

# PIRLS and TIMSS 2011 in Northern Ireland: reading, mathematics and science



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# Contents

	PIRLS and TIMSS 2011 in Northern Ireland: introduction	1
<b>1</b>	Attainment in TIMSS and PIRLS 2011 in Northern Ireland	3
<b>2</b>	Attainment in PIRLS and TIMSS 2011 by gender	17
<b>3</b>	Distribution of attainment in PIRLS and TIMSS 20112	23
<b>4</b>	Attainment by content and skill in Northern Ireland	33
<b>5</b>	Pupils' engagement	43
<b>6</b>	School resources	71
<b>7</b>	The school learning environment	85
<b>8</b>	The curriculum and learning activities	119
<b>9</b>	Characteristics of pupils and their homes	137
	Appendix A Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2011: Overview	147
	References	153



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# PIRLS and TIMSS 2011 in Northern Ireland: introduction

## Report outline

This report summarises Year 6 (Y6) pupils' attainment in the PIRLS and TIMSS surveys of 2011 in Northern Ireland and explores the context of that attainment.

PIRLS is an international comparison study of reading at ages 9-10 and TIMSS is a parallel study of mathematics and science at ages 9-10 (and ages 13-14, although Northern Ireland participated only at the younger age range). PIRLS has a five-yearly cycle and TIMSS a four-yearly cycle. 2011 was the first year in which the cycles of the two studies coincided, allowing the opportunity to assess the same pupils at ages 9-10 in all three subject domains. Northern Ireland took part in PIRLS and TIMSS for the first time in the 2011 cycle.

## What PIRLS assesses at ages 9-10

PIRLS identifies and assesses two purposes for reading: reading for literary experience and reading to acquire and use information. Within each of the two reading purposes, the PIRLS items measure four comprehension processes:

- Focus on and retrieve explicitly stated information
- Make straightforward inferences
- Interpret and integrate ideas and information
- Examine and evaluate content, language and textual elements.

## What TIMSS assesses at ages 9-10

TIMSS assesses content domains (mathematics and science) and cognitive domains (knowing, applying and reasoning) in both subjects. The content domains assessed at ages 9-10 are:

- Mathematics – Number, Geometric Shapes and Measures, Data Display
- Science – Life Science, Physical Science, Earth Science.

In science, the area of study related to the classification and properties of materials is included in the Physical Science content domain.

## **Countries with which Northern Ireland will mainly be compared in this report**

The report compares performance in Northern Ireland with that of the five PISA countries which outperformed Northern Ireland in all three subject domains in the most recent PISA cycle, PISA 2009, as well as with England and the Republic of Ireland. PISA is an international comparison study of reading, mathematics and scientific literacy at age 15.

Of the 45 countries participating in PIRLS and 50 countries in TIMSS at ages 9-10, therefore, the main comparator countries are:

- Australia
- Finland
- Hong Kong
- New Zealand
- Singapore
- England
- Republic of Ireland.

These will be referenced throughout the report as applicable.