



Down High School

Prospectus

2024





Contact

Down High School

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Welcome



Welcome to the Prospectus of Down High School, a thriving co-educational grammar school situated in the historic town of Downpatrick. The school is justly known for high academic standards and outstanding examination results, yet high quality pastoral care sits at the heart of our pursuit of excellence and guides every aspect of school life. The warm, friendly and caring atmosphere of Down High comes from the great value placed on relationships between pupils, staff and parents.

At Down High we celebrate the many talents and achievements of our pupils, but in particular we value effort. We expect our students to be committed and resilient learners who give their best in the classroom and discover genuine interests that extend beyond the curriculum. Through developing a true passion for learning and a capacity for independent thinking, the habits of success and sound character are realised at Down High. Students are encouraged to learn from their mistakes and to believe in their potential, since intelligence and ability are not regarded as fixed qualities. Reflected in our motto *Absque Labore Nihil* ('nothing achieved without effort') is our belief that there is no limit to what can be accomplished through hard work. Learning is a life-long activity that allows dreams to be fulfilled.

The development of core values such as respect, kindness and responsibility are given particular importance at Down High. This personal growth empowers each student to be the very best that they can be, attaining the highest possible academic standards as happy, well-rounded young people ready to make a positive contribution to our global community. We encourage our students to care for others and to take every opportunity to participate in making the world a better place.

With the development at the site of our new school progressing so quickly, your child can look forward to the opening of a best-in-class modern educational facility in the near future.


I thank you for your interest in Down High School and believe passionately that your child can thrive in our school, with high expectations at the heart of our exceptional educational experience.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'M Perry'.

Mrs M Perry
Principal



Cutting the first sod on our new build site.

A young boy and girl in school uniforms are working on a project in a classroom. The boy, on the left, is wearing a green blazer and a striped tie, and is smiling while looking down at his work. The girl, on the right, is also wearing a green blazer and a striped tie, and is smiling while looking at the boy's work. They are both wearing braces. In the background, there are other students and a teacher, and a Christmas tree is visible. The boy is holding a small wooden block, and the girl is holding a yellow electronic device. They are both looking at a small wooden block on the table.

My child is very happy and loves going to school. An exceptional place, which has great family values.

My child is very happy at Down High and I as a parent think the school is excellent.

ABOUT US

The warm, friendly and caring atmosphere of Down High School arises from the high value placed on relationships between pupils, staff and parents. Pupils have a very positive attitude towards school life, particularly appreciating their friendships as well as the support they receive from teachers who know and treat them as individuals. There is a tradition of high academic achievement in the school. Teachers have high expectations of pupils academically but also in terms of their social and moral development. This generates a culture of tolerance within which the spiritual life of pupils can thrive. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities which offer opportunities to support the physical, intellectual and cultural development of the pupils. A child-centred approach is made possible by the wise and compassionate pastoral care provided. Positive discipline based on a high trust philosophy means that when sanctions are necessary they are used in a manner which seeks to repair and develop relationships.

At Down High School, we believe that through high aspirations, perseverance and commitment every pupil can enjoy school life as they fulfil their potential.

Our Aims

- Promote wellbeing by providing a safe, caring and supportive environment for every member of our school community
- Nurture life-long friendships and positive relationships through respect for diversity and sensitivity towards others
- Foster kindness, trust, optimism as well as respect
- Develop leadership, independence, confidence and resilience in every pupil
- Encourage curiosity, creativity and resourcefulness in pupils who, as fully engaged learners, embrace the knowledge and skills required for a changing world
- Inspire participation and excellence in the rich extra-curricular life of the school
- Raise pupils' awareness of the world around them and their wider responsibilities as members of society
- Celebrate the strong partnerships within the Down High School community

The development of our core value of RESPECT is given particular importance at Down High. Personal growth and character education empowers each pupil to be the very best that they can be, achieving highly as contented, well-rounded young people ready to play an important role in the workplace and their community. We encourage our students to care for others and to take every opportunity to participate in making the world a better place.

At Down High School our core value of **RESPECT** means:

Responsibility	we value doing the right thing
Effort	we value trying our best
Success	we value high achievement
Perseverance	we value rising to a challenge
Equality	we value our diversity
Community	we value our positive relationships
Trust	we value each other

We expect our students to be committed and resilient learners, working to their full potential in the classroom and finding a voice through our extra-curricular programme. Through developing a true passion for learning and a capacity for independent thinking, the habits of success and sound character are realised at Down High. Students are encouraged to learn from their mistakes and to believe in their potential, since intelligence and ability are not regarded as fixed qualities.





Into the Future

Down High School is a controlled, co-educational Grammar School, run by a very committed Board of Governors. School numbers have risen substantially over recent years, and around 300 students are engaged in Advanced Level study in our expanded Sixth Form. The situation of the school is convenient to many town and country bus routes.

Down High School occupies an historic setting. It is built on the site of the 19th Century county gaol, close to Down Cathedral and overlooking both the Mound of Down and the nearby ruins of Inch Abbey. The walls surrounding the school are part of the original boundary walls and these, along with the 1833 gate-lodge, are "listed" buildings.

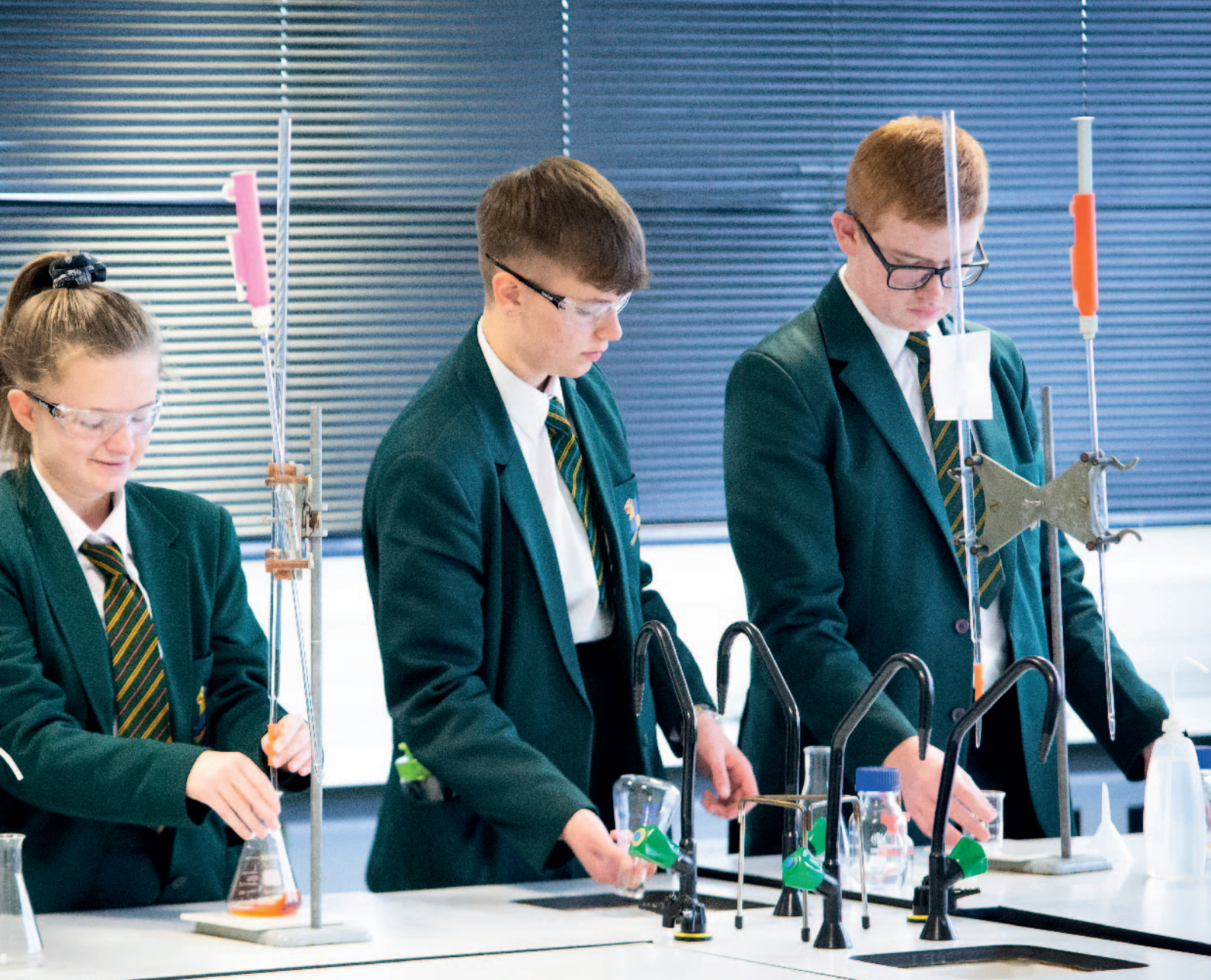
In January 2013, the Department of Education announced that Down High School would be prioritised for a new build on a site on the Strangford Road. In conjunction with the Education Authority, we have been working hard in preparation for the build and look forward confidently to your sons and daughters being educated in an attractive, environmentally responsible site with state-of-the-art facilities that will continue to prepare pupils for the opportunities and challenges of third level education and the workplace.

The Minister of Education, Ms Michelle McIlveen, visited the school in October 2022 before proceeding to the site of the new school on the Strangford Road where she cut the first ceremonial sod signifying the start of the construction process. Progress since has been swift, therefore your child can look forward to spending much of their time at Down High in our new school building.

Proud to be Dunumians

The school crest, designed by the late RWH Blackwood of Loughinisland near Downpatrick, is a reminder of another link with the past, dating back to the 12th century. The design itself is based upon the supposed badge of John de Courcy, the Norman knight who captured Downpatrick in 1177 and established himself as ruler of North East Ireland.

The colours of the crest are taken from the arms of Lady Elizabeth Southwell (1674-1709), daughter of Vere Essex Cromwell, 4th and last Earl of Ardglass, owner of Downpatrick estate and wife of the Right Honourable Edward Southwell of King's Weston, Gloucestershire (MP for Kinsale and Principal Secretary of State for Ireland). She was a well-known benefactor of the town.



Admissions and the House System

Currently the Admissions Number of the school is 128 with the Enrolment Number being 934. On entry to Year 8, pupils are divided into unstreamed classes, linked to the House System.

Many students from local 11-16 schools choose to come to Down High for post-16 study, when a range of A-Levels and Level 3 qualifications are offered.

On entering the school each pupil is assigned to one of five Houses. A wide range of House competitions and activities take place throughout the year, allowing pupils to embrace a healthy spirit of competition while developing their leadership skills.

	Down
	Lecale
	Rathkeltair
	Mourne
	Strangford

*Big city opportunities
in a safe and rural setting*

May Down Flourish – nothing achieved without effort.



Year 8 Induction

In June of the P7 year, we invite Year 8 pupils who have gained a place in Down High and their parents into school to meet with senior staff and the form teachers who will help your child to settle into the school. This is also an opportunity to meet new classmates and allow your child to look forward to life in Down High.

At the beginning of Year 8, pupils enjoy a phased entry into school without large numbers of students in other year groups. For their first months, Year 8 pupils will leave class five minutes early at the end of the day in order to help them board the correct bus outside the school gate or at the bus depot.

As pupils get used to the very different school day, they also prepare for the exciting two-day residential at Ganaway in County Down, a fantastic opportunity for them to get to know their peers and teachers while participating in a range of dynamic learning activities.

Ganaway was class. It was great fun to mix with my new friends and take part in the outdoor adventures. The teachers were good sports too."



The School Year

The three-term school year begins in September and ends in late June. A calendar of the principal school dates for each term (including parents' meetings) is made available at the start of each term. Parents and friends are cordially invited to attend a range of school events as well as those organised by the Friends of Down High, which embraces our parents and alumni of the school.

The School Day

Registration takes place at 8.55am daily. Assemblies, including year assemblies, have maintained the important sense of community that we value in Down High. All pupils are required to attend Morning Assembly on the appropriate days, unless excused by request of their parents.

The attendance levels in Down High School are above the Northern Ireland grammar school average and we value the support of parents in ensuring that pupils' learning is maximised by their full attendance in school.

School Uniform - Belonging to our Community

Down High School places strong emphasis on pupils' dress code. This allows students to prepare for the professional standards of the workplace and also serves as a social leveller, whereby pupils are not subject to the anxiety associated with daily fashion and expensive brands. Our distinctive uniform is an important statement of belonging to a school community. In comparison to many other grammar schools, the Down High blazer is affordable. Sportswear is purchased through our on-line shop, which keeps costs to a minimum. Parents can obtain details on uniform regulations from the following booklets provided to new entrants:

- Information for New Entrants
- Information for Sixth Form Pupils.

Details of the school uniform and uniform suppliers can be found on the school website. Financial support to eligible parents for the purchase of school uniforms is available under the Education Authority's Clothing Scheme. We also receive great quality used uniforms each year and these are available to pupils of all ages.



I was made to feel very welcome and everyone was so friendly.

School Meals

The school canteen has a 5-star hygiene rating and provides a variety of lunch and snack meals. A cashless cafeteria system operates, whereby pupils pre-pay for their meals using machines installed in the school and receive food either by a fingerprint reading on biometric meter or by a pin code. School meal payments can also be made by parents using an on-line pre-pay facility. Packed lunches may be brought if desired and consumed in the canteen or Assembly Hall.

Pupils with a Free School Meals Entitlement can access this through the Education Authority on a means tested basis. Application Forms may be obtained online.

Books and Materials

Textbooks and other requisites are provided under the Free Books Scheme. They remain the property of the school and must be returned at the end of each course.

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

The structure of the school day is set out above.

Registration Bell will ring at 8.53am
Period 7E: Junior Lunch (Years 8-9)
Period 7L: Senior Lunch (Years 10-14)

The teachers here are very nice, the other pupils are kind and there are many different clubs to join.



The Curriculum

The curriculum in Down High School aims to equip our young people with the knowledge and skills to become learned citizens who have the skills and capabilities to thrive in the world of work. Their spiritual and physical development is also prioritised and their lives enriched by a range of creative pursuits.

The school's Learning and Teaching Policy provides the basis for effective classroom practice and accentuates the importance of

the pupils as confident, curious and participative learners who are challenged using a range of classroom methodologies, including ICT.

The Education and Training Inspectorate has noted that "The curriculum is suitably broad and balanced and meets effectively the learning needs of all of the pupils including a curriculum for post-16 pupils which will match well the interests, abilities and career aspirations of the widening intake of pupils to the sixth form."

Key Stage 3	Key Stage 4	Key Stage 5
Art	Art	Art and Design
Biology	Business Studies	Biology
Chemistry	Biology	Business Studies
Drama	Chemistry	Chemistry
English	Digital Technology	Digital Technology
French	Double-Award Science	English Literature
Geography	Drama	French
History	English Language	Geography
Home Economics	English Literature	Government & Politics
ICT	Food & Nutrition	Health & Social Care
Learning for Life and Work	French	History
Mathematics	Further Mathematics	Mathematics
Music	Geography	Further Mathematics
PE	History	Moving Image Arts
Physics	LLW	Music
Religious Studies	Mathematics	Nutrition & Food Science
Science (Yrs 8-9)	Moving Image Arts	Physical Education
Spanish (Yrs 9-10)	Music	Physics
Technology	Physical Education	Religious Studies
	Physics	Sociology
	Religious Studies	Software Systems Development
	Spanish	Spanish
	Technology	Technology & Design
		Theatre Studies
		Tourism Level 3 Diploma

We aim to develop the skills and capabilities that young people will need in a fast-moving world. Communication and problem-solving skills are promoted in all subjects along with the ability to manage information and work with others to produce successful outcomes. Our pupils are financially aware and competent in ICT. Leadership among pupils is developed in the classroom, as well as through mentoring schemes and extra-curricular activities.

My child is exceptionally happy with a very positive attitude to school.

Homework

All pupils are expected to do the daily recommended amount of homework, which varies according to age and course of study: one to one and a half hours per day for junior pupils, two and a half hours for those studying Advanced Level. Developing effective study skills that work for the individual child is considered an important element of the learning process as well as encouraging self-motivation and self-discipline. Pupils' academic progress is recorded on a regular basis, and pupils are given the opportunity twice yearly to formally self-evaluate their learning and identify the actions they will take to improve.

Learning to Learn

Down High School places a lot of emphasis on developing the pupils' ability to learn how to learn in ways that work for them as individuals. Year group and subject-based opportunities are provided for the pupils to develop creative revision and learning techniques that extend beyond the inefficient reading and re-reading of notes. Year 8 pupils attend an age-appropriate learning skills workshop, during which they are exposed to a range of methodologies that can assist in the absorption, retention and deployment of information. We suspend homework in the period before internal examinations to allow pupils to focus on revision. Useful study skills advice is provided in the age-appropriate and bespoke Homework Diaries that are written by members of the school's Learning and Teaching Committee. We are working to assist our pupils to become resilient and resourceful learners, equipped fully not just for school examinations but for third level education and the world of work.

Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their learning, adapt and change where necessary and recognise what learning strategies work for them. Through metacognitive approaches, pupils are encouraged to become self-regulated learners who are able to maximise their performance and thrive in ways that prepare them effectively for their next steps.

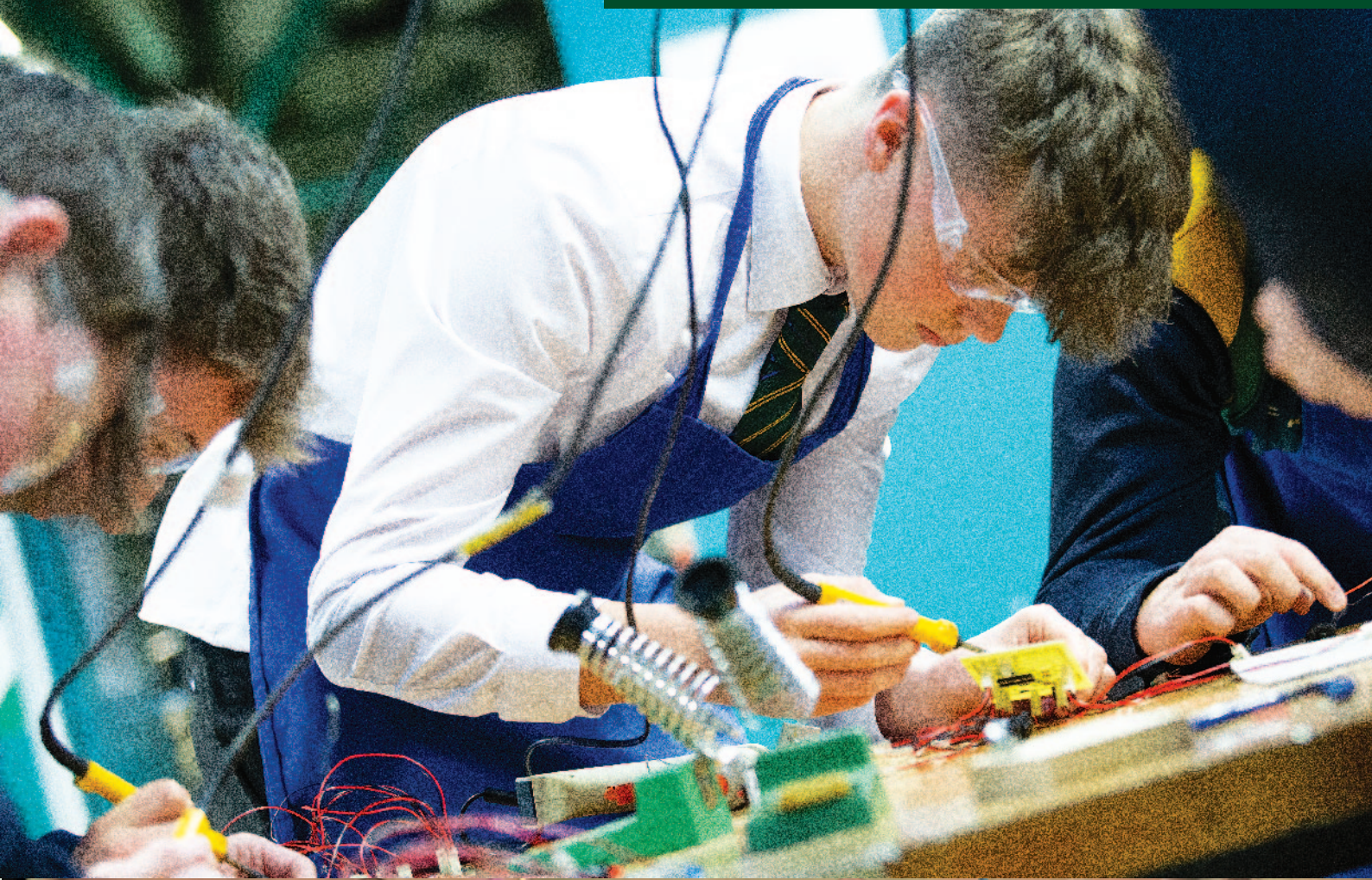
Religious Education Provision

Religious Studies is non-denominational and is followed by all pupils in Junior and Middle School. It promotes an understanding of world religions, ethical issues and human behaviour, and develops a range of thinking skills and personal capabilities.

Pupils follow the Programmes of Study relevant to Key Stages 3 and 4. Currently, the vast majority of pupils are entered for GCSE Religious Studies. This course begins in Year 10 and continues through to the end of Year 12.

*I was the only person
to transfer from my
previous school.
Although I knew
no one, I settled in
really quickly.*







Growth Mindset

We value effort and the successful reviewing of learning strategies that work for individual pupils. We want our pupils to be rewarded not simply for being 'bright', but for their positive approach to learning new things and the ways in which they respond to setbacks. Pupils who seek challenge and see difficulties as learning opportunities are equipped with the resourcefulness and resilience to manage the pressures of an increasingly complex world.

"The hallmark of successful learners is that they love learning, they seek challenges, they value effort and they persist in the face of obstacles"

(Professor Carol Dweck – Stanford University)

Internal Assessment and Reports

Pupils are assessed continuously through tests and homework, with internal examinations held twice yearly. Reports are sent to parents who may also ask for an individual update on their child's progress at any time by contacting the school.

ICT

Down High School boasts five fully equipped ICT suites and a Mac suite for Moving Image Arts. Digital projectors and Wi-Fi connectivity is found in all classrooms and portable laptops and iPad trollies allow ICT to be deployed in any teaching space. A Bring Your Own Device Policy provides the opportunity for senior pupils to use their own technologies in school in a supervised and controlled environment.

The school recognises that a high degree of computer literacy is a prerequisite for modern adult life. Our pupils are given every opportunity to develop their competence in ICT and are consequently well placed to access highly skilled posts in a sophisticated workplace environment. The upcoming new school will feature an expanded provision of state-of-the-art ICT facilities which will allow our students even easier access to devices.

Down High School embraces online learning and uses Google Classroom across all year groups to enrich the learning experience beyond traditional classroom boundaries.





Sixth Form

Recent years have seen an ever-increasing number of pupils wishing to enrol in the Sixth Form at Down High. Currently there are nearly 300 pupils undertaking Advanced Level study. Each year we are joined by pupils from a variety of other controlled and maintained 11-16 schools. Nearly all students apply to universities and further education colleges across the UK and Ireland, including Oxford and Cambridge. We also promote the opportunities provided by work-placed apprenticeship schemes in Northern Ireland and beyond.

A wide range of general academic and applied courses are on offer, including AS and A2 Levels in Art, Biology, Business Studies, Chemistry, Digital Technology, Drama and Theatre Studies, English Literature, French, Geography, Government and Politics, Health and Social Care, Nutrition and Food Science, History, Mathematics, Further Mathematics, Moving Image Arts, Music, Physical Education, Physics, Religious Studies, Sociology, Software Systems Development, Spanish and Technology & Design. A Level 3 Diploma in Tourism is also part of our curriculum provision.

In all A-Level subjects the course consists of a number of modules, some of which are taken at the end of Year 13, to achieve an AS qualification. In the first year four AS subjects are normally taken, with most students reducing to three subjects in the second year.

The Sixth Form programme includes time for private study and students are required to assume a greater responsibility for organising their studies. Our 'Bring Your Own Device Policy' allows students to bring laptops and tablet computers into school to aid their work and research. Students can undertake voluntary service within an academic department or extra-curricular activity, while a community action programme enables students to develop responsibility and leadership in the local area by working in primary schools, care homes and charity shops.

Sixth Form study introduces a different style of school life. Classes are usually smaller and less formal; opportunities to expand interests and activities increase and there is time to develop socially. With a healthy balance of academic work and social activity, life in the Sixth Form can be both rewarding and enjoyable.



Entry Requirements for Sixth Form

Our Sixth Form admissions criteria can be found on the school's website. Grade B or better at GCSE is usually expected in subjects being taken to AS Level.

Every effort is made to ensure that a smooth transition is made from GCSE to AS and A2 Levels, and that pupils joining Down High from other schools soon become familiar with the school and Sixth Form study requirements. This change is facilitated by our successful Year 13 Induction Day in August, a meeting with students and parents in early October, study skills assistance and pastoral support. Progress within the Sixth Form is monitored carefully by a Head of School and two Year Heads.

Examination success at AS/A2 Level has been consistently high and a number of pupils have gained top places in Northern Ireland in the CCEA examinations in a variety of subjects.

My three children have been very happy in the school, have contributed to school life and got a lot back in return - I could not recommend it more highly to other parents.

STUDENT RETENTION RATES	DOWN HIGH SCHOOL THREE-YEAR AVERAGE	DOWN HIGH SCHOOL THREE-YEAR AVERAGE
Year 12 into Year 13	92%	85.4%
Year 13 into Year 14	94%	87.4%



Pastoral Care

A caring and child-centred Pastoral Care provision lies at the heart of Down High School's ethos and good practice. It is our priority that the pupils attending the school are safe and their welfare paramount. For this reason, a strong pastoral team has been assembled with the aim of supporting a child's academic, behavioural and emotional development. This team is headed by the Pastoral Vice-Principal, Mr McKillen and Senior Teacher, Miss Bell. The Head of Junior School is Mr Morrow, while Miss Garrett is the Head of Middle School and Mrs Hamilton (Senior Teacher) is our Head of Sixth Form.

Each form class is under the supervision of a Form Teacher who looks after the welfare and progress of the pupils on a day-to-day basis. It is usual for the Form Teacher to teach the class in his/her individual subject in order to get to know each pupil well. Effective co-operation between parents and the school pre-empt most serious situations and provides the best possible support for young people in their formative school years.

Queries concerning a pupil's welfare should be addressed to the Form Teacher, Head of Year, Head of School or the Pastoral VP, Mr McKillen.

Throughout the school year, parent-teacher consultations are arranged to allow parents to discuss their child's progress with subject teachers. Parents may contact the school to discuss a pastoral or academic issue at any time and interviews with the Principal can be scheduled through her Personal Assistant.

Down High School has assigned two teachers (a Learning Support Coordinator and a deputy) to direct the Special Needs programme. All classrooms in the school are accessible 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 every aspect of the curriculum.

A number of classroom assistants support children with a statement of Special Educational Needs and Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are used to establish targets for pupils in every subject. In Down High School we value the partnership formed with parents and, as a consequence, ensure parents are kept fully informed and involved in their children's education.

I am really happy with the pastoral care, extra-curricular activities and general attention given to my daughter's wellbeing over the past 7 years. I have found the teaching staff to be exceptionally caring and kind, and I believe that the general atmosphere in the school is happy and homely.

May Down Flourish – nothing achieved without effort.



Pupil Voice

Elected members of the School Council bring issues that affect pupils for discussion at regular meetings of our School Council. Consisting of students from all year groups, the School Council consults widely and raises matters such as well-being, facilities, pupil concerns and other aspects of school life. The School Councils of Down High and St Patrick's Grammar School have worked together through the Shared Education link between the two schools and there are also strong links with the School Council of Knockevin Special School.



My children have reached their potential with consistent support from excellent staff.

Inspection

Down High School has been classified as “Very Good” by the Education and Training Inspectorate and two subsequent Sustaining Improvement Inspections have confirmed the school’s sustained self-improvement in the interests of our pupils.



I am so glad I chose Down High for my children - it is delivering exactly the quality of education, moral guidance, extra-curricular activity and social interaction it promised.

Careers Education Advice Information and Guidance (CEAIG)

Down High School provides students with the opportunity to complete effective research, discuss with tutors any issues relating to career choices, and assist them in their decision-making throughout the key transition stages during their school years.

A structured programme has been developed to ensure that careers education is fully integrated into the curriculum and meets the needs of all pupils. The careers library is always open to students who wish to research career pathways or discuss careers-related issues. The careers team, consisting of Mr Williamson (HoD) and a part-time careers adviser, aims to assist all students to find the most appropriate route for them and welcomes contact with parents during this sometimes difficult period.

Significant attention is given to students in Years 13 and 14 as they approach, construct and refine their UCAS applications, and Google Classrooms for each year provide a wealth of information and on-line research materials. The Careers Department continues to prioritise broadening the CEAIG provision for the school's expanding and changing Sixth-Form student base. It is committed to developing the resources and skills base in relation to a wider range of Post-18 pathways (including Apprenticeships, Company Leavers' Programmes, Further Education, CAFRE, Institutes of Technology in the Republic, universities in the USA and continental Europe, business start-ups, and Company Selection Day challenges).

The Careers Department is also broadening the range of stakeholders it works with, bringing in more speakers from industry and third level education in its widest sense. Video shorts are produced to showcase some of the post-18 pathways that our pupils have embarked upon.

Throughout the course of a year, students are invited to attend a range of talks and information sessions provided by a number of institutions and are also given the opportunity to attend university open days. Additional mock interviews are held for all students applying for places in nursing, teaching and allied health courses. The Department also holds Careers Presentation Evenings for parents of pupils in all of the key transition year groups.

As part of the wider Careers provision, all pupils in Years 8-12 participate in an Employability programme as part of Learning for Life and Work and engage with a series of workshops during the course of the year in conjunction with Young Enterprise (NI). These focus on the development of teamwork and the cultivation of entrepreneurial skills, both significant features of the Employability programme. Pupils in Years 10 and 12 receive a personal careers interview and are able to request a consultation with a member of the Careers Department. Year 13 students have opportunities to secure live or virtual work experience placements to help confirm their career aspirations. Year 13 students also participate in an annual mock interview evening, where their applications, skills and competences are assessed by visiting panellists, all of whom have close links with the Down High School community. Pupils in all year groups chart their careers education using Unifrog, an exciting on-line tool which supports pupils on their pathway to further education and the world of work.

Leavers' Destinations 2023

The vast majority (90%) of Year 14 student leavers embarked immediately upon university/further education studies in 2023. This figure excludes students planning to re-apply to their desired courses next year after a "Gap Year." The Careers Department is also proactive in helping students see the benefits of work-based apprenticeship schemes.



May Down Flourish – nothing achieved without effort.



Extra-Curricular

A host of clubs and societies cater for as many interests as possible and participation rates are very high, both during lunchtimes and after school. Pupils can choose to become members of any of the following:

Book Club	Debating Society
Junior Book Club	Show Jumping/Equestrian Society
Chemistry Club	Volleyball
Community Action Programme	Games Club
Current Affairs Society	Rugby
Charity Support Group	Rugby Lineout Skills
Coding Club	Hockey
Cybersecurity Club	Netball
Cookery Club	Tennis
Come Dine with Me	Football (Years 13-14)
Dance Club	Badminton
Dodgeball Club	Volleyball
Drama Club	Swimming
Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme	Junior Choir
Eco-Group	Rock Band
Film Club	Role Play Games
Foreign Language Film Club	Highland Piping and Drumming
ICT Games Tournament	Traditional Music Group
Junior and Senior Scripture Union	Arts and Crafts Club
Junior Debating Society	Running Club
Lego Club	Chamber Choir
LinguaClub	Junior woodwind and Junior brass
Making a Difference Group	String Ensemble
Mindfulness	Orchestra
Programming Club	Chess Club
Public Speaking	Scripture Union
Senior Biology Discussion Group	Young Enterprise
Sailing	Zoology Club

These societies allow pupils to mix with friends and colleagues from other year groups and provide them with the skills and experiences that will enable them to be confident and positive contributors to society. The friendships established during such activities can be long-lasting and testify to the effectiveness of an extra-curricular programme that is led by a committed staff with the aim of providing as broad an education as possible.



Architect's design for the front of the new school



Music and Drama

Individual tuition in brass, woodwind, voice, piano, violin, percussion, Highland piping and drumming, flute, tin whistle and guitar is provided by either Education Authority peripatetic staff or private tutors. An array of musical instruments can be hired from the local Music Centre.

In Music lessons, pupils learn using a variety of methodologies and through a range of musical genres. The Orchestra, Traditional Group, small ensembles and the Junior Choir cater for the many pupils who are interested in instrumental performance and choral singing. There is also a smaller Chamber Choir which performs highly specialised pieces from the choral repertoire.

During the last week of the Christmas term, choirs lead our annual Carol Services in Down Cathedral. During the last two years of the pandemic, virtual Carol Services have been recorded and uploaded, with significant amounts of money raised for charity. An instrumental and choral concert is held in March and a junior concert staged in the summer term. Every opportunity is taken to induct pupils into the realm of musical performance.

All pupils engage in Drama as a discrete subject in two of the three years of Key Stage Three and Drama and Theatre Studies are options for GCSE and A-Level respectively. A number of lavish school shows involving large casts drawn from all year groups have been performed in recent years. These theatrical treats have included 'Calamity Jane', 'The Sound of Music', 'Grease', 'Joseph and his Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat', 'The Wizard of Oz', 'Bugsy', 'Annie', and 'Sister Act'.



Physical Education and Games

Physical Education and Games at Down High is a fun, wide-ranging experience which affords pupils the opportunity to participate, as well as compete at the highest level. Participation in a comprehensive PE and Games programme enables pupils to develop their physical and mental well-being as well as important values such as respect, teamwork, and resilience. Within Games pupils can develop the skills and qualities they learn in core PE, putting them into more competitive scenarios, as well as learning how to deal with winning and losing and therefore developing their resilience.

Games also affords pupils the opportunity to represent their school and enhance their identity within Down High. As a school we aim to provide opportunities for pupils to compete at the highest level in their sport, as well as develop the physical and mental well-being in an enjoyable way. We particularly value parental support for our programme of out-of-class sporting activities.

In Year 8 all pupils receive swimming tuition and are taught the basic skills of a variety of sports and games. Physical Education enhances and develops ball skills, racquet skills and general fitness, emphasising the connection between exercise and wellbeing. We are proud of the fact that many of our pupils have gained representative honours at Ulster, Irish and British levels, modelling the virtues of practice, resilience, perseverance and loyalty.

In Games, boys in Years 8-11 play rugby in winter and undertake athletics, tennis and cricket in the summer. Girls in Years 8- 11 play hockey and netball in winter and enjoy tennis, athletics, football and softball in the summer. In Years 12-14 a menu of sports is offered for one and a half hours each Wednesday afternoon. Within the menu are rugby, hockey, dance, badminton, soccer, swimming, squash, fitness training and netball.

Teams compete against other schools, usually on Saturday mornings, in rugby, hockey and cricket and are also involved in inter-school competitions in athletics, cross-country running, equestrian sport, golf, badminton, swimming, squash, netball and tennis.

Facilities at Down High consist of playing fields, four tennis courts, netball courts, an Assembly Hall and Gymnasium. The school also boasts a high specification fitness suite with stunning views over the River Quoile. The Sports Hall provides excellent opportunities for sporting endeavour. A non-turf cricket pitch and two bays of cricket nets are additional features of the playing fields. Facilities are extended by the substantial use of Down Leisure Centre and local astro-turf pitches for senior hockey practice and matches.



May Down Flourish – nothing achieved without effort.





Sports available to pupils at Down High School

Athletics

Badminton

Cricket

Dance

Equestrian

Girls' Hockey

Golf

Netball

Boys' and Girls' Rugby

Girls' and Boys' Soccer

Squash

Swimming

Table Tennis

Tennis

Volleyball



School Trips and Visits

An important feature of school life is providing the opportunities for our pupils to learn, form friendships and develop new skills while enjoying trips and visits that add richness to their lives and create memories that will last forever. Many departments within the school organise group outings for various year groups as part of their Controlled Assessment, or in preparation for formal examinations. Outings include visits to local theatres, colleges and universities, as well as various fieldwork options. Year 8 pupils enjoy a residential at Ganaway Outdoor Centre during their first term in Down High.

Advanced Level pupils are encouraged to visit local colleges and universities during their official open days prior to making their selection for further education courses. They can meet lecturers and make enquiries regarding the course combinations they may wish to study. Some Sixth Form students have the opportunity to visit Oxford and Cambridge.

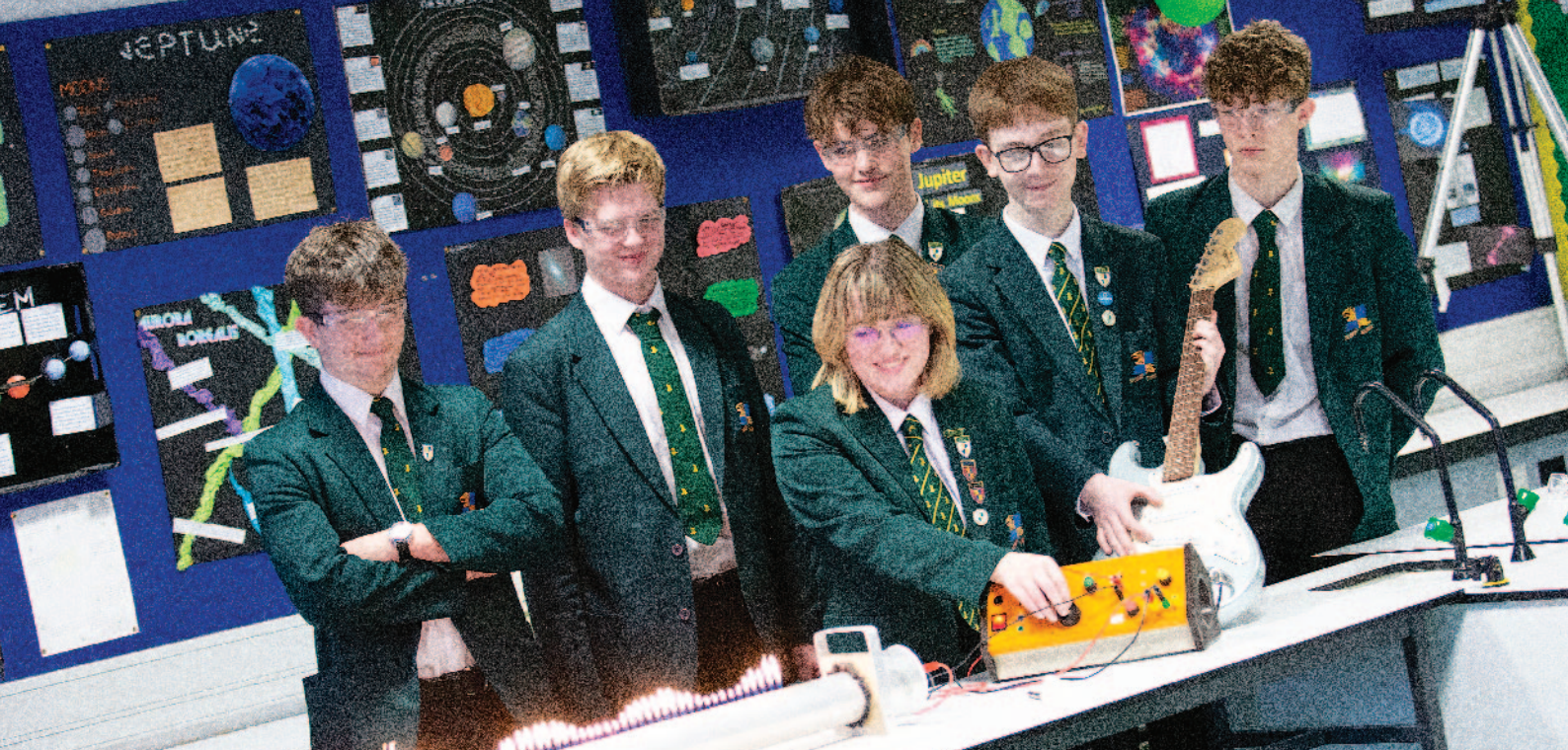
Other tours are organised on a regular basis for pupils from Year 9 onwards. The school ski trip, the French trip to Paris and the Art and Spanish tour to Barcelona are all very popular.

We are delighted with his progress and development over these last 7 years. He has made some great friends and has progressed steadily through his years at Down High. Whatever the future may bring, we think he will do well. We thank all the teachers and staff for their teaching, time, care and inspiration!

We are an outward facing school, with links to France, Spain, India and China. Down High pupils are aware of their global responsibilities.

Locally, Year 13 students participate in community action voluntary work in local primary schools, charities and care homes.

A range of charities benefit greatly from the generosity of Down High School staff and pupils across the school year.



Voluntary Contribution

Parents pay an annual voluntary contribution to meet additional costs in the running of the school, including those arising from extra-curricular activities. The current charges are:

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



Applications and Admissions

YEAR	ADMISSIONS NUMBER	TOTAL APPLICATIONS*	TOTAL ADMISSIONS (includes temporary variations)
2021/22	128	188	140
2022/23	128	165	137
2023/24	128	187	138

* All preferences

School Inspections

This is what the Education and Training Inspectorate said about our school.

“The school’s distinctive, inclusive and pupil-centred ethos is highly conducive to learning. The pupils are well-motivated and articulate confidently in class activities; their behaviour is exemplary.”

“The school is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the pupils; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.”

“The percentage of Year 14 pupils attaining Grade C or above in at least 3 General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) levels has demonstrated significant and continuing improvement over the last three years and is above the average for similar schools.”

“In the most effective practice, the teachers structure the lessons well, make explicit connections to previous learning and set challenging tasks which reflect their high expectations.”

“The pupils, including those identified as needing additional support with their learning, have well-planned opportunities to participate in active and enjoyable learning experiences.”

“The high levels of commitment to the welfare of the pupils are expressed through the very good quality of the arrangements for pastoral care. The pupils and the parents appreciate fully the quality of this support.”

“Effective use is made of pupil consultation through the school council to enhance the learning experiences for all pupils.”

“A distinctive ethos of trust and respect permeates the life and work of the school as a result of the very good working relationships at all levels.”

“The availability of an extensive extra-curricular programme for the pupils helps to develop individual talents, confidence and self-esteem.”

“The school plays an active role in promoting Careers Education, Advice, Information and Guidance in the learning community and has developed good links with other schools and external agencies.”

“Very good links and partnerships are maintained with a wide range of organisations and external agencies including local employers, schools and support services which broaden the range of the pupils’ experiences and support well their learning.”

“Financial resources are well managed, providing pupils with a suitable curriculum, making effective use of all available resources and, in doing so, providing good value for money.”

“The senior leadership team is also instrumental in effecting school improvement; the team leads collegially and manages effectively whole-school development. Strategic leadership draws successfully on the collective and individual strengths of the team.”

“Down High School continues to demonstrate a high level of capacity for sustained self-improvement in the interests of the pupils.”

“All of the lessons observed during the inspection were effective, with a majority of them being very effective (very good or outstanding).”

“A robust culture of self-evaluation has been established across the school.”

“A well-thought-out strategic approach to the use of ICT to enhance the pupils’ learning is being implemented. The evidence is clear that the pupils are using ICT confidently and competently to extend their learning.”

The full Inspection Reports are available on the School website and that of the Education and Training Inspectorate.

Prospective parents wishing to ask any questions regarding the Inspection Report or any other aspect of school life should speak to Mrs Perry or one of the Vice-Principals.

Three Year Data

INDICATOR	DHS RESULTS			NI GRAMMAR SCHOOL DATA*			
	20-21	21-22	22-23	LQ	M	UQ	95th Pce
GCSE %7+ A*-C	100	100	95.5	91.2	94.5	97.5	99.0
GCSE %7+ A*-C (inc. English and Maths)	100	100	95.5	91.2	94.4	97.5	99.0
GCSE %5+ A*-C	100	100	97.7	96.8	98.0	99.4	100
A-level: %3+ A*-C	90.9	85.2	89.6	77.6	81.4	87.6	89.6

INDICATOR	DHS RESULTS			NI GRAMMAR SCHOOL AVERAGES*
	20-21	21-22	22-23	
GCSE % 5+ A*-C	100	100	97.7	96.1
GCSE % 5+ A*-G	100	100	100	99.7
GCSE % WITH NO PASSES	0	0	0	0.1
GCSE % 5+ A*-C (inc. English and Maths)	100	100	97.7	94.3
GCSE % achieving A*-C in English	100	100	100	98.5
GCSE % achieving A*-G in English	100	100	100	99.9
GCSE % achieving A*-C in Maths	100	100	100	97.9
GCSE % achieving A*-G in Maths	100	100	100	99.9
A-level % 3+ A*-C	90.9	85.2	89.6	79.7
A-level % 2+ A*-E	100	100	100	99
Attendance %	95.6	93.1	95.5	95.5

*Comparative data from 2019 as no SAER process has been completed by DENI in recent years due to Covid mitigations.

GCE A-Level Grade Analysis 2023 Cumulative Percentages

SUBJECT	NO. OF ENTRIES	A*	A	B	C	D	E	U
Art & Design	8	50	88	100	100	100	100	100
Biology	51	22	59	75	88	98	100	100
Business Studies	24	17	33	63	96	100	100	100
Chemistry	23	30	78	87	100	100	100	100
Design and Technology	15	20	53	67	100	100	100	100
Drama	3	0	0	67	100	100	100	100
English Literature	8	13	63	75	100	100	100	100
French	5	60	80	100	100	100	100	100
Geography	23	9	52	74	100	100	100	100
Health & Social Care	35	6	49	91	100	100	100	100
History	16	13	69	100	100	100	100	100
Home Economics	26	19	46	69	96	100	100	100
Software Systems	10	0	20	50	80	100	100	100
Mathematics	50	30	76	88	96	100	100	100
Mathematics Further	5	40	80	100	100	100	100	100
Physics	20	30	50	80	90	100	100	100
Politics	14	29	64	93	100	100	100	100
Religious Studies	9	11	67	100	100	100	100	100
Sociology	48	6	42	73	94	100	100	100
Spanish	12	8	33	67	100	100	100	100
Sport/PE Studies	11	64	82	100	100	100	100	100
Travel and Tourism	3	0	67	100	100	100	100	100

BTEC COURSES		Dist*	Dist	Merit	Pass
Engineering	10	10	60	100	100
Sports Studies	7	14	57	100	100
ICT	7	29	71	100	100

GCSE Grade Analysis 2023 Cumulative Percentages

SUBJECT	NO. OF ENTRIES	A*	A	B	C*	C	D	E	F	G	U
Art & Design	20	25	75	95	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Biology	41	7	44	80	98	100	100	100	100	100	100
Business Studies	45	11	29	71	82	91	98	98	100	100	100
Chemistry	21	29	71	81	90	95	100	100	100	100	100
Design and Technology	52	17	40	83	88	94	100	100	100	100	100
Digital Technology (Programming)	23	17	74	91	96	96	100	100	100	100	100
Digital Technology (Multimedia)	9	0	67	67	78	78	89	100	100	100	100
Drama	9	0	44	67	89	89	100	100	100	100	100
English Language	135	9	50	83	99	100	100	100	100	100	100
English Literature	133	16	48	83	95	99	100	100	100	100	100
French	41	22	59	80	93	100	100	100	100	100	100
Geography	69	6	43	74	91	96	99	100	100	100	100
History	55	25	64	82	89	95	98	100	100	100	100
Home Economics	54	17	57	89	94	100	100	100	100	100	100
Mathematics	135	24	77	95	99	100	100	100	100	100	100
Further Mathematics	41	24	83	93	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
MIA	9	22	44	67	78	89	89	89	100	100	100
Music	13	0	46	85	92	100	100	100	100	100	100
Physics	28	14	25	54	68	89	100	100	100	100	100
Religious Studies (Full Course)	134	7	43	63	84	95	99	100	100	100	100
DA Science	75	16	59	83	97	99	100	100	100	100	100
Spanish	73	8	34	67	96	99	100	100	100	100	100
PE	24	33	58	79	96	100	100	100	100	100	100



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