

# Post-Primary Education including Sixth Forms



# POST-PRIMARY EDUCATION INCLUDING SIXTH FORMS

## Introduction

204. The post-primary sector in Northern Ireland faces substantial educational change over the coming few years.
- The transfer test for selection into grammar schools is to be discontinued after autumn 2008.
  - The implementation of the Entitlement Framework will require further collaboration among schools and other institutions in order to offer pupils broader curriculum opportunities including relevant vocational options.
  - The revised Northern Ireland Curriculum (NIC) will be implemented in all schools at year 8 from September 2007.
  - A Pupil Profile will be introduced to record progress.
205. A number of schools have engaged in pilot exercises as part of the introduction of these initiatives. In general, there is still uncertainty about the implications of the changes for individual schools and many are not well prepared to implement the full range of changes. Further clarification is needed of the developments required in school organisation and teaching methods in order to support the teachers' efforts to adapt to this ambitious agenda.
206. The Inspectorate's new standard model of inspection for post-primary schools has increased substantially the focus on leadership and management, complementing the emphasis given to school self-evaluation and self-improvement. In all post-primary inspections, teachers' questionnaires have been introduced to enable the staff to express their views on their school's provision. The Inspectorate has also introduced area inspections, initially in the greater Newry and Coleraine areas, with the purpose of assessing the effectiveness, within a defined area, of the provision of education and training for 14-19 year olds in preparing them to progress to further education, training or employment.

*Details of enrolment trends and sustainability are contained in Part 1 of this report, Additional Challenges: Demographics and Sustainability*

207. What are the main strengths in post-primary education?

The main strengths are:

- the caring ethos in almost all schools and the good behaviour and co-operation shown by the pupils;
- the good pastoral care in the majority of schools;
- the significant commitment of time and effort from most teachers in order to provide their pupils with a broad curriculum and programme of extra-curricular activities;
- the high quality of much of the teaching;
- the improvement in standards achieved in examinations, particularly for those achieving grades A to C in more than three subjects at GCE A level; and
- the good quality of leadership and management in the majority of schools.

208. What improvements have been brought about during the period 2004-2006?

Improvements are evident in:

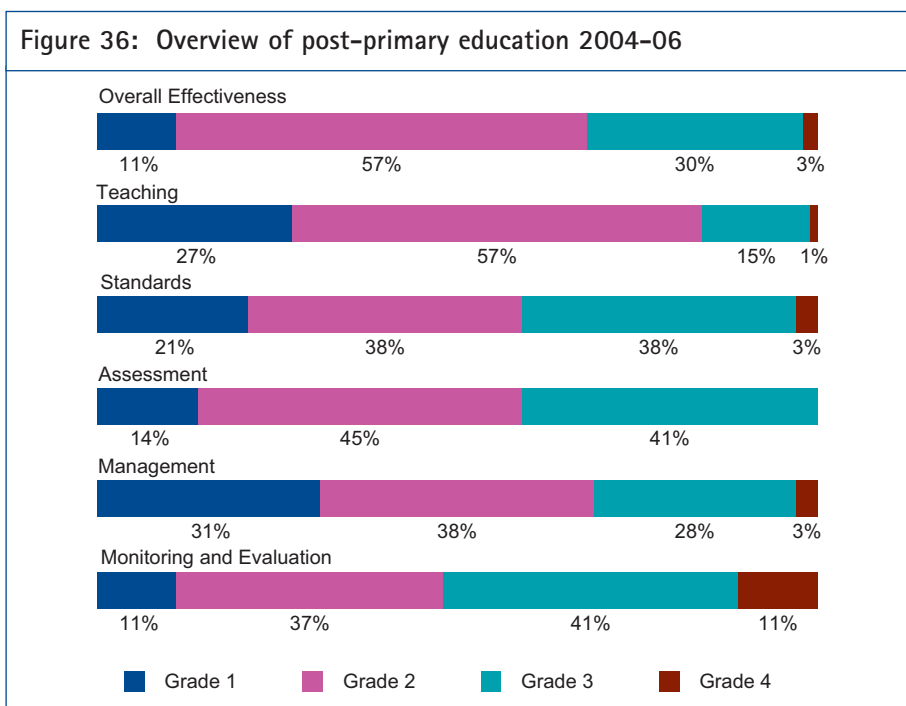
- the use of external agencies to enhance further the pastoral provision and to support and extend the pupils' learning experiences;
- the incidence of very good to excellent teaching;
- the falling percentage of boys who leave school at age 16 without any qualifications;
- the provision for, and the standards achieved by, pupils identified with special educational needs; and
- aspects of learning and teaching using ICT and the good facilities in schools provided through C2K.

209. What further improvements are needed?

The main actions needed to bring about further improvement are:

- progressing further a joint DE and DEL strategy for schools in general, and 14-19 provision in particular, which draws together more effectively the many initiatives being introduced;
- establishing better arrangements in schools for consulting with parents and pupils with regard to the implementation of DE Circular 2003/13: Welfare and Protection of Pupils Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 2003;
- developing more effective co-operation among schools, support services, youth organisations and alternative education providers to disseminate the existing good practice in teaching the growing number of disaffected pupils;
- reducing the one-sixth of lessons in which the quality of teaching has important shortcomings, or is poor overall and, in particular, increasing the pupils' standards in literacy and numeracy;
- providing more systematic continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers to enable them to deliver effective learning and teaching through ICT;
- reviewing the provision of careers guidance in schools and the Careers Service provided by DEL in order to meet more effectively the needs of pupils;
- ensuring better access for all sixth form pupils to a broad range of courses in classes big enough to encourage effective interaction and learning, and, in particular, taking action to reverse the continued downward trend in the number of post-16 pupils studying modern languages, physics and mathematics;
- in a majority of schools, developing better strategies for monitoring and evaluating teaching, learning, standards and, in almost one-third of schools, ensuring more effective leadership and management overall; and
- addressing the deficiencies in the accommodation in the post-primary sector which has seen little improvement over the period 2004-2006.

Figure 36: Overview of post-primary education 2004-06



### How effective are post-primary schools?

- 210. During 2004-06, the inspections in the post-primary sector emphasised whole-school matters to a greater extent than previously with a sharper evaluation of effectiveness across the school’s provision. The new model of standard inspection, introduced in September 2005, focuses clearly on the quality of leadership and management, including the school’s capacity for self-evaluation and self-improvement.
- 211. The overall effectiveness is satisfactory or good in just under 70% of the schools inspected and there are significant weaknesses in a small number. It is, nevertheless, a cause for concern that in approximately one in three schools the strengths in the provision overall are outweighed by the weaknesses. A similar picture emerges of the quality of leadership and management. More detailed analysis of the trends in standards in the post-primary sector is considered below.

### How good is the ethos in post-primary schools?

- 212. There continues to be a positive ethos in almost all schools with a strong emphasis on the pastoral welfare of the pupils and staff. In a majority of schools, the teachers

promote successfully the pupils' personal, moral, social and academic development. In the best practice, there are many opportunities for the pupils to experience achievement outside the classroom and, increasingly, schools are making effective use of external agencies, for example, counselling services, to support the pupils and extend their learning experiences.

213. There is an increasing number of pupils with English as an additional language in post-primary schools. For those who speak very little or no English, there are substantial academic and social demands. In addition to their language development, it is important that schools take account of these pupils' pastoral, curricular and assessment needs, and prepare them adequately for their future career paths.
214. There has been a slight decrease in the number of pupils suspended and expelled. Those schools that respond most effectively to the behavioural and curricular needs of disruptive or disaffected pupils share appropriately the overall responsibility for the pupils with other support services; offer a suitably flexible learning programme; and often develop productive links with other student-centred services or an alternative education provider.

Figure 37: Suspensions and expulsions - post-primary schools

<b>Pupils Suspended</b>	<b>2002-03</b>	<b>2003-04</b>	<b>2004-05</b>
KS3	2368	2294	2578
KS4	2636	2900	2523
<b>Total</b>	<b>5004</b>	<b>5194</b>	<b>5101</b>

<b>Pupils Expelled</b>	<b>2002-03</b>	<b>2003-04</b>	<b>2004-05</b>
KS3	31	36	30
KS4	36	33	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>61</b>

## How good are the arrangements for pastoral care and child protection?

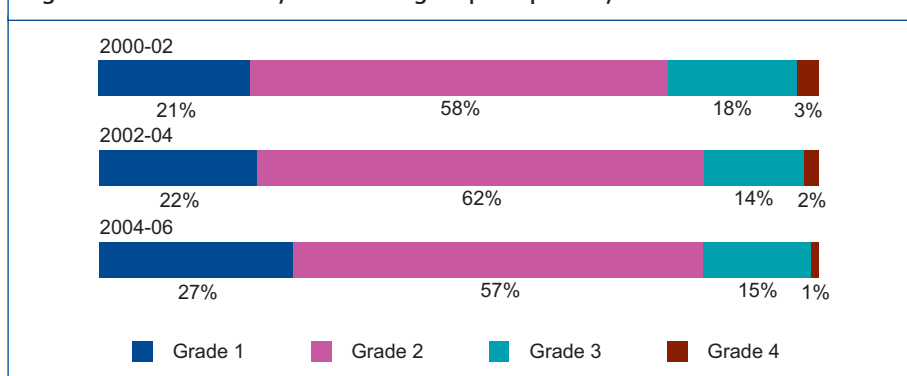
215. Almost all schools comply fully with the guidance in the DE Circular 1999/10: Pastoral Care in Schools: Child Protection. Half of the schools have procedures which are in line with the DE Circular 2003/13: Welfare and Protection of Pupils Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. The main area to be addressed is the need for better consultation processes with pupils and parents in relation to key pastoral and child protection policies.

*Further evaluation of pastoral care and child protection is contained in Part 1 of this report, Additional Challenges: Pastoral Care and Child Protection*

## How good are the learning and teaching?

216. In the lessons observed, 27% had significant strengths, in 57% the strengths outweighed the weaknesses, and in 16% there were important shortcomings. Compared to evaluations in 2002-04, there has been an improvement in the proportion of lessons with significant strengths. Most of the features of the effective and less effective practice remain constant from previous years.

Figure 38: The Quality of teaching in post-primary schools from 2004-06



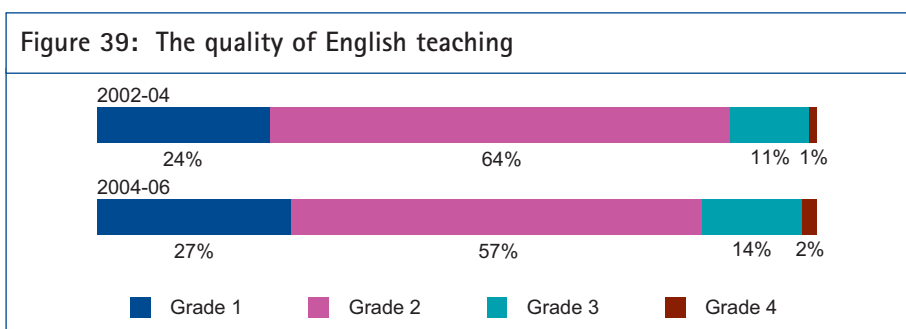
217. The most effective practice includes:
- a good variety of teaching strategies and resources;
  - realistic expectations for pupils and tasks that are well-matched to their abilities;

- well-planned and structured activities which provide good opportunities for the pupils to express and develop their opinions;
- clear lesson introductions which build on previous learning and include specific learning objectives which are shared with the pupils;
- good consolidation and review of learning outcomes to confirm understanding and learning;
- challenging activities which encourage the pupils to take responsibility for aspects of their own learning;
- a good balance between practical and more theoretical tasks to encourage pupils to evaluate and articulate their thinking; and
- the regular use of a range of assessment strategies and effective questioning to identify progression in learning and to inform future planning and classroom practice.

218. In the less effective practice:

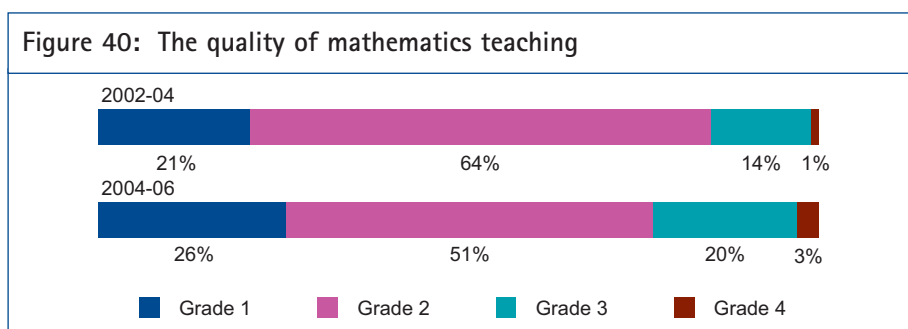
- planning does not cater sufficiently for the pupils' abilities and interests;
- there is a limited range of teaching approaches and over-directed lessons which do not involve, interest or motivate the pupils;
- the monitoring and evaluation of the pupils' progress and attainment are inadequate; and
- there are missed opportunities for the development of ICT and other transferable skills.

### How good is English in post-primary schools?



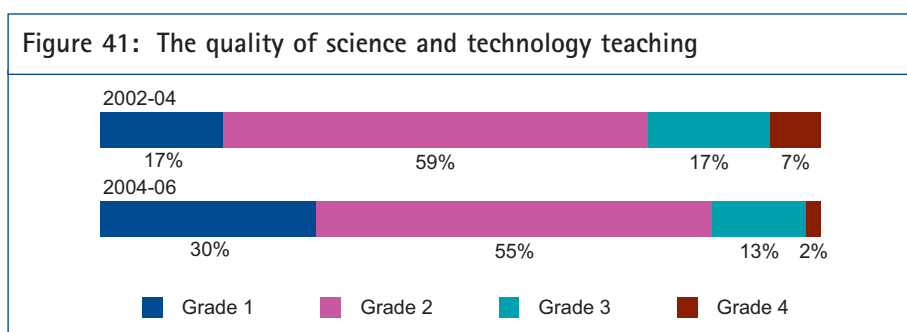
219. A wide range of teaching approaches is evident in English lessons with almost all of the teaching having significant strengths or strengths which outweigh weaknesses. The proportion of lessons with important shortcomings has risen from just under one-in-eight to just under one-in-six, and these were mainly with classes of less-able pupils. There is a need to increase the expectations of teachers and pupils in these classes to raise standards in English and literacy across the curriculum.
220. There continues to be an appropriate and effective emphasis on the development of pupils' talking and listening skills. The balance is improving between direct teaching approaches and those that encourage the pupils to become more independent in their learning. They are given appropriate opportunities to write for a variety of purposes and audiences. The teachers' marking of the pupils' work at KS4 is effective with evidence that pupils are becoming more confident in how to improve their assignments. There is a need to disseminate this good practice to improve the marking at KS3.
221. English departments are becoming more focused on the evaluation of their work and its outcomes but need to make more effective use of information about the pupils' prior attainments and experiences in planning for improvement in learning and teaching.
222. As schools continue to promote literacy in other areas of the curriculum, it is increasingly important for all teachers to widen the range of strategies within the classroom to allow the pupils to express and develop further their ideas and to encourage a greater sense of audience and purpose in their written work. Schools need to ensure that staff have ongoing professional development to acquire and apply the skills to bring about school improvement and, in particular, ICT needs to be used more effectively to promote the development of literacy across the curriculum.

### How good is mathematics in post-primary schools?



223. The strengths of the mathematics provision in post-primary schools have been sustained over the period 2004-2006. The ethos in the classes is strong; the exposition of skills and methods is clear; the individual support provided for the pupils is sensitive; the teachers generally plan thoroughly for the lessons; and, the marking of pupils' homework is regular and conscientious.
224. Improvements noted in 2004 have not, however, been built on sufficiently in areas including mental mathematics and the standard of mathematical thinking. Generally, the pupils are not challenged sufficiently through skilful questioning, are not given opportunities to discuss and evaluate their work, and do not make sufficient use of ICT to explore and consolidate their learning. There is a need to develop departmental planning to ensure that the needs of all the pupils, including those who require additional support and those who are mathematically gifted, are addressed more effectively.
225. A majority of departments have started to draw up action plans, setting out priorities. There is evidence that this process is beginning to improve the levels of staff collaboration, the use of benchmarking data, the process of target-setting and the quality of monitoring and evaluation. There is a need to develop further the leadership and management role of the heads of department (HoDs). The HoDs need to focus on more effective actions to bring about improvement in the mathematical achievements of all learners, and in particular, of those pupils who experience difficulties and lack confidence in the subject.

### How good is science and technology in post-primary schools?

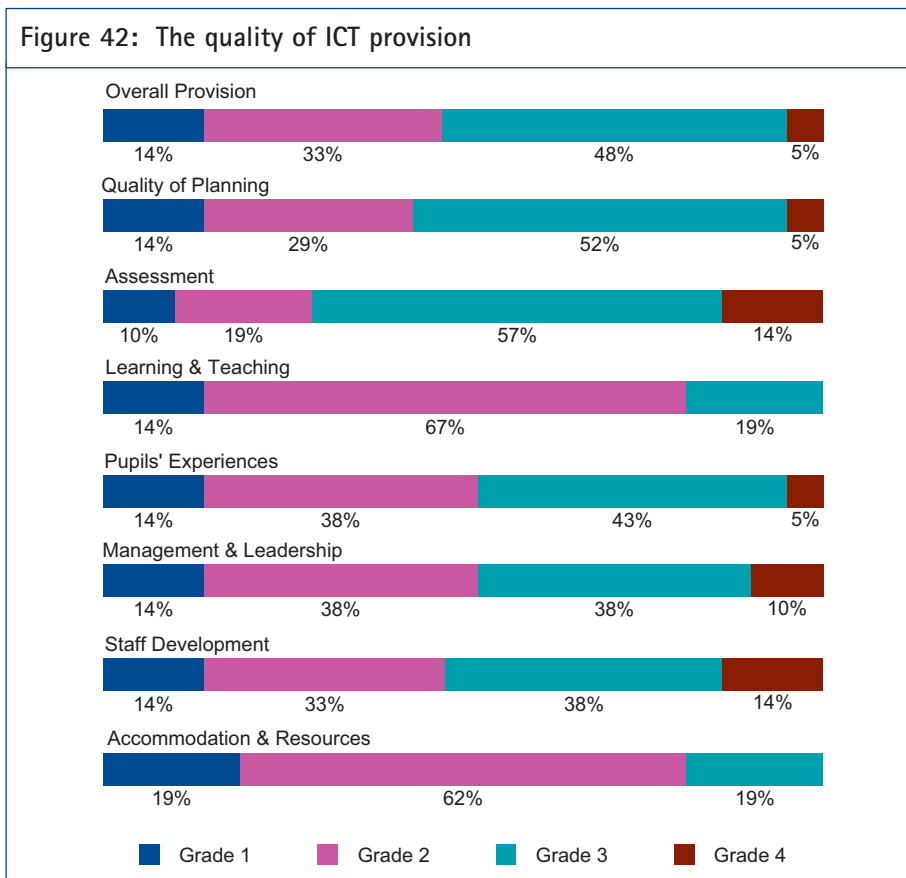


226. In most of the science and technology lessons, the strengths outweigh the weaknesses. In the best lessons, the teachers use a variety of teaching approaches which enable the pupils to develop their understanding of important principles and

concepts. In the weaker practice, inadequate classroom management strategies, excessive copy writing, lack of practical work, and insufficient opportunities to talk about science and technology often result in poor motivation and insecure learning. However, the standards attained by the majority of the pupils are good or better; in a minority of lessons, standards are too low.

227. A major success in Northern Ireland is the establishment of stronger links between science educators and professionals from science-based industry. All recognise that they have a part to play in ensuring that there are sufficient young people with the skills in science and technology to build and sustain the local 'knowledge economy'.
228. The 'science for all' policy for pupils aged 5 to 16 years, set within the Curriculum Reform Order of 1989, has, over the years, been successful in providing pupils of all abilities with meaningful experiences and opportunities to acquire recognised qualifications in science. Girls and lower-achieving pupils in particular have benefited significantly. The revised NIC, that is to be implemented from 2007, does not make science compulsory beyond the age of 14. The decision to reverse the 'science for all' policy may well prove questionable, given the increasing importance of science in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the link between science and the knowledge economy in NI.

## How good is ICT in post-primary schools?



229. In all schools, mostly through the implementation of C2k, there has been good progress in the provision of equipment, software, management information systems, technical support and network infrastructure.
230. The quality of provision is good or better in 14% of the schools, and satisfactory in a further 33%. There are important weaknesses in just over half of the schools. The quality of teaching using ICT is improving gradually with more widespread use of presentational technologies, such as electronic interactive whiteboards. Where ICT is used effectively and regularly, it improves the pupils' motivation, their levels of attention, concentration and participation, and leads to a higher quality of work. There is significant inconsistency in the quality of the opportunities for the pupils to learn and apply ICT skills. In only a minority of schools are these opportunities a strong feature across the educational provision and, as a result, the potential of modern technology to extend learning remains relatively under-exploited. The

teachers' good practice is not shared well within schools, or among schools. Inadequate use is made of ICT to facilitate collaborative links with key partners, such as other schools or further education colleges. Teachers need to gain greater skills in teaching with, and through, ICT to build on the foundations of the NOF<sup>6</sup> training initiative.

231. The absence of an effective strategy for the CPD of staff has contributed to the lack of progress in ensuring that ICT becomes an integral part of learning and teaching across the post-primary curriculum. There are limitations in advisory support structures, in-service training for teachers, and collaboration by the key stakeholders.

### How good is the provision made for special educational needs?

232. In most schools inspected, there has been a significant improvement in the provision and outcomes for pupils with special educational needs. The outcomes of an Inspectorate survey<sup>7</sup> showed that there were significant strengths in over one-third of the schools visited. In nearly one-half, the strengths in the provision outweighed the weaknesses and in nearly one-fifth there were important weaknesses that outweighed the strengths.
233. In the best practice there is a comprehensive and effective system to identify a range of special educational needs. The pupils, especially those who have very particular needs, receive a good experience within an inclusive learning environment. Effective EPs are devised jointly by the relevant teachers and track effectively the improvement in the pupils' work. There is evidence that this good practice leads to an increase in the pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem, and in their literacy and numeracy skills.
234. The main improvements needed include stronger leadership to develop and implement whole-school policies and practices and to ensure that funding for special educational needs is used for the purposes for which it was made available. Better links are needed with primary schools and AEPs to help meet the needs of pupils experiencing difficulties. All schools need to focus more on improving the literacy and

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<sup>6</sup> New Opportunities Fund

<sup>7</sup> *Provision and Outcomes for Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Post-Primary Schools*, ETI, 2006

numeracy skills of individual pupils and to use data effectively to identify targets, to track progress, and to plan for further support.

*An evaluation of Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance is contained in Part 1 of this report, Additional Challenges*

## How good are the attainments of pupils in post-primary schools?

### Assessment at KS3

235. Over the period covered by this report, the proportion of pupils achieving at least level 6 in KS3 assessment has remained unchanged for English and mathematics, and has increased for science. The results achieved in English and science remain well ahead of the corresponding results from England. However, in mathematics, there has been sustained improvement in the KS3 results in England and these are now better than in Northern Ireland. Under the revised NIC arrangements, KS3 tests are not compulsory for schools for the 2006-07.

Figure 43: Percentage of pupils achieving level 6 or above at Key Stage 3

	2002		2003		2004		2005	
	England	NI	England	NI	England	NI	England	NI
English	33	48	35	47	34	45	35	47
Mathematics	45	47	49	47	52	47	53	46
Science	33	40	40	42	34	44	37	46

### GCSE

236. The percentage of year 12 pupils achieving 5+ GCSEs at grades A\* to C has increased gradually since 2002. These figures remain ahead of the corresponding statistics for England or Wales over the same period. In June 2005, approximately 50% of pupils achieved 5+ GCSEs (or equivalent) at grades A\*-C in subjects including English and mathematics compared to 44% in specialist post-primary

schools in England and 34% in non-specialist post-primary schools. Although standards are undoubtedly improving, behind Northern Ireland's good overall performance there remains a wide variation in the achievements of organisations and learners. The gap between Northern Ireland and England in public examinations is closing steadily.

Figure 44: Attainment in GCSE: comparative results for Northern Ireland, England and Wales

Performance Indicator		2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05
% achieving 5+ GCSEs A*-C	NI	57	59	59	60	61
	England	50	52	53	54	57
	Wales	50	50	51	51	52
% achieving no GCSEs	NI	4	4	4	4	3
	England	5	5	5	5	4
	Wales	8	8	7	7	7

## GCE A Level

237. There has been a significant increase during 2004-06 in the proportion of pupils achieving 3+ GCE A level subjects at grades A to C. This improvement is reflected in the figures for both the selective and non-selective sectors. The proportion of NI pupils achieving at least two GCE A level subjects at grades A to E is consistently above the corresponding figures for England and Wales.

Figure 45: Attainment in GCE A level: selective and non-selective schools

Performance Indicator	School Type	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05
% achieving 3+ 'A' Levels A-C	Grammar	63	64	68	71
	Secondary	27	33	35	39
% achieving 2+ 'A' Levels A-E	Grammar	98	98	99	99
	Secondary	85	88	88	92
% achieving 1+ 'A' Levels A-E	Grammar	100	100	100	100
	Secondary	97	96	96	98
% achieving GNVQ Intermediate (full)	Grammar	0	0	0	0
	Secondary	89	85	88	80

Figure 46: Attainment in GCE A level: comparative results for Northern Ireland, England and Wales

Performance Indicator		2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05
% achieving 2+ GCE 'A' Levels A-E	NI	93	95	95	96	97
	England	89	93	93	94	95
	Wales	93	94	94	95	94

## School Leavers

238. In contrast to the data for previous years, during 2004-06 there has been a reduction in the number of pupils who leave school without qualifications. In particular, the proportion of boys has dropped from one in every 14-to-one in every 23 and for those boys eligible for free school meals(FSM) this figure has dropped from one-in-six to one-in-nine.

Figure 47: Proportion of boys in NI leaving school without qualifications

	All school leavers	Those entitled to FSM <sup>8</sup>
<b>2004-05</b>	1 in every 23	1 in every 9
<b>2003-04</b>	1 in every 16	1 in every 6
<b>2002-03*</b>	N/A	N/A
<b>2001-02</b>	1 in every 14	1 in every 6

\* The School Leavers Survey was cancelled in 2002-03 as a result of technical problems with new software installed in schools.

## Gender

239. Based on the results for 2004-05, at both GCSE and GCE A level, girls continue to outperform boys. For the first time in recent years, however, girls in co-educational schools achieve a better performance than their peers in single-sex girls' schools. The corresponding figures for boys have shown a similar picture over several years.

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<sup>8</sup> Free school meals

Figure 48: GCSE and GCE A level results by gender and school type

	Girls' Schools	Boys' Schools	Co-ed Schools	Co-ed	
				Girls	Boys
<b>GCSE: non-selective schools by gender and school type (2004-05)</b>					
% achieving 5+ GCSEs A*-C	45	27	41	51	33
No GCSEs	2	11	5	3	6
<b>GCSE: selective schools by gender and school type (2004-05)</b>					
% achieving 5+ GCSEs A*-C	97	93	97	98	96
% achieving 7+ GCSEs A*-C	93	84	92	95	89
<b>GCE A level: selective schools by gender and school type (2004-05)</b>					
% achieving 3+ A levels A-C	74	65	71	75	67
<b>GCE A level: non-selective schools by gender and school type (2004-05)</b>					
% achieving 3+ A levels A-C	40	32	40	43	35

## Sixth Form

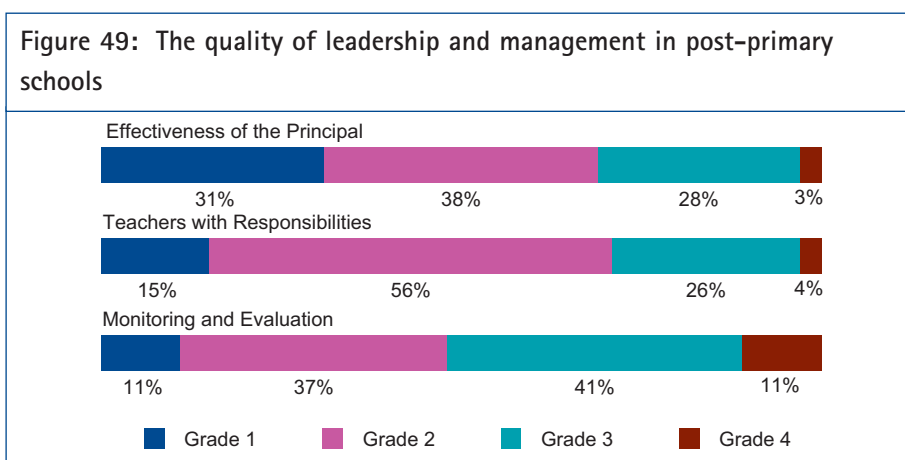
240. The proportion of 17 year olds in full-time education in schools fell to 55% during 2005-06. Most of these pupils study for GCE A level examinations with over 29,500 entries in 2004-05. The pupils' subject choices show a continuing increase in the entries for art and design, English literature, history, home economics, religious studies and sociology and a decline in the entries for physics, mathematics and modern languages. Worryingly, there has been little progress in stemming the flow of young people away from studying physical science courses and languages in schools and further education colleges or in increasing the number of physical science graduates entering Post-Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) courses. More effective action is needed from schools, further and higher education and

Government to influence young people's choices, particularly towards science education.

*An evaluation of the provision for 14-19 year olds is contained in Part 1 of this report, Additional Challenges: 14-19 Provision*

## How good are the leadership and management in post-primary schools?

Figure 49: The quality of leadership and management in post-primary schools



241. During the period 2004-06, inspection in post-primary schools has focused closely on the quality of leadership and management at all levels and has highlighted weaknesses in its overall quality. The leadership of the Principal is good or better in 31% of the schools inspected, and satisfactory in a further 38%. It is a concern that, in 31% of the schools, weaknesses in leadership and management outweigh strengths. The quality of the work of the senior and middle managers is good or better in 15% of the schools and satisfactory in nearly 56%. In 30% of the schools, there are important shortcomings in management at these levels, with weaknesses outweighing strengths.
242. The most effective principals provide firm and informed leadership with clear strategic direction, and set a positive tone for the work of the school. They nurture a culture of collegiality, value the staff and their development, and put effective arrangements in place to promote and share good practice. They give a high priority to monitoring and evaluating the quality of learning and teaching and to supporting improvement in both, and in the attainments of the pupils.

243. Where leadership and management are weak, there is a lack of clear and effective direction by the Principal and inadequate communication and consultation with the staff. The development-planning process is not rigorous enough and is seldom underpinned by the use of comparative data on standards of achievement. The SDP does not provide the momentum for whole-school improvement.
244. Many schools have not yet created a culture where effective processes of monitoring and self-evaluation have become normal practice. Just over 10% of schools do this well and there are satisfactory arrangements in a further 37%.
245. In over half of the schools, the arrangements for monitoring and self-evaluation are not good enough. The Principals and the SMTs do not know enough about the quality of the learning and teaching to guide their schools' improvement. They have not agreed a baseline for self-evaluation nor developed among the staff an awareness of the schools' strengths and areas for improvement. The same is true at departmental level where self-evaluation leading to self-improvement has yet to become normal practice in most schools. Data on pupils' performance is too seldom used at whole-school or departmental levels to identify under-performance and inform the making of decisions that will improve the pupils' achievements.

*An evaluation of governance and of school improvement is contained in Part 1 of this report, Additional Challenges: Governance and Improving Education and Training*

### How good is the accommodation?

246. There has been little improvement in the many deficiencies in accommodation noted in the Chief Inspector's Report for 2002-04.

*Further details of accommodation and enrolment trends are contained in Part 1 of this report, Additional Challenges: Demographics and Sustainability*