

Girls' Schools and Positive Post-16 Destinations: Evidence from the DfE KS5 and L4+ Datasets (2022-24)

1. Executive Summary

Analysis of national and institution-level destination measures for Key Stage 5 (KS5, 2022/23) and post-18 progression (2023/24) shows that **girls consistently outperform boys** in sustained destinations, higher-education continuation, and degree-level progression.

Within this, **girls attending girls' schools show particularly strong outcomes**. At KS5, girls in girls' state schools are more likely to continue in education and progress to higher education (HE) than girls in mixed (co-educational) state schools and are less likely to be recorded as not sustained (NEET).

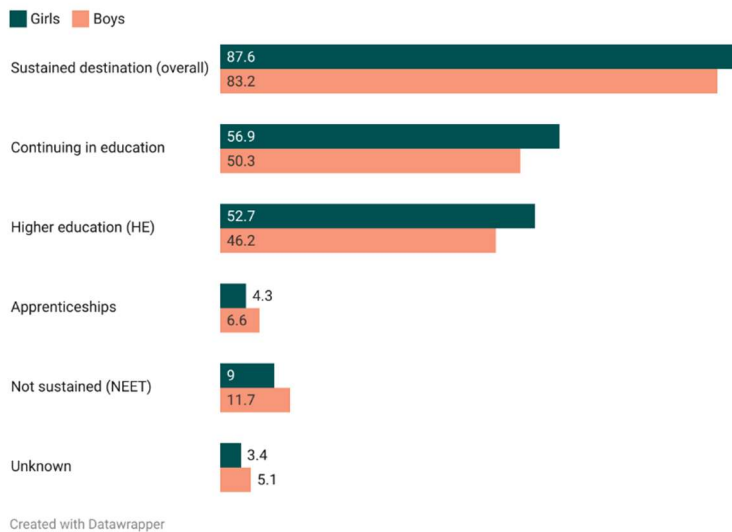
2. National Gender Picture: KS5 Destinations (2022/23)

Measure	Girls	Boys	Difference (Girls - Boys)
Sustained destination (overall)	87.6%	83.2%	+4.4 pp
Continuing in education	56.9%	50.3%	+6.6 pp
Higher education (HE)	52.7%	46.2%	+6.5 pp
Apprenticeships	4.3%	6.6%	-2.3 pp
Not sustained (NEET)	9.0%	11.7%	-2.6 pp
Unknown	3.4%	5.1%	-1.7 pp

Key insights:

Girls are **6.5pp more likely than boys** to sustain a destination in higher education (52.7 % vs 46.2 %) and **2.6pp less likely to be NEET** (9.0 % vs 11.7 %). This suggests stronger academic continuity and engagement among girls nationally.

KS5 Destinations 2022/23



3. Single Sex Schools vs Co-Educational Schools

Using institution-level KS5 2022/23 data (weighted by cohort size), we can compare **girls in girls' schools with girls in co-educational schools**, and **boys in boys' schools with boys in co-educational schools**, focusing on **state-funded mainstream schools** and **independent mainstream schools**.

3.1 Key KS5 destination outcomes by school gender and type (percentages, KS5 2022/23, cohort-weighted)

State-funded mainstream schools (KS5 2022/23 - Sex breakdown from institution-level file)

Institution Group	Sustained	Continuing Edu	HE	Apprenticeships	NEET	Unknown
Girls in girls' State Schools	87.7%	68.2%	65.3%	3.7%	6.9%	4.4%
Girls in co-ed State schools	86.8%	59.6%	56.0%	4.6%	8.1%	3.4%
Boys in boys' State Schools	86.9%	65.9%	63.9%	4.6%	7.4%	5.0%
Boys in boys' co-ed Schools	82.6%	52.6%	49.5%	6.9%	10.5%	5.1%

Independent mainstream schools (KS5 2022/23 - institution-level file)

Institution Group	Sustained	Continuing Edu	HE	Apprenticeships	NEET	Unknown
Girls in girls' Independent Schools	82.8%	70.5%	67.2%	1.0%	6.3%	10.3%
Boys in boys' Independent Schools	78.7%	66.6%	65.53	1.1%	8.6%	12.4%

Technical note:

For **independent mixed (co-educational) schools**, the DfE dataset only provides **total cohort percentages**, not separate figures for female and male students. As a result, the analysis can compare **girls in girls' independent schools to boys in boys' independent schools but cannot isolate "girls in mixed independent schools" or "boys in mixed independent schools"** from the published data.

3.2 Findings - Girls in Girls' Schools vs Girls in Co-ed Schools (State Sector)

- **Higher continuation and HE progression for girls in girls' schools**
 - Girls in girls' state schools are **more likely to continue in education** than girls in mixed state schools (68.2% vs 59.6%, a gap of about **8.6 percentage points**).
 - Girls in girls' state schools are also **around 9.3 percentage points more likely** to progress to higher education (65.3% vs 56.0%).
- **Lower NEET for girls in girls' schools**
 - NEET rates are **lower for girls in girls' state schools** (6.9%) than for girls in mixed state schools (8.1%), a difference of around **1.2 percentage points**.
- **Sustained destinations remain very high in both settings**
 - Sustained destinations are strong for girls regardless of school type, but **girls in girls' state schools still have a small advantage** (87.7% vs 86.8%).

Overall, the state-sector data suggests that **girls attending girls' schools are more likely to stay in education post-16, more likely to move into higher education, and slightly less likely to be NEET** than girls in mixed state schools.

3.3 Findings - Boys in Boys' Schools vs Boys in Co-ed Schools (State Sector)

- **Substantially higher continuation and HE progression for boys in boys' schools**
 - Boys in boys' state schools are **13.3 percentage points more likely to continue in education** than boys in mixed state schools (65.9% vs 52.6%).
 - They are **around 14.4 percentage points more likely** to progress to higher education (63.9% vs 49.5%).
- **Lower NEET for boys in boys' schools**
 - NEET rates are **lower for boys in boys' state schools** (7.4%) than for boys in mixed state schools (10.5%), a gap of around **3.1 percentage points**.
- **Higher sustained destinations overall**
 - Sustained destinations are stronger for boys in boys' state schools (86.9%) than for boys in mixed state schools (82.6%), a difference of about **4.3 percentage points**.

This indicates that **boys in boys' schools also benefit from single-sex environments** in terms of continuation in education, progression to HE and reduced NEET.

3.4 Independent Schools and "Unknown" Destinations

Within independent mainstream schools, girls in girls' schools show **very strong HE progression** (around **67%** entering HE, with over **70%** continuing in education). However, the **"unknown" category is notably higher** for independent schools than for the state sector:

- **Girls in girls' independent schools:** unknown \approx **10.3%**
- **Boys in boys' independent schools:** unknown \approx **12.4%**
- By contrast, **state girls' schools** have unknown \approx **4.4%**, and **mixed state schools** for girls \approx **3.4%**; for boys the unknown rates are \approx **5.0-5.1%**.

In other words, **independent schools have unknown rates roughly double (or more) those seen in state schools**.

The **DfE KS5 destination measures** classify a destination as "unknown" when a student **cannot be matched** to any of the administrative datasets used to track:

- Participation in state-funded education or training, or

- UK tax/benefit records (used as a proxy for employment or other tracked activity).

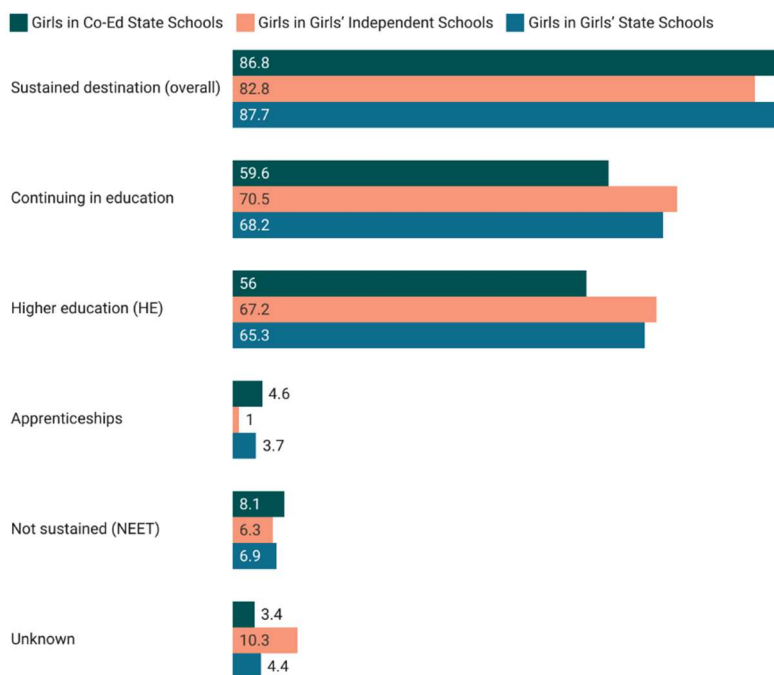
For **independent schools**, a significant proportion of leavers follow routes that are **less visible to these national administrative systems**, for example:

- **Overseas universities** or colleges
- **Private (non-state-funded) HE or training providers**
- **Gap years** (often including work, travel or volunteering that does not show in UK tax or education records in the first tracking year)
- Short-term or atypical destinations that fall outside the standard DfE tracking windows

Because these positive destinations are **not captured in the matching process**, they are counted as **“unknown” rather than “NEET”**. This explains why:

- Independent mainstream schools, especially independent girls’ and boys’ schools, show **very strong HE and education continuation rates**,
- **And yet** have **“unknown” percentages around 10-14%**, compared with around 3-5% in the state sector.

KS5 Destination Comparison 2022/23



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4. Progression to Level 4+ (Post-18, 2023/24)

Outcome (State-funded)	Girls	Boys	Difference
Progressed to Level 4+ (any)	68.1%	61.3%	+6.8 pp
Achieved degree-level	64.0%	55.5%	+8.5 pp
Top-third HE institution	19.8%	17.9%	+1.9 pp
Apprenticeships	1.6%	3.3%	-1.7 pp
Higher-technical qualification	2.5%	2.5%	0.0 pp

Interpretation:

Girls are not only more likely to continue to Level 4+ study, but **8.5 percentage points more likely to achieve degree-level qualifications** than boys, a difference equivalent to **a 15 % higher success rate**. This reinforces the pattern seen at KS5 and reflects strong academic persistence among girls.

5. Longer-Term Destinations (2019/20 Cohorts)

Across five years after leaving KS5, female students maintain stronger sustained destinations, higher HE engagement, and lower NEET rates than males.

Outcome (State-funded)	Year 1 F	Year 1 M	Year 5 F	Year 5 M
Sustained destination	94.7 %	93.5 %	83.8 %	79.4 %
Higher education	–	–	46.4 %	34.5 %
Not sustained (NEET)	4.6 %	5.5 %	13.6 %	14.6 %

Long-term trend:

Even five years on, **girls remain 12 percentage points more likely than boys to have achieved a higher-education destination**, and slightly less likely to be NEET. The gap in educational participation widens over time, underlining the **long-term resilience of female learners**.

6. Conclusion

Across every major dataset examined – **KS5 destinations, post-18 Level 4+ progression**, and **long-term tracking** – girls outperform boys on sustained destinations, higher education progression, and degree-level attainment.

Within this, the **institution-level analysis shows that single-sex schools, particularly girls' schools, are associated with especially strong outcomes:**

- In the **state sector**, girls in girls' schools are **more likely to remain in education and enter higher education, and less likely to be NEET** than girls in mixed schools.
- Boys show a similar pattern, with **boys in boys' schools significantly outperforming boys in mixed schools** on continuation and HE progression and having lower NEET rates.
- In the **independent sector**, girls' schools combine **high HE progression (around two-thirds entering HE)** with **unknown rates that reflect untracked positive destinations (e.g. overseas HE, gap years)** rather than disengagement.

Taken together, this provides **robust evidence that girls' schools - and single-sex environments more broadly - deliver exceptionally strong post-16 and post-18 outcomes**, fostering academic confidence, sustained engagement, and long-term educational success for their students.