

Down High School

Annual Report to Parents by the Board of Governors



SEPTEMBER 2024 – AUGUST 2025

THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS OF DOWN HIGH SCHOOL

The list below identifies the Board of Governors as it appeared during the 2024-25 academic year.

Chair:	<i>Mrs Avril Heenan</i>	<i>EA representative</i>
Vice-Chair:	<i>The Very Rev Henry Hull</i>	<i>EA representative</i>
	<i>Miss Wendy Bell</i>	<i>Staff Governor</i>
	<i>Mrs Dawn Crosby</i>	<i>EA representative</i>
	<i>Mr Keith Graham</i>	<i>DENI representative</i>
	<i>Mr Philip Lennon</i>	<i>DE representative</i>
	<i>Mr David Martin</i>	<i>Parent Governor</i>
	<i>Mrs Martina Moore</i>	<i>Parent Governor</i>

The process for the reconstitution of the Board of Governors, overseen by EA, has been ongoing since November 2023. The current Board remained in place and continued to meet until the Board had been reconstituted.

The Principal, Mrs Perry, was Secretary to the Governors during the period to which this report pertains but was a non-voting member of the Board.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Total Enrolment in September 2023	965
Total Enrolment in September 2024	953
Intake at Year 8 in September 2023	139
Intake at Year 8 in September 2024	140
Attendance Rate	96.1% 2024-25
GCE A-Level (2024-25)	
Percentage of total examination entries A*–E	100%
Average Number of A-Level passes per pupil	2.93 A*-C / 3.08 A*-E
% Gaining 3+ A-Levels at grades A*-C	89.8%
GCE AS Level (2024-25)	
Percentage of total examination entries A-E	100%
Percentage of total examination entries A-C	92.2%
% Gaining 3+ AS-Levels at grades A-C	80.0%
GCSE (2024-25)	
Percentage of total examination entries A–C	92.9%
Average Number of GCSEs at A–C level per pupil	9.55
(pupils sit ten GCSE subjects)	
% Gaining 5+ A*-C (inc. English and Mathematics)	100%
% Gaining 7+ A*-C (incl. English and Mathematics)	97.6

STAFFING

Teaching Staff

The number of teachers in the school was as follows:

2024-25 Principal + 57.4 full-time equivalent (48 FT teachers, 17 PT teachers)

Changes in staff during 2024-25 academic year

The following joined the staff on a permanent basis during the 2024-25 academic year:

Mrs L Henderson (Head of Biology)

Mrs G Morris (Religious Studies)

Mr J Beattie (Biology)

Ms S Henning (PE)

Mrs B McCabe (Coordinator MIA)

Mr C McGloin (Head of ICT)

Mr D Bassett (Classroom Assistant)

The following permanent members of staff retired or left during the 2024-25 year:

Teaching Staff

Mr A Miller (Senior Teacher, Head of Physics) – took up a new appointment

Mrs K Stuart (Head of ICT) – took up a new appointment

Mrs R Adams (English) – retired

Ms P Mills (Co-ordinator of Drama) – retired

Support Staff

Mr P McKinstry (Technician Physics) – took up a new appointment

Mrs Carmel Billingsley (Classroom Assistant) – retired

Mrs Jennifer Cadden (Study Supervisor) – retired

The Board of Governors wishes all departing colleagues well for the future and thanks them for their outstanding contributions to Down High School over many years.

THE CONTEXT

The 2024–25 academic year was one of the most significant in the school’s history, marked by extensive preparations for the move to our new, state-of-the-art facilities on Strangford Road in June 2025. This transition represented not only a major logistical undertaking, but also a moment of reflection on the rich heritage of Down High School and its place within the local community.

Originally opened in 1933, Down High School occupied an historic site on one of the four distinctive hills overlooking Downpatrick. Built on the grounds of the former 19th-century County Gaol, the school enjoyed views of Inch Abbey and the ancient earthwork known as the Mound of Down. The surrounding boundary walls and the 1833 gate lodge are listed structures, forming an important part of our shared local heritage. In recognition of the significance of both the former Mount Crescent site and the new Strangford Road site, substantial historical and archaeological research was commissioned and undertaken by Kenneth Dawson, celebrated historian, published author, and former Head of History & Politics and Vice-Principal at Down High School. This work documented the history of the original site and the archaeological discoveries on the new campus, including evidence of a Bronze Age settlement and the former workhouse. A publication capturing this rich local history was launched in June and was warmly received by the wider community. On Saturday 21 June, the Mount Crescent site was opened one final time to past pupils, and, in a poignant moment, the final bell rang at 3.20pm.

During the third and final year of the 2022–25 School Development Plan, priorities for improvement remained firmly focused on sustaining high standards in learning and teaching. In recent years, significant emphasis has been placed on developing pupils’ study skills, fostering a growth mindset, and encouraging reflection on learning. Further professional development was provided for staff to promote metacognitive dialogue in the classroom, enabling pupils to develop effective study behaviours, regulate their learning and take greater ownership of their progress. Information evenings for Year 8 and Years 11–14 supported pupils and parents in understanding curriculum demands, examination requirements and effective revision strategies.

High-quality pastoral care continues to sit at the heart of all work at Down High School. The Pastoral Care Team responded proactively to the evolving pressures faced by young people in modern society, promoting emotional health, wellbeing and resilience through a strong culture of compassion. Pupils were encouraged to see themselves as compassionate global citizens. For the first time, 34 Year 13 and 14 pupils took part in a funded overseas placement organised by Challenges Abroad, supporting the work of the FutureSense Foundation in Thailand. During two weeks in July, pupils worked in a local school and an Elephant Nature Park, gaining invaluable personal and cultural experiences. Links with external agencies were further strengthened to support pupil wellbeing.

The Board of Governors recognises the considerable commitment, monitoring and evaluation undertaken throughout the 2024–25 academic year and commends the staff for the exemplary manner in which both the academic and pastoral needs of pupils were met. The extensive programme of extra-curricular activities and educational visits, including trips abroad, continues to enrich pupils’ experiences and is greatly valued by the school community.

EXAMINATION RESULTS

A-Level

The last set of public examinations at the Mount Crescent site did not disappoint. Down High School's outcomes surpassed all previous records and outperformed all the NI Grammar benchmarks. The headline figure increased by 7% to 89.9% of pupils attaining 3 or more A*-C grades. Also, 46% of all grades were A* or A, which is an increase on the 40.5% the previous year, and reads pleasingly, when compared to the CCEA NI Average of 38.6%. 81.2% of all grades achieved were A*-B, compared with the CCEA NI Grammar average of 71.3%

Exceptional individual achievements were seen at A-Level, with 25 pupils achieving 3 or more A*/A grades (or equivalent). Patrick Maginnis, Patrick Majorczyk and James Wright claimed 3A* grades. We also saw five students gain places at Oxbridge. Patrick Maginnis, Ollie Torney and Josh Herron from the 2024-25 cohort were joined by Kyle Bradshaw and Grace McMullan from the previous year.

High attainment in A-Level is rooted in the foundational work done in Year 13, where the school places significant emphasis on maximising UMS scores at AS Level. For our pupils sitting AS examinations, 39.8% of all results achieved were grade A, a significant increase from the 33.2% the previous year. The number of pupils attaining at least 3 A-C grades is 77.9%, which was a decrease from the previous year. Our pupils, including the pupils who joined our enlarged 6th Form from local 11-16 schools, showed that they can achieve the highest grades.

GCSE

Year 12 pupils benefited from an early exam experience, having completed some modules in Year 11 (May 2024) and November of Year 12. This gradual exam exposure gave an increased understanding of the examination process, whilst also easing the exam burden. In Down High, 50.7% of all GCSE grades were A* or A grades, with 22 pupils gaining 10 or more A*/A grades across their subjects. Joy Daniells secured 10 A* grades while Grace Bradshaw, Thomas Chambers, Dawn Erwin, Niamh Lowry, Scott Macleod and Jessica Owen all secured 9A* and 1A. In total, 97.6% of pupils secured at least 7 GCSEs at A*-C (including English and Mathematics). For the sixth consecutive year, all pupils achieved A*-C grades in GCSE English and Maths. In addition, 100% of pupils achieved 5 or more A* - C grades overall, likely placing Down High School at the top of the league tables once again.

The teachers and pupils are to be congratulated for the excellent results achieved in public examinations in 2024-25.

A-LEVEL RESULTS 2025 (cumulative percentages)

SUBJECT	NO. OF ENTRIES	A*	A	B	C	D	E	U
Art & Design	10	30	60	100	100	100	100	100
Biology	36	17	39	75	92	100	100	100
Business Studies	21	0	14	67	90	95	100	100
Chemistry	28	14	32	68	89	93	100	100
Design and Technology	11	27	55	73	91	100	100	100
English Literature	9	11	44	78	100	100	100	100
French	6	17	50	83	100	100	100	100
Geography	23	4	17	78	87	100	100	100
Health & Social Care	31	0	52	97	100	100	100	100
History	16	19	50	88	100	100	100	100
Home Economics	24	13	42	67	100	100	100	100
Software Systems	9	11	44	67	89	100	100	100
Moving Image Arts	6	0	33	83	100	100	100	100
Mathematics	47	21	70	91	94	98	100	100
Mathematics Further	6	33	50	83	100	100	100	100
Music	3	33	33	67	100	100	100	100
Physics	15	7	47	80	93	100	100	100
Politics	6	0	17	83	100	100	100	100
Religious Studies	9	11	33	78	100	100	100	100
Sociology	35	11	46	80	97	100	100	100
Spanish	5	0	40	100	100	100	100	100
Sport/PE Studies	13	8	46	62	85	100	100	100
Travel and Tourism	9	67	78	100	100	100	100	100
BTEC COURSES		Dist*	Dist		Merit		Pass	
Engineering	5	0	75		100		100	
Sports Studies	5	20	80		100		100	
ICT	10	0	67		100		100	

GCSE RESULTS 2025 (cumulative percentages)

SUBJECT	NO. OF ENTRIES	A*	A	B	C*	C	D	E	F	G	U
Art & Design	19	0	32	95	95	100	100	100	100	100	100
Biology	45	9	31	71	98	100	100	100	100	100	100
Business Studies	39	10	38	64	87	95	100	100	100	100	100
Chemistry	20	30	65	75	90	100	100	100	100	100	100
Design and Technology	26	27	62	88	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Drama	8	13	38	75	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Digital Technology (Programming)	18	28	56	83	94	100	100	100	100	100	100
Digital Technology (Multimedia)	14	14	57	79	93	100	100	100	100	100	100
English Language	127	9	50	88	99	100	100	100	100	100	100
English Literature	127	17	43	72	94	99	100	100	100	100	100
French	48	13	46	67	83	92	100	100	100	100	100
Geography	66	18	52	70	86	95	100	100	100	100	100
History	54	24	63	78	89	96	100	100	100	100	100
Home Economics	49	18	55	88	96	100	100	100	100	100	100
Mathematics	127	21	68	96	99	100	100	100	100	100	100
Further Mathematics	37	30	73	89	95	97	97	100	100	100	100
MIA	13	0	23	54	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Music	10	20	60	90	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Physics	20	15	45	70	80	95	100	100	100	100	100
Religious Studies (Full Course)	118	18	44	68	84	95	100	100	100	100	100
DA Science	75	16	59	83	97	99	100	100	100	100	100
Spanish	84	15	44	71	95	100	100	100	100	100	100
PE	38	13	37	63	95	97	100	100	100	100	100

INDICATOR	DHS RESULTS		DHS TARGET 24-25	NI GRAMMAR SCHOOL DATA *				DHS RESULT 24-25	DHS TARGET 25-26
	22-23	23-24		LQ	M	UQ	95 th Pce		
GCSE %7+ A*-C	95.5	97.8	100	94.2	96.5	97.5	99.3	97.6	100
GCSE %7+ A*-C (inc. En and Ma)	95.5	97.8	100	94.0	95.8	97.4	99.3	97.6	100
GCSE %5+ A*-C	97.7	100	100	97.8	98.8	99.3	100	100	100
A-level: %3+ A*-C	89.6	82.1	85	77.1	81.3	86.8	92.1	89.8	88
INDICATOR	DHS RESULTS		DHS TARGET 24-25	NI GRAMMAR SCHOOL AVERAGES*				DHS RESULT 24-25	DHS TARGET 25-26
	22-23	23-24							
GCSE %5+ A*-C	97.7	100	100	96.6				100	100
GCSE %5+ A*-G	100	100	100	99.6				100	100
GCSE % WITH NO PASSES	0	0	0	0.1				0	0
GCSE %5+ A*-C (inc. Eng and Ma)	97.7	100	100	94.2				100	100
GCSE % achieving A*-C in English	100	100	100	96.9				100	100
GCSE % achieving A*-G in English	100	100	100	99.9				100	100
GCSE % achieving A*-C in Maths	100	100	100	94.7				100	100
GCSE % achieving A*-G in Maths	100	100	100	99.8				100	100
A-level % 3+ A*-C	89.6	82.1	84	79.9				89.8	88
A-level % 2+ A*-E	100	100	100	99.6				100	100
Attendance %	95.5	95.5	97	93.3				96.1	97

The above table uses the latest data available from DENI – for the academic year 2023/24. This was a year when results were returning to pre-pandemic levels.

The table below uses the benchmarking data from the academic year 2018/19, which was the last pre-pandemic year. The attendance benchmarking data in the table below is from 2023/24.

INDICATOR	DHS RESULTS		DHS TARGET 24-25	NI GRAMMAR SCHOOL DATA *				DHS RESULT 24-25	DHS TARGET 25-26
	22-23	23-24		LQ	M	UQ	95 th Pce		
GCSE %7+ A*-C	95.5	97.8	100	91.2	94.5	97.5	99.0	97.6	100
GCSE %7+ A*-C (inc. En and Ma)	95.5	97.8	100	91.2	94.4	97.5	99.0	97.6	100
GCSE %5+ A*-C	97.7	100	100	96.8	98.0	99.4	100	100	100
A-level: %3+ A*-C	89.6	82.1	85	77.6	81.4	87.6	89.6	89.8	88
INDICATOR	DHS RESULTS		DHS TARGET 24-25	NI GRAMMAR SCHOOL AVERAGES*				DHS RESULT 24-25	DHS TARGET 25-26
	22-23	23-24							
GCSE %5+ A*-C	97.7	100	100	96.1				100	100
GCSE %5+ A*-G	100	100	100	99.7				100	100
GCSE % WITH NO PASSES	0	0	0	0.1				0	0
GCSE %5+ A*-C (inc. Eng and Ma)	97.7	100	100	95.5				100	100
GCSE % achieving A*-C in English	100	100	100	98.5				100	100
GCSE % achieving A*-G in English	100	100	100	99.9				100	100
GCSE % achieving A*-C in Maths	100	100	100	97.9				100	100
GCSE % achieving A*-G in Maths	100	100	100	99.9				100	100
A-level % 3+ A*-C	89.6	82.1	84	72.9				89.8	88
A-level % 2+ A*-E	100	100	100	99				100	100
Attendance %	95.5	95.5	97	93.3				96.1	97

LEAVERS' DESTINATIONS 2025

The majority (90%) of Year 14 student leavers embarked upon university studies in 2025. It was also the trend that most students who missed their offer by one grade ended up securing their place, perhaps owing to the drop in the number of students applying to UK universities from outside the UK and the EU. Leavers who took a gap year or who decided to switch courses after their first year at college, generally returned to the school for help. A significant number of students also took up FE courses including HNCs, HNDs and HLAs.

CAREERS EDUCATION & GUIDANCE

Careers Advice Education Information and Guidance (CAEIG) in Down High School provides pupils with the opportunity to complete effective research, discuss any issues relating to career choices with their teachers and benefit from support in their decision-making throughout the key transition stages during their school years. The Careers Department has a strong working relationship with the local professional careers advisers in the NICS.

The development of CAEIG within the context of the Lecale Learning Community (LLC), with good practice being shared between a number of schools in the area, continued to be a feature of the 2024-25 academic year. Mr Stephen Glass is very proactive in how he organises and delivers this careers menu and Down High School benefits from the providers that he secures. Down High School enjoys working with other Careers departments within our ALC.

On our new site, the Careers Suite is situated on the second floor beside the Sixth-Form Study Area. This location is proving to be very beneficial. The room is always open to pupils who wish to research career pathways or discuss careers-related issues.

Significant attention is given to students in Years 13 and 14 as they approach, construct and refine their UCAS applications and other application streams. The process moves forward in four main waves.

The front wave applications are the students who are applying for Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary, Oxford and Cambridge. Their preparation begins back in the previous January. Oxbridge workshops are organised in collaboration with Brasenose College, with a strong focus on super-curricular development, preparation for admissions tests and an autumn residential. Med / Dent / Vet applicants, meanwhile, focus on building up relevant experiences, adding value to their application and preparing for additional selection procedures. External expertise is called in to support these competitive applications. We were delighted that last year, 5 students took up their offers to study at Oxford and Cambridge, beginning their studies in September 2025.

Second wave applications include Nursing / Midwifery, the Allied Health Professions, Social Work and Primary Education. These students also get additional assistance in the form of close application support and practice MMI interviews. The third wave includes the remainder of our learners. An additional fourth wave involves students applying for school leaver programmes and Higher Level Apprenticeships. It should also be noted that students whose socio-economic background may make an application more challenging are supported with an application to the QUB Pathways Programme.

Students are not only supported by a team of 30 Reference Writers, but they are also encouraged to apply for other pathways including CAO, Belfast Met, Degree Apprenticeships and HLAs. Apprenticeship providers such as SERC and Thales are invited into school to present to students. Careers Google Classrooms are utilised to highlight these opportunities and provide useful links.

Work-related learning is an important part of the programme and particularly crucial for those applying for vocational pathways. Virtual work experiences are available throughout the year and students are encouraged to seek out opportunities in the voluntary sector. Some placements are organised through Work Inspiration, and these are spread across the year. Students who opt for a traditional week of work experience do so in June, after their exams are over. Careers classes cover CVs, preparation for Mock Interviews, the protocols of work experience and examples of company selection day tasks and psychometric tests.

Careers Presentation Evenings for parents of pupils in the key transition year groups (Years 10 and 12) are conducted and are very well attended. These take parents through the permutations and implications of different subject choices. Parents of Sixth-Form students are introduced to the Senior School Careers programme in October of Year 13 and they have the opportunity to attend a UCAS / Other Post-18 Pathways presentation in the September of Year 14. Students access subject presentations and a wide range of careers information in their bespoke Careers Google Classroom.

The mock interview experience was conducted very successfully, mostly in-person. Mr Knox harvests information each year from parents to help the Careers Department best utilise the considerable expertise available across the Down High community. We are very indebted to parents for the support that they provide.

The School Day 2024-25

The 10-period structure of the school day resumed a more normal format after the practice of staggered break and lunchtimes during the height of the pandemic.

Longer lunchtimes were introduced during junior and senior periods in order to encourage a greater range of extra-curricular activities during the school day.

Period	1	2	3	4	Break	5	6	7E		7L	8	9	10
	9:15 to 9:45	9:45 to 10:15	10:15 to 10:45	10:45 to 11:15	11:15 to 11:35	11:35 to 12:05	12:05 to 12:35	12:35 to 13:10		13:10 to 13:50	13:50 to 14:20	14:20 to 14:50	14:50 to 15:20

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT PROVISION

CURRICULAR PROVISION

An extensive range of subjects across all key stages equips our pupils with the knowledge and skills essential for success in public examinations, subsequent study and the world of work. The quality and relevance of our curriculum has repeatedly been affirmed by pupils, parents, staff, governors and the Education and Training Inspectorate.

The curriculum in Down High School encompasses not only knowledge and skills but the attitudes, beliefs and values which underpin the relationships within the school community. We remain committed to ensuring that pupils in all year groups experience a broad, balanced, enriched and relevant curriculum that offers meaningful opportunities to explore and develop their interests and talents. Pupils are encouraged to achieve their full potential during their time at Down High School, leaving well-equipped with the competencies required for success in the wider world. To further strengthen this provision, a comprehensive review of the curriculum has commenced.

Down High School has consistently promoted the development of thinking skills and personal capabilities, with structured opportunities embedded across departmental schemes of work. The importance of subject knowledge and the integrity of academic disciplines continue to be upheld within a curriculum that enables pupils to develop personally, contribute positively to society and the economy, and demonstrate a respect for the environment. In recognition of the central role of Learning for Life and Work (LLW), clear connections have been established between LLW and the Learning Areas. A comprehensive review of the LLW programme is ongoing, with improvements implemented on a continual basis. A new Coordinator of LLW was appointed for September 2025 to develop both the resources used within the programme and the capacity of the team delivering it. The school also believes that pupils should be able to make meaningful connections across subjects; therefore, interdepartmental collaboration is encouraged and facilitated where appropriate.

Our commitment to the holistic development of every pupil is reflected in the close alignment between our Pastoral Care structures and the curriculum. This is reflected in the shared information evenings, and the development of the form time programme to include opportunities for conversations around progress to take place.

High levels of literacy are essential to pupils' ability to access the full curriculum, and all teachers share responsibility for developing pupils' reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. In 2024–25, the COPS strategy continued to embed high standards of written communication, which remain a notable strength in public examinations at GCSE and A Level. To support learners requiring additional assistance, Literacy Support was provided one day per week by the Literacy Support Tutor, following referrals from the English Department. Ukrainian pupils also benefited from English as an Additional Language provision to support their integration into school life. The promotion of pupils' competence in number and measures remains equally important in equipping them with the financial capabilities required for adult life. The Heads of English and Mathematics continue to act as whole-school coordinators for Literacy and Numeracy respectively.

Down High School remains committed to inclusivity across all aspects of its work, ensuring that pupils' individual needs and learning styles are accommodated within the classroom. Differentiated strategies are employed to support pupils with specific needs, and the School's SEN Policy and accompanying guidelines are implemented to ensure progress for all learners. The Learning and Teaching Policy provides the foundation for effective classroom practice and emphasises the importance of pupils as curious, engaged learners who are challenged through a range of pedagogical approaches, including the integration of ICT.

Key Stage 3

In Years 8-10 all pupils follow a programme in line with the Northern Ireland Curriculum. **Year 8** pupils study a broad range of subjects: Mathematics, English, French, Religious Studies, Physical Education, Science, History, Geography, Art, Home Economics, Music, Technology, Information and Communications Technology (ICT), Drama, Learning for Life and Work, and Games. In **Year 9**, pupils commence the study of a second language, Spanish. Drama is not included in the Year 9 curriculum. In **Year 10**, Science is delivered through separate, specialised classes in **Physics, Chemistry, and Biology**.

Key Stage 4

Pupils in Years 11 and 12 study ten subjects at GCSE. All pupils take the core subjects of English with English Literature, Mathematics, Religious Studies and non-exam lessons in Physical Education, Games and Learning for Life and Work. We recognise the value of Modern Languages and the study of French or Spanish is highly recommended particularly given the emphasis placed on their importance by universities.

All pupils also study either Double Award Science or at least one Science as a single subject. They are then free to choose the remainder of their subjects from Art, Biology, Business Studies, Chemistry, Digital Technology (Multimedia and Programming pathways), Drama, French, Geography, History, Home Economics, Moving Image Arts, Music, Physical Education, Physics, Spanish and Technology. During Key Stage 4, a very small number of pupils may have their subject load reduced to nine GCSE subjects and the additional periods are allocated to other areas of the curriculum where they need additional support. This exceptional arrangement exists only after consultation between the school, parents and pupils.

Sixth Form

The majority of pupils study four subjects at AS level in Year 13 and three subjects at A2 level in Year 14. The following subjects were offered to Year 13 in 2024-25:

Art & Design	Government & Politics	Physical Education	Theatre Studies
Biology	Health & Social Care	Physics	BTEC Engineering*
Business Studies	History	Religious Studies	BTEC Sport *
Chemistry	Home Economics	Sociology	BTEC ICT*
English Literature	Mathematics	Software Systems Development**	WJEC Level 3 Diploma in Tourism
French	Further Mathematics	Spanish	Computer Science**
Geography	Moving Image Arts	Technology & Design	Digital Technology**

* In 2024-25, Pupils in Year 14 were completing their BTEC qualification in partnership with SERC. It was not possible to offer this qualification to Year 13 pupils. The school is grateful for the partnership that we had with SERC for many years.

** AQA Computer Science replaced Software Systems Development. Pupils in Year 13 began the Computer Science course, while Year 14 pupils completed the Software Systems Development Course. Digital Technology was added to the curriculum menu for pupils in Year 13.

In addition, there is a non-exam Games provision and Enrichment and Careers for all pupils in both Years 13 and 14.

ASSESSMENT IN DOWN HIGH SCHOOL

In Down High School, assessment is used to consolidate learning and inform improvement. We view the formative process of assessment as fundamental to both teaching and learning, enabling teachers and pupils to evaluate the effectiveness of the learning journey. Teachers are committed to providing constructive feedback that highlights each pupil's strengths while identifying areas for improvement. Such feedback encourages pupils to take practical steps to enhance the quality of their work. Assessment for Learning techniques are well embedded across classrooms, with pupils regularly encouraged to reflect on their progress and consider strategies for advancement. The school also maintains a distinct Assessment for Learning Policy, and each department has subject-specific guidelines to support its implementation.

In terms of summative assessment, pupils in Years 8–11 sit biannual written and practical examinations. In February, a concise report - including a percentage mark, the year average, and an effort grade - is issued to parents. A comprehensive report with detailed comments follows in June. Similarly, pupils in Years 12–14 receive full written reports following their January examinations. Departments also use additional common assessments throughout the year to measure pupils' understanding, with each subject's scheme of work clearly outlining the assessment methods employed.

Year 8 pupils continue to undertake the GL Cognitive Abilities Test early in the academic year. Results are shared with staff and analysed alongside other data to produce ragged data sheets, which are reviewed by the pastoral team to identify any pupils who may not be making expected progress. Through Data Tracking Meetings, targeted interventions are planned for pupils whose performance deviates significantly from initial benchmarks. These interventions may include meetings with the Year Head to discuss progress, study strategies, and learning skills. In 2024/25, the school used Form base to provide study skills workshops for Key Stage 3 pupils with pastoral staff providing additional support with revision techniques.

Pupils are encouraged to engage in ongoing reflective practice, identifying their strengths and areas for development before setting new learning goals.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING INSPECTORATE

Visits to the school by the Education and Training Inspectorate have confirmed that a robust culture of self-evaluation is established across the school. As well as Sustained Improvement Inspections in 2016 and 2019, discussions between senior leaders and the Inspectors continue to be positive, despite the absence of formalised visits during the height of the pandemic and during action short of strike action.

EXTRA-CURRICULAR PROVISION 2024-25

The school provides a wide and varied range of extra-curricular activities that offer pupils the opportunities to find interests beyond the classroom which are both enjoyable and contributory to their development as young people. The Governors are very grateful to the significant numbers of staff who devote their lunchtime, time after school or time at weekends to provide opportunities for pupils, with an impressive array of over forty clubs on offer. The tradition of school shows continued with the school's production of Little Shop of Horrors. The Governors are grateful to Reverend Adrian Dorrian for facilitating the annual Carol Service which allowed the Down High community to gather again in the lead up to the Christmas season. With the transition to the new school, the usual concerts schedule was put on hold in the spring and summer of 2025 however many of our musicians had opportunity to grace the Old Dunumian Open Day with their incredible talents. The Governors commend and thank the Music Department for all its investment of time and expertise.

The thanks of the Governors are also extended to the Games staff who provide training and fixtures throughout the school year. These after-school and Saturday fixtures provide opportunities for our pupils to connect fully with school life and take pride in their community. Of particular note, the Medallion XV rugby team brought home the Danske Bank Medallion Plate for the first time in the school's history.

SCHOOL TRIPS

Pupils at Down High School avail of a number of opportunities to further their development through participation in a range of school trips that are curricular and extra-curricular in nature. A number of departments organise site visits and trips. There are also several residential experiences during the course of any school year. Residential trips during the 2024-25 academic year included:

Year 8 Transition - Ganaway

French Trip - Paris

Hockey Trip - Amsterdam

Physics Trip - CERN, Switzerland

Rugby Trip - Lisbon

Art Trip - Berlin

Ski Trip - Folgaria, Italy

Scripture Union Weekend – Greenhill YMCA

Challenges Abroad - Thailand

Duke of Edinburgh Bronze, Silver and Gold Level expeditions

OTHER POLICIES

The delivery of the curriculum in Down High is achieved with reference to a number of important policies and documents which set out the expectations and experiences that are appropriate for the pupils who attend the school. Important policies are available on the school website.

HEALTH & SAFETY AND SECURITY

The Board of Governors continues to be very cognisant of its responsibility for the safety of pupils and staff and the need to provide secure premises. CCTV operates within the School grounds and a Senior Teacher (in conjunction with the Building Supervisors) reports regularly to the Senior Leadership Team on the safety and security of the school site. A Governor, Mr K Graham, who has been designated as a Health and Safety representative, reviewed and reported on issues relating to the school site throughout the year.

Maintaining the security and safety of the Mount Crescent site was an ongoing issue throughout the year. A small number of break-ins was reported, and work was carried out to patch damaged ramps and roofs in mobile classrooms. Planning for Health & Safety procedures in the new school began, with new fire evacuation procedures drawn up in consultation with the Education Authority. The complex tasks of packing up of resources and disposal of waste in advance of the school move were carried out without any major safety issues.

Emergency procedures, including fire drills, were followed during the school year. The school alarm system was fully operative and effective. These safety procedures were reviewed throughout the year and modifications made where appropriate. Colleagues were informed of any significant changes in the operation of evacuation procedures. The silent alarm standard has become embedded in the school's fire escape plan. Certain classroom assistants and fire wardens on the top corridor have become familiar with the stair evacuation chair.

Full risk assessments are conducted and approved in advance of trips and visits. New and temporary staff are inducted on health, safety and risk training and there was a H&S and Medical briefing included in the Baker Day programme in August 2024 and updated procedures for the new site were shared in the Baker Day programme August 2025.

All visitors must report to the Reception Office and sign the Visitor's Book. At the completion of their visit, they sign out at the appropriate time. Volunteers who assist departments in preparation for PGCE applications are accompanied at all times and comply with the visitor protocol. The school was able to offer PGCE placements to trainee teachers from Queen's University throughout the academic year.

The school is grateful for the support it receives from the Education Authority in the areas of health, safety and site maintenance.

SCHOOL COUNCIL

The School Council consists of pupils from Years 8-14. They are selected by their peers in each year group and help to communicate the pupil voice to SLT within school. The School Council is managed by the Head Boy and Head Girl in liaison with a Senior Teacher.

This year a very enthusiastic group met and decided to help promote the whole school drive towards the Compassionate School Award. Regular meetings take place throughout the year and pupils have the opportunity to discuss ways to improve the school from a pupil perspective. The School Council also helped to select furniture and chairs for the new building. The School Council regularly helps to communicate pupil observations and concerns. Pupils decided that they wanted to continue to promote pupil well-being across the school. After the internal exams in January, the School Council organised a "Donut and Connect" well-being event at break for Years 11-14. To help raise funds for initiatives throughout the school year, the School Council organised a non-uniform day. Funds are also used to help support the wellbeing activities in the summer term for Years 8-10.

A number of pupils from the School Council have also sat on Secondary School Union NI working groups this year.

SAFEGUARDING 2024-25

Child Protection and Safeguarding is a major element of the school's pastoral responsibility. We have a primary responsibility to promote wellbeing by providing a safe, caring, and supportive environment for every member of our school community. We believe that every young person has a right to feel safe, to be heard, listened to, and taken seriously.

In 2024-25, Mr McKillen was the Designated Teacher for Child Protection and Miss Bell and Mrs Hamilton the Deputy Designated Teachers. The Safeguarding Team worked closely with the Principal and the rest of the Pastoral Team to deal with any issues.

All staff in school were provided with Child Protection and Safeguarding training. Child Protection and Safeguarding assemblies were also delivered to pupils in school and Child Protection information was provided to parents.

The school continues to employ a second counsellor to support pupils wishing to avail of the service. In line with statutory regulations the Board of Governors receives a Child Protection and Safeguarding report at every meeting.

An annual Child Protection and Safeguarding report is also made available to the Board of Governors. The Safeguarding Team also uses the ETI self-evaluation pro-forma designed to help review and quality assure Child Protection and Safeguarding arrangements in school.

Pupil wellbeing is supported by different activities throughout the year and the Wellbeing Coordinator organises a range of external agencies to speak to pupils about their wellbeing and how to cultivate resilience.

In 2024-25 we participated in the EA Being Well Doing Well programme which supported the development of a whole school approach to emotional health and wellbeing. In line with Addressing Bullying legislation, a report on any incidents of bullying is a mandatory item at meetings of the school’s Board of Governors.

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS 2024-2025

Down High School is committed to supporting all pupils, including those with special educational needs. The Special Education Needs/Inclusion Policy is updated to take account of the Special Education Needs and Disability Order 2005 (SENDO), the subsequent supplement to the Code of Practice and the ongoing changes brought about by the SEND Act (NI) 2016. A copy of the policy was updated in June 2022 and is available from the school on request.

Down High School staff are committed to providing equal access for all our pupils to a broad and balanced educational experience based on the Northern Ireland Curriculum. We recognise that some pupils during their school career may have special educational needs and/or a disability. In the interests of these children, we will endeavour to make every reasonable arrangement to provide for their individual needs.

Down High School is starting to integrate the new initiative in SEN within its framework and its ethos. This will be built into our vision for the next two years and we will move across from IEPs to PLPs by 2025. A graduated response embeds a child-centred ethos, ensuring resources and expertise are matched to individual needs when and where they are needed most. The Graduated Response Framework (GRF) is a structured approach guiding schools in Northern Ireland to identify and support children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities. It ensures that learners and their families are actively involved at every stage, with decisions documented through a Personal Learning Plan (PLP). The six-part IPAMER cycle – Identify, Plan, Action, Monitor, Evaluate, Review - provides the day-to-day steps through which the graduated response is delivered. Each stage in the IPAMER cycle translates the strategic goals of the Graduated Response Framework into concrete tasks and decisions within schools.

The School's aims in relation to Special Educational Needs are:

- To ensure that pupils with Special Educational Needs or a Disability will have access to the full NI curriculum and will be fully supported so that their personal, social and academic development may be realised.
- To provide learning and pastoral support for pupils with defined special educational needs through individual education plans specific to the needs of each child.
- To maintain effective communication with parents, the Education Authority and outside agencies to ensure that support for the individual child remains a priority.

The Special Needs programme is directed by three teachers. To ensure that the school building is accessible to pupils with a disability during its final year of use, most classrooms have access via ramps and there is a lift in the main building which gives access to the first floor. Specialist rooms such as Technology and Home Economics have been adapted to give all pupils access to all parts of the curriculum. In 2022 a temporary classroom was also repurposed and adapted to meet sensory and physical needs and this classroom is now being used as a mentoring room for SEN pupils to meet with staff members who check in with them on a weekly basis to ensure that they are managing the demands of AS and A-Level courses. The room is also being used at breaktimes and lunchtimes when required by hearing-impaired pupils when noise levels prove overwhelming.

Consideration is given to timetabling arrangements, ensuring that pupils are accommodated in classrooms that are accessible and appropriate to their needs. Progress continues to be made in the development of Special Needs provision in Down High School, and staff are kept updated on changes and are briefed on the needs of specific pupils throughout the year.

Individual Education Plans are in place for all pupils at Stages 1-3 of the SEND Framework. These will be replaced by PLPs from September 2025 in the move towards the graduated response. In 2024-2025, Annual Review meetings took place face to face, allowing parents, pupils, teachers, classroom assistants and EA specialists to evaluate the progress of pupils with a statement of special educational needs. The SENCo and Access Arrangements Officer accessed additional professional development online to ensure up to date knowledge of access arrangements, as well as changes ahead regarding the new SEND Framework.

Regular updates and guidance on pupils with Special Needs and medical needs were offered, including the provision of resources in the Special Education Needs dedicated digital area in the Staff folder. Classroom Assistants provided bespoke support for pupils with a statement of special educational needs and catered for their educational and emotional needs. We hold Classroom Assistant team meetings once per month, as a means of ensuring all pupils and staff are sufficiently resourced and any issues or solutions are discussed. Classroom Assistants continue to complete their monthly reports yet also compile a daily chronicle of each pupil's classroom experience, so as to have as full a picture as possible regarding the progress being made and issues arising.

A new club has been introduced, via invitation to parents, for children with ASD on the SEN Register. This has been offered to both KS3 and 4 pupils as a means whereby pupils can meet with likeminded peers and share a quieter lunchtime, with the hope of making new acquaintances. This is offered in six week blocks throughout each of the three terms.

Laptops are still being trialled as a means of technological assistance to those pupils who may benefit. Reading pens are being used and new means of reasonable adjustments are being considered to ensure parity and fairness for all examination series. Access arrangements are closely monitored and reviewed, with the intention of ensuring those pupils with a picture of need are fully supported in both their daily routine and also in preparation for their external examinations.

One to one check-ins for specific pupils with the SEN team are proving positive, especially amongst the Sixth Form community, and this is helping to support pupils in terms of their emotional wellbeing and their self-esteem. Similarly, the literacy support teacher is providing specialised and targeted assistance to those pupils with dyslexia tendencies and those whose primary difficulty is cognition and learning. It is hoped that all such interventions and initiatives can enthuse pupils and strengthen their learning experience whilst in the school environment.

The SEN Team are preparing for the movement not only to the new school building but also to the new Graduated Response, which will be the focus of next year's planning.

SCHOOL YEAR 2024-25

Holiday dates (inclusive) and other closings

DATE(S)	DETAILS
Monday 19 th , Tuesday 20 th & Wednesday 21 st August	Baker Days
Thursday 22 nd August	GCSE Results Day / Career interviews
Friday 23 rd August	Careers interviews
Monday 26 th August	Bank Holiday
Tuesday 27 th August	School Development Day
Wednesday 28 th August	Year 13 pupils in school 9.30am – 12.30pm
Thursday 29 th August	Year 8 pupils in school 8.50am - 12.00pm Year 13 pupils in school all day
Friday 30 th August	Year 8 pupils in school all day Year 14 pupils in school 9.15am – 12.30pm (Senior prefects until 3.20pm)
Monday 2 nd September	All pupils in school (all day)
Thursday 17 th October	School Development Day
Monday 28 th – Thursday 31 st October	HALF-TERM HOLIDAY
Friday 1 st November	Baker Day
Friday 20 th December	Last day of term (half day)
Monday 23 rd December – Friday 3 rd January	CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY
Friday 10 th January	School Development Day
Monday 10 th February	Baker Day
Tuesday 11 th – Friday 14 th February	HALF-TERM HOLIDAY
Friday 7 th March	Controlled Assessment Time Pupils work from home
Monday 17 th March	HOLIDAY
Monday 14 th April	School Development Day
Tuesday 15 th to Friday 25 th April	EASTER HOLIDAY
Monday 5 th May	BANK HOLIDAY
Monday 26 th May	BANK HOLIDAY
Wednesday 11 th June	School Development Day
Monday 23 rd to Monday 30 th June	DECANT TO NEW SITE (School closed to pupils)

STAFF TRAINING 2024-25

Down High School availed of the training and development time that was available for schools during time when schools were open during the 2024-25 year. Baker Days and School Development Days were used to update staff on pastoral and curricular issues and allow time for school leaders to consult and identify priorities for the School Development Plan. Departments were given time to plan, monitor and evaluate their action plans. A summary of the training and professional development programme is set out below.

DATE	SUMMARY OF CONTENT	FACILITATED BY	VENUE
19 August 2024	Learning & Teaching/Pastoral Action Plans Health and Safety Pastoral meetings	SLT Pastoral leaders	Library
20 August 2024	Introduction to the Emotional Wellbeing Teams in School Programme Looking Through a Trauma Lens Action Plans <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICT • Eco Committee • Shared Education Departmental tasks	Alison Kennedy Alison Kennedy Mrs Stuart Mrs Wilson Mr Williamson	Library
21 August 2024	Action Plans <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numeracy • Literacy • Games • LLW Departmental tasks	Mrs Droogan Mrs Cooper Mr Pentland Mrs Adams	Library
23 August 2024	Interactive Panel Demonstration Effective Inclusion of Pupils with Diabetes	Mrs Stuart Online training	Various venues
27 August 2024	Safeguarding /Child Protection Training Medical Briefing SEN Briefing Positive Behaviour/Attendance	Mrs Hamilton Mrs Shilliday Miss Bell Mr McKillen	Library
12 October 2024	School Development Day Being Well Doing Well SEAG Briefing & Familiarisation Departmental meetings	Jim Weir SLT	Library Assorted venues
10 January 2025	School Development Day Exams/Reporting Briefing New Build Update Departmental Tasks	Exams Team SLT	Library
14 April 2025	School Development Day Well Being Day		
11 June 2025	School Development Day Visit to new build site Strangford Road		

LINKS WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS 2024-25

Down High School has healthy links with a range of external agencies as part of its continuing community emphasis during 2024-25.

In March 2025, we were delighted to welcome a large number of pupils from 11-16 schools to an information session on the 6th Form experience. The event included a summary of the curriculum, pastoral and careers provision as well as a tour of a number of departments. The school was also represented at an ALC event held in Blackwater IC which was an opportunity for schools and employers to meet with young people from 11-16 schools in the district to discuss future options. From these events, the school was able to make initial preparations for its annual Intake Day in August 2025, during which many of the young people who had expressed a written interest in joining 6th Form signed up for post-16 study at the newly opened school. While we were able to welcome visitors in the springtime, pupils and parents were also able to avail of a digital experience of the school, thanks to the production of several promotional videos produced by Lindsay Armstrong Media.

The Careers Department has long-established links with business organisations close to the school and further afield. The annual Mock Interview Evening largely took place in-house, but some interviews continued to be online. We were joined by over 50 volunteers who shared their considerable expertise with their sectoral interviewees.

The Community Action Programme enabled Sixth Form pupils to take up placements with local charities, nursing homes and schools. It is evident from the response of outside agencies that this work was valued and allowed our pupils to be visible in the wider community, carrying out good works and feeling the benefits of civic participation.

In sport, extensive links continued with local rugby hockey, netball, swimming, athletics, tennis and cricket clubs. The Equestrian team competed regularly and successfully across a range of venues and worked closely with organisations such as local pony clubs.

Cross-community Links

Down High School is a selective grammar school which welcomes children from all denominations and none. That it attracts a significant number of applications from every section of the community is, no doubt, due in part to its respectful ethos, which is well supported by cross-community links including the *PeacePlus-Aspire* Ambassadorial partnership with Lecale Trinity Grammar School. This new programme builds upon the older Shared Education partnership with Saint Patrick's Grammar School. Whilst the broad objectives remain similar, Aspire has different delivery requirements.

The 80 Aspire Ambassadors within each school must achieve at least 30 hours of shared learning. Senior pupils take part in a residential that delivers 20 of these hours. They also take part in various community actions to log the remaining hours, including a mural project, politics events, environmental initiatives, music and charity work. Junior Aspire Ambassadors are able to meet up on four school days throughout the year and they participate in a wide-ranging programme that includes Identity, Inclusion and Different Cultures.

Liaison with Agencies Linked to Pastoral Care Provision

Down High School's commitment to the welfare of its pupils has meant that it has maintained excellent relationships with a range of local agencies to support the school's work in the area of promoting emotional health and wellbeing.

CHARITIES

Fostering awareness amongst our pupils of those who are less fortunate is an important part of the school's aims and ethos and a number of charities benefited from the generosity of the pupils and staff in 2024-25. The list below identifies some of the groups receiving support.

Date	Charity	Amount
Oct 24	Cancer Fund for Children	£1,000
Oct 24	Little Princess Trust	£560
Oct 24	Pretty 'n Pink Charity	£1,000
Nov 24	Children in Need	£4,250
Dec 24	Children in Crossfire	£400
Dec 24	NI Hospice	£1,010
Dec 24	Down Cathedral	£1,010
Dec 24	Save the Children	£673.50
Jan 25	Simon Community	£200
Mar 25	Cancer Fund for Children	£1,685
May 25	Autism NI	£175
June 25	Challenges Abroad	£2431.95

VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTION

A voluntary contribution is requested annually to meet additional costs in the running of the school, including those arising from extra-curricular activities. This vital revenue source has a direct impact on pupils' learning, pastoral support and sporting/musical experience. Quite simply, the school cannot function without the voluntary contribution and the Board of Governors is eager to promote its importance as a means of supporting the ethos of the school, especially at a time when school budgets are under serious pressure and traditional provision is threatened. The voluntary contribution cost has not changed in ten years and currently stands at the following:

One Child	£75
Two Children	£125
Three Children	£150
More than Three Children	£150

APPLICATIONS AND ADMISSIONS

Year	Admissions No	Total Applications <i>i.e. All preferences</i>	Total Admissions (including temporary variations)
2020/21	128	224	138
2021-22	128	188	133
2022-23	128	165	133
2023-24	128	187	138
2024-25	128	179	140

FINANCIAL SUMMARY 2024-25

LMS Financial Summary for the year ended 31/03/2025				
Receipts			Payments	
EA	£5,407,087		Teaching Staff	4,319,546
Letting of Facilities	£3,465		Non Teaching Staff	661,311
Money sent to EA from DHS	£28,927		Premises, Fixed Plant and Goods	194,661
Earmarked funding (e.g. SEND, Period Dignity, Shared Education, Entitlement Framework)	£59,208		Operating Costs	291,257
			Contract Cleaning & Grounds Maintenance	204,810
			Travel, Course & Conference Fees	4,554
			Non-Capital Purchases	£17,860
			Stock Take	-£2,297
			Carry forward	-£193,015
Totals	£5,498,687			£5,498,687
School Accounts for the year ended 30/06/2025				
Receipts			Payments	
Departments	£12,697.00		Departments	£13,567.00
DHS Societies	£38,640.00		DHS Societies	£40,210.00
Voluntary Contribution	£0.00		Trips	£232,867.00
Trips	£251,502.00		Music/School Concerts / Shows	£18,718.00
Exams	£7,321.00		Exams	£6,698.00
Music/School Concerts / Shows	£6,680.00		Extra-Curricular Activity Costs	£16,069.00
Charities	£14,410.00		Charities	£21,857.00
Commissions received	£786.00		School Activities and Events	£8,218.00
Eco Group	£1,932.00		School Publications, Promotion and Marketing	£9,877.00
School Activities and Events	£18,954		Insurance and professional fees	£2,714.00
Other income	£26,083		Eco Group	£1,111.00
			New Build Costs	£11,543.00
			Other expenditure	£26,318.00
Totals	£379,005.00			£409,767.00