floor if less than 30% of pupils in the school achieved 5+ A\*-C including English and mathematics.

There were 440 below floor schools in 2008, and 366 of these had results in 2010. Of these 366 schools, almost half had at least 50% of pupils entering mathematics early, with over a quarter entering at least 90% early. 18 of the schools (5%) had all their pupils entering early.

These figures are far higher than the figures for all schools. Only 20% of all schools had at least 50% of pupils entering mathematics, 10% had at least 90% entering early and only 3% entered all pupils early.

### **Case Studies**

As detailed above there are numerous schools that enter all, or the majority of pupils, early. There are also some schools that allow almost all pupils to retake at least once, and other schools that only let a minority of pupils retake.

School 'A' is a high attaining selective (grammar) school with 97% of pupils achieving 5+ A\*-C including English and mathematics. 99% of pupils in this school entered GCSE mathematics early, with all early entrants entering at the end of year 10. All pupils achieved a C grade or higher. However only a handful of pupils then retook, so even the majority of pupils achieving a B or C grade did not attempt the subject again. A much smaller proportion of pupils achieved A\* grades in this school than in other grammar schools. 9% of the pupils in school 'A' who achieved a level 5 in Key Stage 2 mathematics went on to achieve an A\* grade. This compares to 36% of pupils in all grammar schools.

School 'B' is a low attaining inner city school with only 43% of pupils achieving 5+ A\*-C including English and mathematics. 99% of pupils in this school were also entered early in GCSE mathematics, although for this school almost all pupils were allowed to retake, twice. The vast majority of pupils entered first at the end of year 10, then retook in the middle of year 11, before retaking again at the end of year 11. The grade achieved by the pupil in either of the early attempts seemed to have little effect on whether the pupil retook – those achieving U grades were given the opportunity to retake. No pupils in this school achieved an A\* grade.

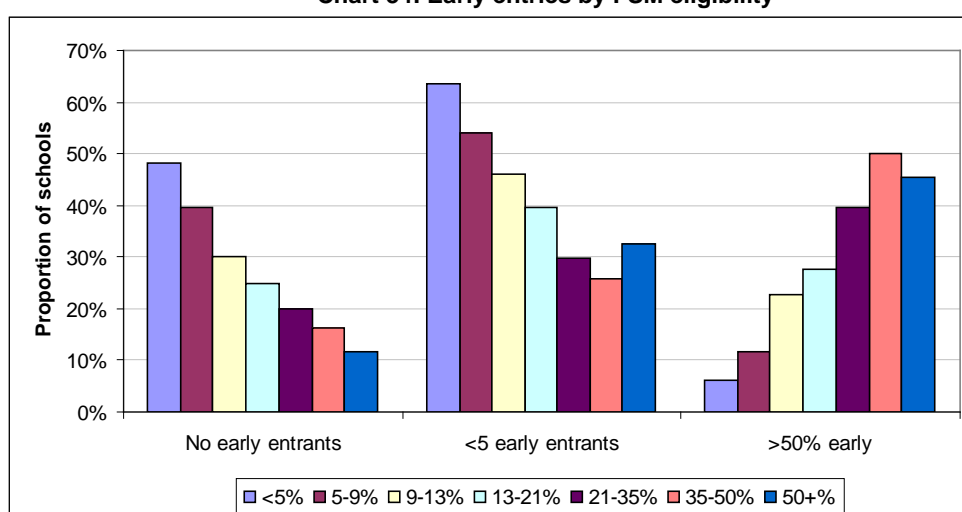
School 'C' is also a low attaining school with only 42% of pupils achieving 5+ A\*-C including English and mathematics. According to the data, 2 pupils in this school attempted GCSE mathematics six times (with a first attempt at the end of year 8), 4 attempted five times, 5 attempted four times and over a quarter of the cohort entered three times.

## Early entries by free school meal eligibility

As FSM pupils on average do not perform as well as non FSM pupils, and low attaining schools are more likely to enter pupils early, it is not surprising that schools with high proportions of FSM pupils have, on average, more early entrants than schools with fewer FSM pupils.

**Chart 34** shows the proportion of early entrants in GCSE mathematics in each school, depending on the proportion of pupils in the school that are eligible for FSM. As the proportion of FSM pupils falls, there is more chance that the school will have no, or a small number, of early entrants, and schools in the highest FSM bandings are more likely to have at least 50% of pupils entering early.

Chart 34: Early entries by FSM eligibility



© Crown copyright 2011

You may re-use this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/> or write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or e-mail: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This document/publication is also available on our website at: <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications>