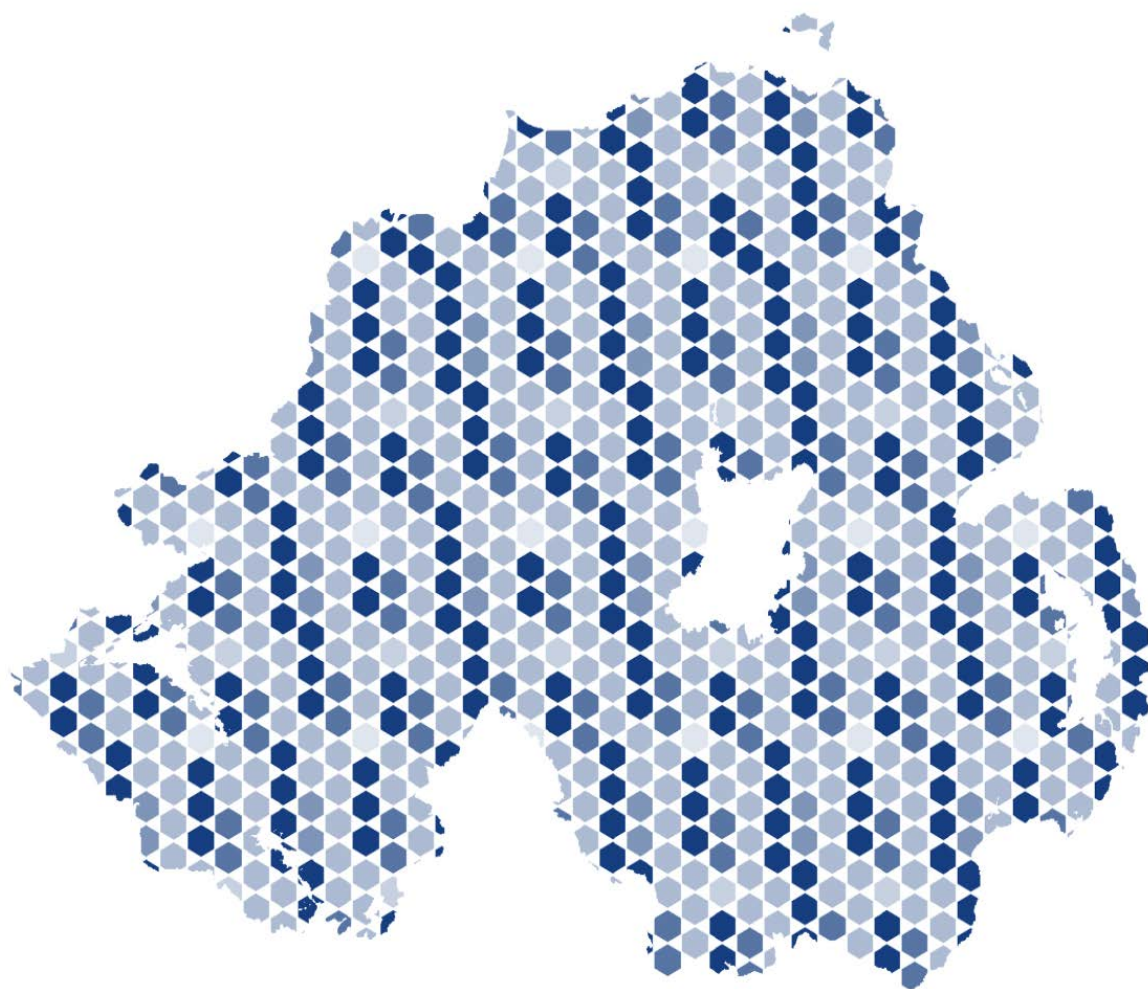


POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Belfast High School

Co-educational voluntary grammar school

Report of an Inspection in
January 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 the inspection included a meeting with the governors and the opportunity for all parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire. One hundred and fifty one parents, almost one half of the teaching staff, and a small number of the support staff responded to the questionnaires.

Nearly all of the staff who responded commented positively on: the caring, inclusive ethos in the school; the pupils' behaviour and how they manage and deal effectively with related issues; and the leadership and management of the school at all levels. Almost all of the parents who responded expressed a high degree of satisfaction in the work of the school. They were pleased with their child's experience at school and the progress they were making. The small number of issues raised in the questionnaires about communication, and information on progression, was shared with the Principal, pastoral leaders and representatives of the governors.

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
- inform the school's planning for improvement.

3. Context of the school

Belfast High School is a selective co-educational voluntary grammar school situated in the borough of Newtownabbey. The school draws its pupils from a wide surrounding area; the current enrolment is 930 pupils. There are 31 pupils on the special needs register, almost one-third of whom has a statement of educational need. Over the past four years the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals has doubled to approximately 7%. At the time of the inspection¹, a minority of the permanent teaching staff were absent for a variety of reasons.

From 2007 to 2011, Belfast High School was designated as specialist school for languages. It is one of only five schools in the UK, and the only one in Northern Ireland (NI), to win The European Language Label Award from the European Commission. The School was awarded the International School Award in 2008 and again in 2011 and 2014.

¹ The head of English was newly appointed to post, there was an acting literacy coordinator, an acting teacher librarian and a number of temporary teaching staff within the English department.

Belfast High School, Newtownabbey	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Year 8 Intake	136	139	138	137
Enrolment	933	936	934	929
% Attendance (NI Average)	95.6 (95.7)	95.3 (95.3)	95.7 (95.3)	N/A (n/a)
FSME Percentage ²	3.3	4.0	5.1	6.9
% (No.) of pupils on the SEN register	3.2 (30)	3.6 (34)	3.2 (30)	3.3 (31)
No. of pupils with statements of educational needs in the mainstream school	8	5	6	8
No. of newcomers	*	*	7	9
<i>Intake³:</i>				
% of Y8 pupils with L5 English	74	57	33	37
% of Y8 pupils with L5 mathematics	96	81	46	46
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in English	100	99	80	74
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in mathematics	100	99	80	74
<i>Source: data as held by the school.</i>				

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall Effectiveness	Good
Achievements and Standards	Very Good
Provision	Good
Leadership and Management	Good

5. Quality of achievement and standards

- The pupils develop a high level of personal, social and self-management skills as a result of a wide range of additional learning experiences. These wider skills and capabilities have a strong pastoral dimension and include excellent opportunities for developing mentoring, teamwork and leadership skills. The pupils have a positive disposition to learning and they set realistic and high expectations for themselves.
- At GCSE level, the percentage of pupils attaining 7 or more grades at A* to C and in 7 or more grades at A* to C, when GCSE English and GCSE mathematics are included, is consistently close to the NI average for similar selective schools. Standards in more than two-thirds of the individual subjects at grades A* to B are above the corresponding NI three year average for selective schools. A particular strength is the attainment of one-quarter of subjects being more than ten percentage points above this average.

² The term 'FSME Percentage' refers to the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals

³ 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

- At GCE A level, the percentage of pupils attaining 3 or more subjects at grades A* to C is above the average for similar schools. Standards in most subjects are above the corresponding NI three year averages for selective schools. In 2014, in three-fifths of the subjects studied at A2 level, all pupils attained at grades A* to C. The pupils also attain well in the small number of vocational/applied subjects at GCE A2 level.
- Over the past three years in GCSE grades A* to B, the pupils attained good standards in GCSE English and very good standards in GCSE mathematics and additional mathematics.
- There are a small number of pupils entitled to free school meals, and over the past three years almost all attained five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including GCSE English and GCSE mathematics. Most of the pupils with additional learning needs achieve well in GCSE and A level qualifications.

6. Quality of provision

- In most of the lessons observed during the inspection, planning, teaching and assessment were effective (good and better) at promoting learning.
- In the more effective lessons, the teaching is well-paced and builds on the pupils' prior knowledge. The learning is set in meaningful contexts with stimulating, creative and problem-solving activities to engage all of the pupils. The teachers use effective questioning, assessment and marking strategies and provide good opportunities for high-quality talking and listening activities to enable the pupils to consolidate their subject knowledge and extend their learning and that of their peers. The plenary sessions are planned well to assess the pupils' learning and inform teachers' lesson planning.
- In the less effective practice there is: over-direction by the teacher; a narrow range of strategies used that do not engage sufficiently the pupils in their learning; and insufficient time is left for effective plenary sessions. It will be important to disseminate the most effective practice in order to promote consistent improvement in planning, teaching and learning.
- The promotion of literacy through English and across the school supports well the development of the pupils' talking and listening and writing skills, with opportunities to participate in debating and public speaking competitions and to write for a range of audiences and purposes, both internally and externally. Reading is encouraged effectively through a number of appropriate initiatives, including book clubs. Within English and across the curriculum, at all key stages, the teachers and leaders need to ensure, through rigorous monitoring and evaluation, that all of the pupils make appropriate progression in the development of their literacy skills.
- While the current development plan for English as a subject identifies a range of appropriate priorities to improve further the provision, it needs to be refined to include targets and success criteria focused on improving the pupils' experiences and raising the standards they achieve.

- The pupils consolidate and extend their mathematical understanding by engaging positively with each other during paired and group work and in whole class discussions. They offer answers willingly and confidently in class; however, these opportunities are too infrequent. The teachers need to broaden the range of learning, teaching and assessment strategies to engage the pupils more actively in their mathematical learning. The school has identified appropriately the need for a consistent school-wide approach to the promotion and development of numeracy across the curriculum.
- The high quality and very effective, pastoral system is well-led and highly collegial. The pupils are courteous, confident and have high expectations for their learning. The school promotes the pupil voice, through the active senior prefect team, the subject mentors, the prefects, the music and sport ambassadors and the newly-reformed school council. In particular, the senior pupils were observed taking responsibility for the smooth running of the sixth-form centre. The pupils contribute greatly to the life and work of the school. The excellent range of extra-curricular activities enriches the educational and social experiences of the pupils.
- The provision for special educational needs within classroom practice across the school is effective. The classroom assistants work well with the teaching staff to provide targeted support for those pupils with statements of special educational need. The special educational needs co-ordinator has identified accurately the need for the more regular monitoring of the implementation of individual education plans across the curriculum. A team which monitors the pupils' progress makes effective use of a range of internal and external data to identify and support well the progress of pupils at risk of underachievement.
- The curriculum at all key stages is broad, balanced and flexible. At key stage 4 and post-16 the school is meeting the requirements of the Entitlement Framework and, to do so, collaborates with a number of other schools and the college of further education within their area learning community. Curriculum review and planning are informed well by the pupils' interests and abilities in order to ensure progression in their learning and to provide them with suitably flexible pathways. Throughout the school, and particularly at post-16, the additional learning experiences broaden the pupils' knowledge and develop well their leadership, team work, problem solving, and communication skills.
- The provision for careers education, information, advice and guidance is steered appropriately by the pupils' interests and stages of development. The taught provision is complemented by a well-conceived and varied programme of careers events and visits. The pupils have access to a wide range of resources to research appropriate career pathways and learn about the world of work, which enables them to make informed subject and career choices.

7. Quality of leadership and management

- The senior leadership team has high expectations of what the staff and pupils can achieve. They provide effective leadership to develop a culture and ethos of self-evaluation through the use of class pursuits, departmental audits, and the role of 'pupil progress managers' to inform improvement planning.

- The school development plan⁴ (SDP) is informed by analysis of, and progress against, the targets of the previous plan, and consultation with the staff and pupils; however, there is a variation in the quality of monitoring outcomes by the middle managers. More consistently robust self-evaluations, based on a thorough understanding of the pupils' needs, are required to inform better the learning and teaching. As the SDP cycle progresses, the senior leaders will need to provide regular evaluative feedback to all departments on the effectiveness of their action planning and target setting.
- Staff development is appropriately linked to the priorities in the SDP, with good opportunities for whole staff training and development and the sharing of good practice across the school.
- The governors have a wide set of skills which enables them to carry out their roles effectively. They are well informed about the standards the pupils attain, actively involved in development planning and have a clear understanding of the strengths and weakness of the school. Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, there can be a high degree of confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated.
- On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection the school has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding young people. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education.

8. Conclusion

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school is good. The school has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision.

The inspection has identified the need:

- for a greater consistency in the quality and effectiveness of improvement planning; and
- to empower leaders at all levels to evaluate the effectiveness of what they do to bring about improvements in classroom practice and the standards the pupils achieve.

The school has demonstrated the capacity to effect continued improvement; the Education and Training Inspectorate will continue to monitor the school's progress.

⁴ The school development plan meets the requirements of the School Development Planning Regulations (NI) 2010

Examination performance and other statistical data

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

The table below compares the percentage of year 12 pupils in Belfast High School achieving 7 or more GCSEs (A* to C) and equivalent subjects 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 7 or more GCSEs including English and mathematics (A* to C).

GCSE and GCSE equivalent subjects - *following permitted exclusions (no pupils)	2012	2013	2014
*Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE & Equivalents in at least 7 subjects	100	99	100
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects	92.9	95.7	97.1
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	91.5	92.1	94.2
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	97.9	98.6	99.3
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)	80	100	83.3

Other examination results at key stage 4 from 2011-12 to 2013-14

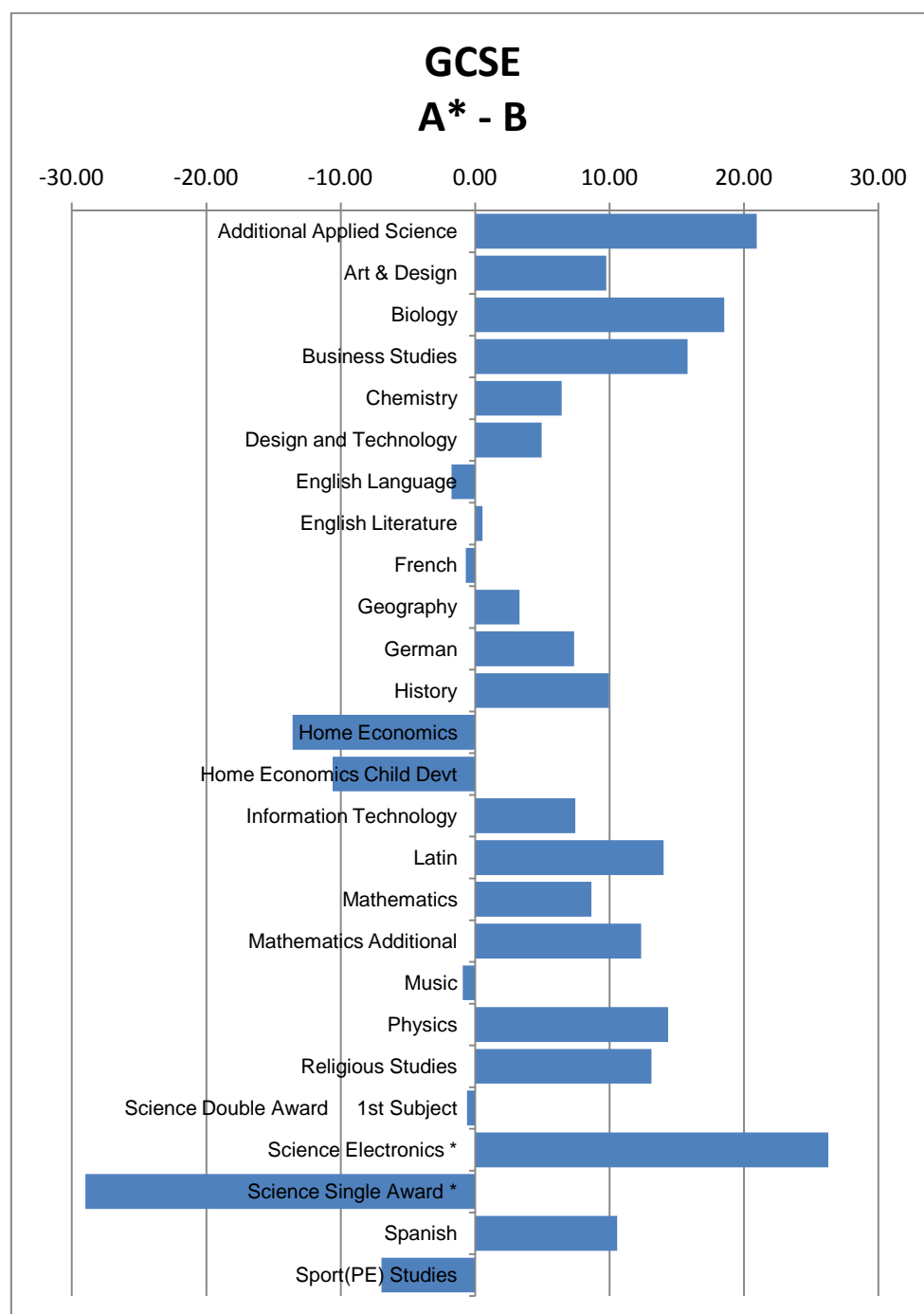
The table below shows achievements by the pupils in a GCSE examination for which NI benchmarking data is not available.

GCSE	2012	2013	2014	Total entry over 3 years
	% A* to B	% A* to B	% A* to B	
Additional Applied Science	56.3	33.3	85.7	35

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 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 ETI, the performance of each GCSE subject, 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

Other GCSE examination results from 2011-12 to 2013-14

The table below shows other examinations at GCSE level at grades A*-B.

GCSE Subject	2012	2013	2014	Entry over 3 years
Classical Greek	75%		100%	6
Polish			100%	1
Classical Civilisation	72.2%	93.3%	85%	53

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

The table below shows the percentage of year 14 pupils in Belfast High School achieving three or more GCE A levels at grades A* to C. The table compares the percentage of 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	97	100	100
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	81.9	83.1	77.0
The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category	75.5	81.1	N/A

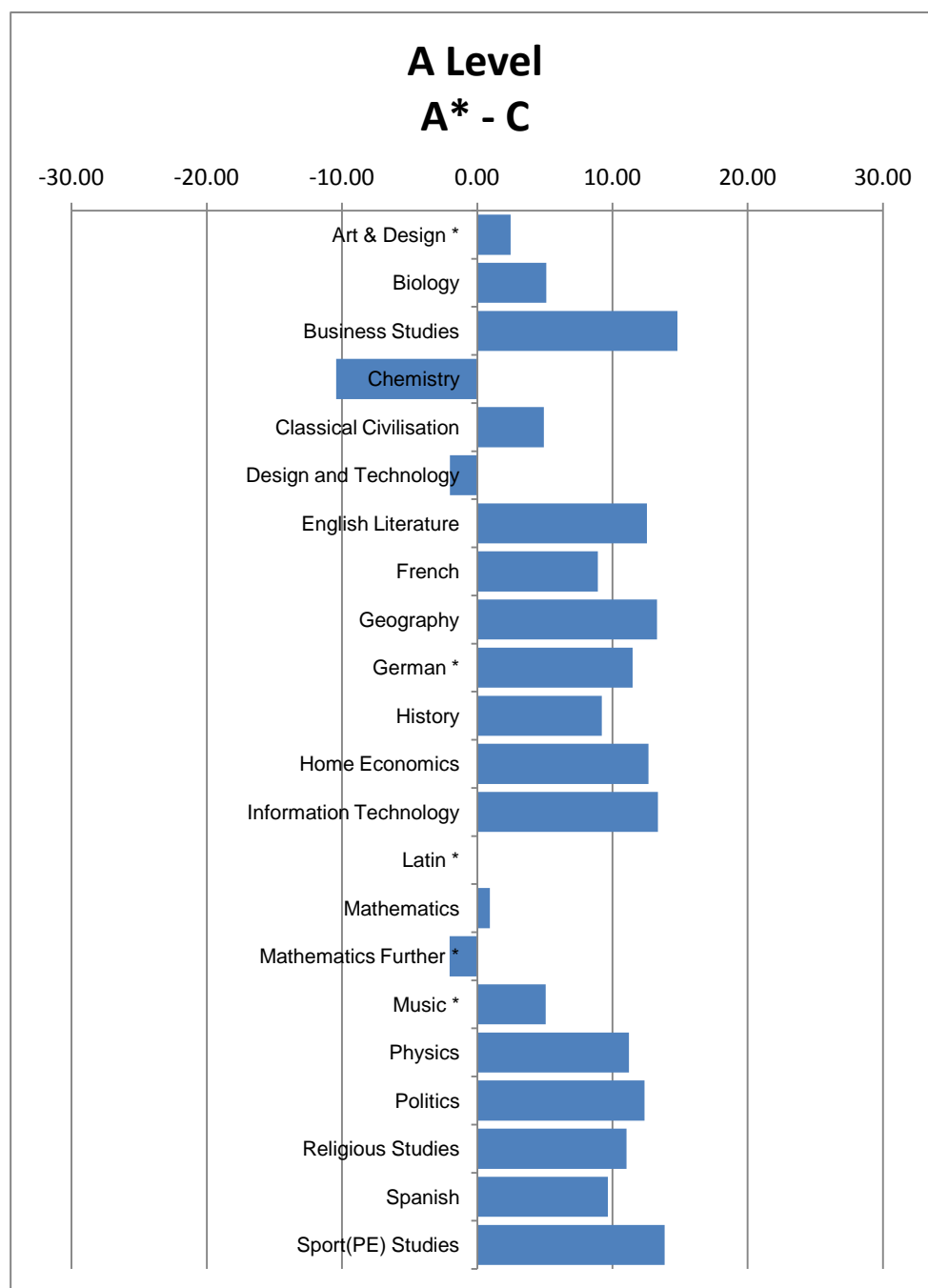
The table below show the percentage of year 14 pupils in Belfast High School achieving grades A* to C in vocational/applied courses equivalent to GCE A level. No average is available from the examining boards for the subjects in this table to facilitate comparison.

GCE Subject	2012	2013	2014	Total entry over 3 years
	% A*-C	% A*-C	% A*-C	
Health and Social Care	100	100	100	23
Media, Film and TV Studies	--	100	100	16
Moving Image Arts	--	100	100	8

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 2010-11 to 2012-13

The bar chart below illustrates, based on data held by the school and verified with ETI, the performance of each GCE A Level subject, 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

Staying on rate

Based on data verified by the school with ETI, the table below shows the percentage of the pupils who stay on at Belfast High School from year 12 to year 13 and then from year 13 to year 14, compared with the NI average for all schools and for the most recent year for which data is available (2012/13).

	NI Average	School
% Yr 12 staying on to Yr 13	95.7	90.7
% Yr 13 staying on to Yr 14	94.3	94.2

Leavers' destinations

Based on data held and verified by the school with ETI, the table below shows the percentage of pupils who leave Belfast High School to enter further education, 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.)	Level 3+ % (No.)
Total Number of Leavers	146	9503			
Employment	6.8 (10)	3.4			
Further Education	20.5 (30)	21.2		25	5
Higher Education	71.9 (105)	72.0			105
Training	0	1.2			
Unemployed	0	1.2			
Unknown	0.7 (1)	1.1			

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