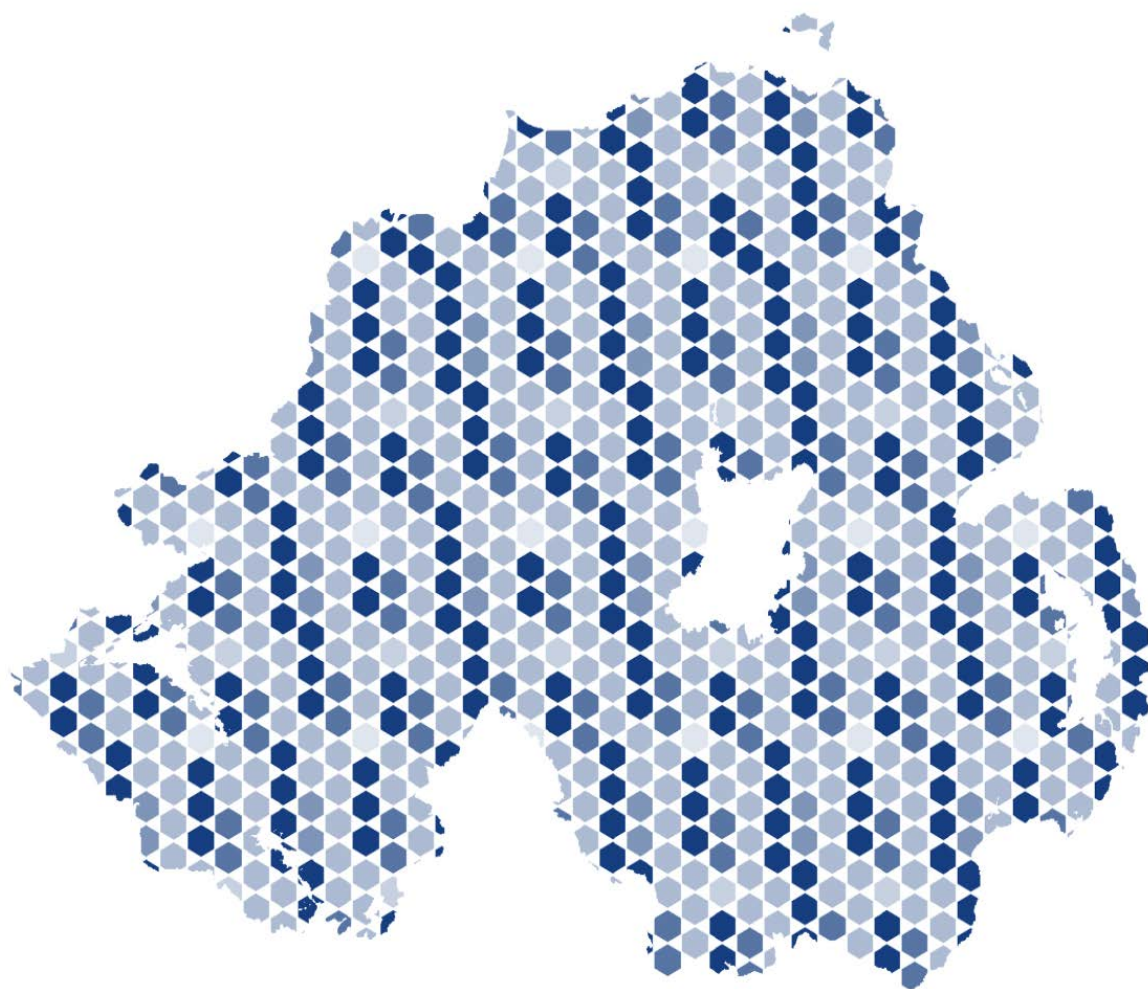


POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Aquinas Diocesan Grammar
School, Belfast

Voluntary co-educational 11-18 selective school

Report of an Inspection in
March 2015



*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*

Providing Inspection Services for

Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

CUSTOMER
SERVICE
EXCELLENCE



Quantitative terms

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

Performance levels

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) use the following performance levels in reports:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

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1. Inspection method and evidence base

The key questions and quality indicators which guide inspection and self-evaluation of post-primary schools, which were applied to this inspection, are available in the ETI publication *Together Towards Improvement: a process for self evaluation* at: <http://www.eti.gov.uk/index/together-towards-improvement/together-towards-improvement-post-primary.htm>.

Inspectors observed teaching and learning, scrutinised documentation, data and the pupils' written work and held formal and informal discussions with pupils (individually and in groups) teachers and staff with specific responsibilities.

The arrangements for this inspection included a meeting with representatives from the governors and the opportunity for all parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

Just over 15% of families (94) and 45% of staff (51) responded to the questionnaires. In their responses, almost all of the parents and staff expressed high levels of satisfaction with the work of the school. The concerns identified in a small number of written comments were discussed with the governors and central leadership team (CLT) and, where appropriate, are addressed in the report.

2. Focus and purpose of inspection

In order to promote improvement in the interests of all pupils, the purpose of a post-primary inspection is, through an effective linking of internal and external approaches, to:

- evaluate the quality of the provision and the outcomes for the pupils;
- evaluate the school's leadership and management and its capacity to effect and sustain improvement in its provision and standards; and
- to inform the school's planning for improvement.

3. Context of the school

Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School was founded in 1993 and the current school building was completed in 2003. Reflecting the diocesan character of the school, there is a purpose-built chaplaincy; the chaplain serves the whole school community and is a full-time member of the teaching staff.

The school draws its pupils from a wide catchment area. Over the last four years, enrolment has remained steady and the school is regularly over-subscribed. Over one-fifth of the pupils are identified as requiring additional support in their learning; 37 pupils hold statements of educational need. A team of teachers, teaching and learning assistants (TLAs) and learning mentors provides support for these pupils in class and through withdrawal sessions in dedicated rooms.

The principal was appointed in September 2011 and the two vice-principals took up post in September and November 2014 respectively; the central leadership team (CLT) is relatively new.

The school is developing its provision for shared education through curricular links with schools in the area learning community.

Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Year 8 Intake	114	119	118	115
Enrolment	818	819	809	807
% Attendance (NI Average)	97.3 (95.7)	97.4 (95.3)	95.8 (95.8)	N/A
FSME Percentage ¹	2.93	3.79	4.57	5.58
% (No.) of pupils on the SEN register	24.4 (198)	23.8 (193)	23.1 (187)	21.7 (176)
No. of pupils with statements of educational needs in the mainstream school	41	40	39	37
No. of newcomers	16	17	11	*
% of Y8 pupils with L5 English	73.7	70.6 ²	39.0	NR ³
% of Y8 pupils with L5 mathematics	91.2	89.9	57.6	NR
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in English	96.5	98.3	95.8	NR
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in mathematics	99.1	98.3	97.5	NR

* fewer than 5

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall Effectiveness	Very good
Achievements and Standards	Outstanding
Provision	Very good
Leadership and Management	Very good

5. Quality of achievement and standards

- The pupils are highly motivated, eager to learn and engage readily in lessons. They share, along with the staff, very high expectations and develop high levels of independence and personal research. Through meaningful paired and group activities, the pupils work maturely with their peers to extend their thinking and oral skills. They articulate their views with confidence, listen respectfully to the views of others, engage maturely in discussions and make very good progress in their learning.

¹ The term 'FSME Percentage' refers to the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals.

² From 2013, KS2 standards in English and mathematics are reported as Levels of Progression in Communication and Using Mathematics and cannot be compared directly with KS2 data from previous years

³ Due to industrial action, not all data from end-of-key-stage 2 assessments in 2014 was made available to the school by the contributory primary schools

- Almost all of the pupils who require additional support with their learning attain very high standards in public examinations. They develop effective interpersonal skills, confidence and self-esteem through the sensitive support of teachers and peers, and their active participation in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including school trips and productions.
- Over the last three years, almost all of the pupils attained seven or more GCSE examinations, including English and mathematics, at grades A* to C. This standard is above or in line with the NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals (FSM) category. Most GCSE subjects at grades A*-B are above the corresponding three-year NI averages for selective schools and over one-third of the subjects are more than ten percentage points above.
- The pupils' attainments at A level are a particular strength, with the percentage attaining 3 or more GCE A level subjects at grades A* to C consistently above the three-year NI average for similar FSM schools. All subjects are above the three-year NI average for selective schools, with three-fifths being more than ten percentage points above. Over four-fifths of the pupils attained grades A*-B in the same period.
- Over the last two years, pupils from the school have been among the top performing candidates in seven GCSE and in three A level subjects. They have also enjoyed success in, for example, the national Bar Mock Trial, the UK Schools Debating League and the Linguistics Olympiad in Beijing.
- The quality of the pupils' oral and written communication is consistently high as a consequence of the effective promotion of literacy through English and across the curriculum, as well as through a wide range of enrichment activities. Through the literacy working group, comprising representatives from a range of departments and from the CLT, the school has renewed its emphasis on literacy in 2014/15. The whole-school targets in spelling and presentation, as well as through meaningful cross-curricular initiatives, underpin successfully the development of the pupils' communication skills. In English, the pupils achieve excellent outcomes in GCSE and A level examinations which are consistently above the corresponding NI averages. A notable strength is the pupils' attainment in GCE A level English Literature where the proportion of pupils attaining grades A*-C over the past three years is more than 10 percentage points above the NI average.
- There are well-planned opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in using mathematics through cross-curricular tasks in a number of subjects. In these lessons the pupils respond confidently to whole-class discussion, engage positively in individual or collaborative tasks and apply mathematical strategies flexibly in a range of contexts. The school has rightly identified the need to extend these opportunities across all of the subjects and to implement a more consistent approach to the promotion and development of numeracy across the curriculum. The pupils attain very good standards which are significantly above the NI average in GCSE mathematics and are consistently above the NI average in GCSE further mathematics. The pupils' performance in GCE A level mathematics is also consistently above the NI average.

- The pupils entitled to free school meals attain consistently high standards at GCSE and A level.
- The percentage of pupils who stay on from year 13 to 14, and the percentage of pupils who leave to go to further and higher education, are slightly above the respective NI averages.

6. Quality of provision

- In around four-fifths of the lessons observed, planning, teaching and assessment were effective (good or better) in promoting learning, with one-half being highly effective. In these lessons, teachers display very high expectations of and for the pupils through well-paced, appropriately challenging activities which enable the pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding. The teachers' skilful questioning, plenary sessions and appropriate opportunities for peer and self-assessment enable the pupils to consolidate well their learning.
- In the less effective practice, in around one-fifth of the lessons observed, there are missed opportunities to develop the pupils' skills and to use appropriate assessment for learning strategies to identify specific ways in which the pupils can improve the quality of their work. In these lessons the pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- The outstanding pastoral care is characterised by excellent working relationships at all levels. The pastoral care team is committed to the spiritual, educational, moral and social welfare of every pupil, reflecting the school's ethos of mutual respect and inclusion. A notable strength is the chaplaincy system which contributes significantly to the individualised support and care afforded to the pupils; senior pupils enhance this support in their role as pastoral and academic mentors to pupils in the junior school. In discussions with the inspectors, the pupils expressed clearly that they feel secure in school and know what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being.
- The provision for additional learning support is highly effective and well led by the special educational needs co-ordinator. The support teachers, learning support mentors, and teaching and learning assistants provide a supportive environment in which the pupils' complex social, emotional and academic needs are addressed. They monitor carefully the pupils' progress and employ well-chosen intervention strategies to very good effect, notably during withdrawal sessions. In the best practice across the school, the individual education plans (IEPs) identify accurately the pupils' needs and abilities through teacher observations and the systematic analysis and careful interpretation of performance data. In a minority of IEPs, the areas of concern are not stated specifically enough and targets are too general to inform sufficiently the teachers' planning and classroom practice.
- The curriculum at all key stages is broad and balanced and meets well the interests and aspirations of the pupils, as evidenced by the high standards they achieve. At key stage 4 and post-16 the school is meeting the requirements of the Entitlement Framework and collaborates with a number of other schools within the area learning community. The extensive extra-curricular programme, community involvement, charitable work and membership of the school council enable the pupils to develop high levels of social responsibility and leadership skills.

- The meaningful integration and promotion of careers education, information and guidance (CEIAG) across subjects, the pupils' interest in and knowledge of learning and career pathways, and the effective monitoring and evaluation of the provision are key strengths. The high-quality provision for CEIAG supports and enhances the pupils' learning and skills development across the curriculum. The school makes excellent use of its links with parents, past pupils, business and industry to provide the pupils with relevant, up-to-date learning and enrichment experiences, both within and beyond the classroom, which complement the well-structured taught programme.

7. Quality of leadership and management

- The school development planning⁴ (SDP) process is informed by extensive consultation with all stakeholders and by the effective analysis and use of performance data to identify priorities for school improvement. The priorities are appropriate, are clearly focused on raising further the standards attained by the pupils and, through the junior and senior school councils, pupils contribute to relevant decision-making. The staff development programme is well conceived and addresses the priorities highlighted in the SDP, in particular through the dissemination of the existing good practice in planning, learning, teaching and assessment. While the quality of action planning across the school is variable, the majority of the action plans are effective, with clear targets, measurable success criteria and robust processes for monitoring and evaluation.
- The CLT has recently been reconstituted and, consequently, its strategic work at whole-school level is at an early stage of development. It is led very effectively by the principal who has nurtured a whole-school culture of self-evaluation leading to improvement which is underpinned by support, encouragement and high expectations. The members of the CLT carry out effectively their respective areas of responsibility and work collegially with the whole staff.
- The middle managers provide effective leadership within their respective areas of responsibility and focus sharply on sustaining high standards in public examinations. The school has identified the best practice, where the middle managers monitor and evaluate robustly the quality of the pupils' learning experiences and the standards they attain, but this good practice is not implemented consistently enough across the departments. In order to build the capacity of all leaders and develop a more consistent approach to monitoring, evaluation and action-planning, the most effective practice needs to be shared and disseminated more widely.
- Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the parents, staff and school community can have a high level of confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated. The highly committed governors are well informed about the priorities in the school development plan, provide support and challenge where appropriate, and play an active role in school improvement.
- On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the school has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education.

⁴ The SDP conforms to the requirements of the School Development Planning Regulations, 2010

8. Conclusion

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is very good. The school is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the learners; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

Examination performance and other statistical data

GCSE and equivalent examination results from 2011-12 to 2013-14

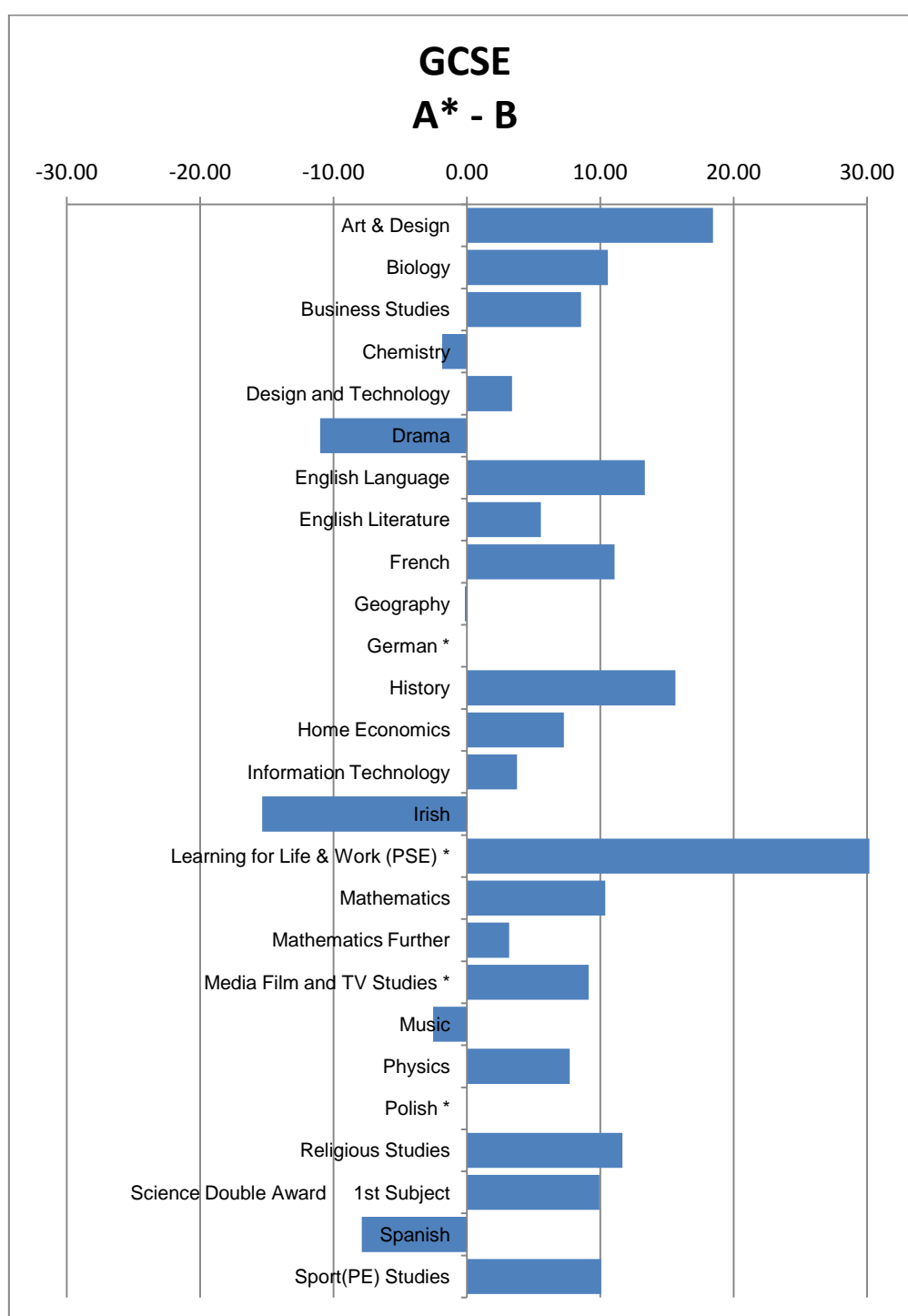
Based on data held by the school and verified with ETI, the table below compares the percentage of year 12 pupils in this school achieving 7 or more GCSEs (A* to C) and equivalent subjects and the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals with the NI average for selective schools in the same free school meals category⁵. It also shows the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals achieving 5 or more GCSEs including English and mathematics (A* to C).

GCSE and GCSE equivalent subjects - *following permitted exclusions	2012	2013	2014
*Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE & Equivalents in at least 7 subjects	100	100	100
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects	100	95.7	97.3
The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category	94.2	96.4	N/A
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics	100	94.0	97.3
The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category	92.6	95.0	N/A
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	100	97.4	98.2
Percentage of Year 12 entitled to free school meals achieving 5 or more GCSEs Grades A* to C or equivalent (including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics)	100	100	100

⁵ See benchmarking data and guidance contained in the annual DE Circulars on: 'School Development Planning and Target-Setting'.

Attainment of pupils in individual subjects at GCSE level at grades A* to B from 2011-12 to 2013-14

The bar chart below illustrates, based on data held by the school and verified with the ETI, the performance of each GCSE subject at grades A*-B, in all exam boards, compared with the three-year average for pupils in selective schools in Northern Ireland. A positive value (to the right) shows that the average individual subject performance is above average. As the number of entries to each subject may vary considerably, comparisons should be treated with caution.



*indicates fewer than 30 entries over 3 years

GCE A level examination results at grades A* to C from 2011-12 to 2013-14

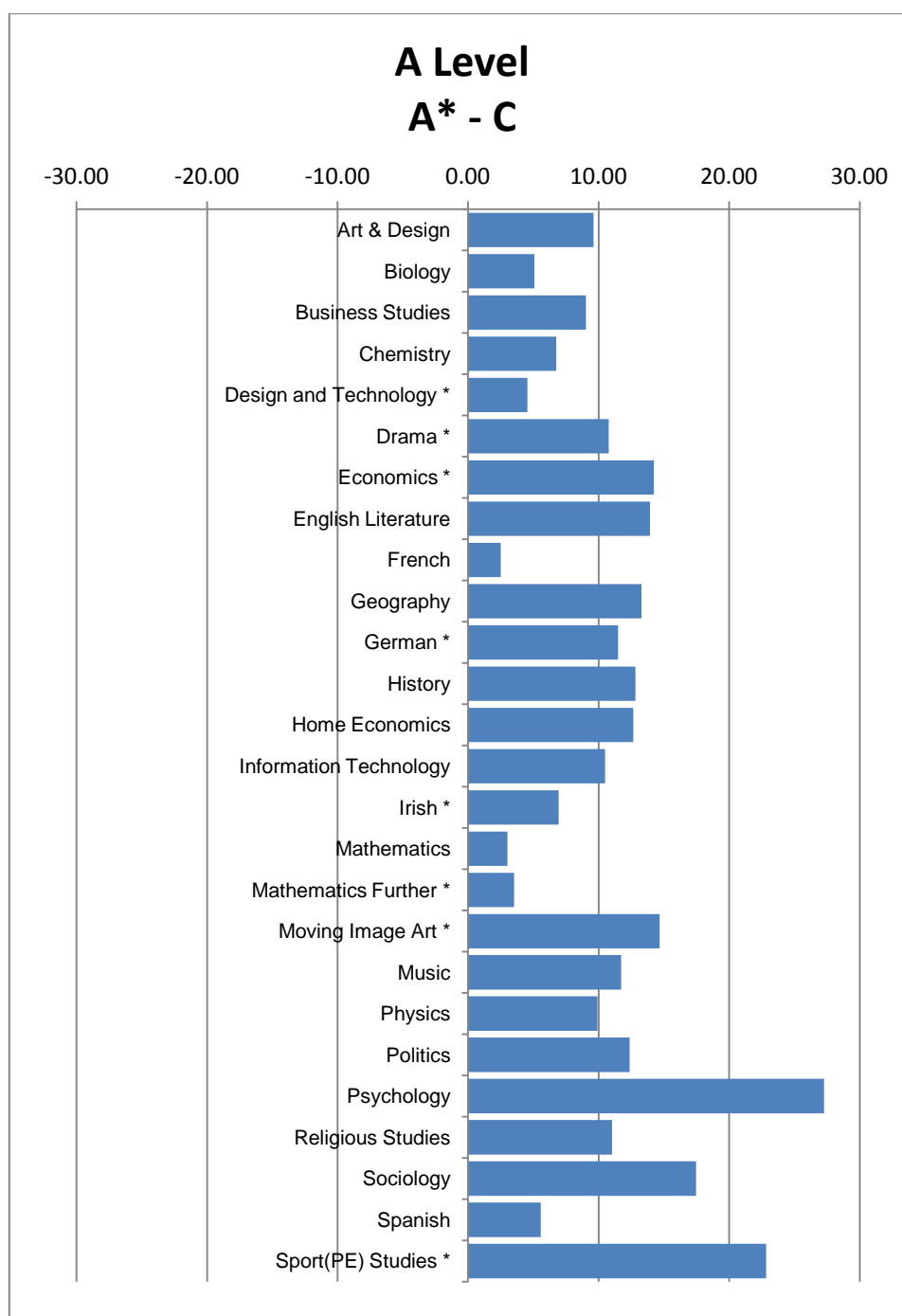
Based on data held by the school and verified with the ETI, the table below shows the percentage of year 14 pupils in this school achieving three or more GCE A levels at grades A* to C, and two or more GCE A levels at grades A* to E. The table compares the percentage achieving three or more GCEs (A* to C) with the NI average for selective schools in the same free school meals category⁶.

GCE A Level or equivalent	2012	2013	2014
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels & Equivalents in at least 3 subjects	100	100	100
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	87.3	87.7	85.6
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	<i>75.5</i>	<i>81.1</i>	<i>N/A</i>

⁶ See benchmarking data and guidance contained in the annual DE Circulars on: 'School Development Planning and Target-Setting'.

Attainment of pupils in individual subjects at GCE A level at grades A* to C from 2011-12 to 2013-14

The bar chart below illustrates, based on data held by the school and verified with the ETI, the performance of each GCE A level subject at grades A*-C, in all exam boards, compared with the three-year average for pupils in selective schools in Northern Ireland. A positive value (to the right) shows that the average individual subject performance is above average. As the number of entries to each subject may vary considerably, comparisons should be treated with caution.



Staying on rate

Based on data held in SIMS by the school and verified with the ETI, the table below shows the percentage of the pupils who stay on at this school from year 12 to year 13 and then from year 13 to year 14, compared with the NI average for selective schools from school census returns to DE for the most recent year for which data is available.

2013-14	NI Average	School
% Yr 12 staying on to Yr 13	95.7%	95.8%
% Yr 13 staying on to Yr 14	94.3%	94.9%

Leavers' destinations

Based on data held and verified by the school with the ETI, the table below shows the percentage of pupils who leave Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School to enter further education, work-based learning (training), higher education or employment, or seeking employment, compared with the average for selective schools for the academic year 2012/13.

	School % (No.)	NI	Level 2 % (No.)	Level 3 + % (No.)
Total Number of Leavers	122	9503		
Employment	*% (*)	3.4%		
Further Education	22% (27)	21.2%		22% (27)
Higher Education	76.2% (93)	72.0%		76.2% (93)
Training	0	1.2%		
Unemployed	0	1.2%		
Unknown	0	1.1%		

* Fewer than five

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