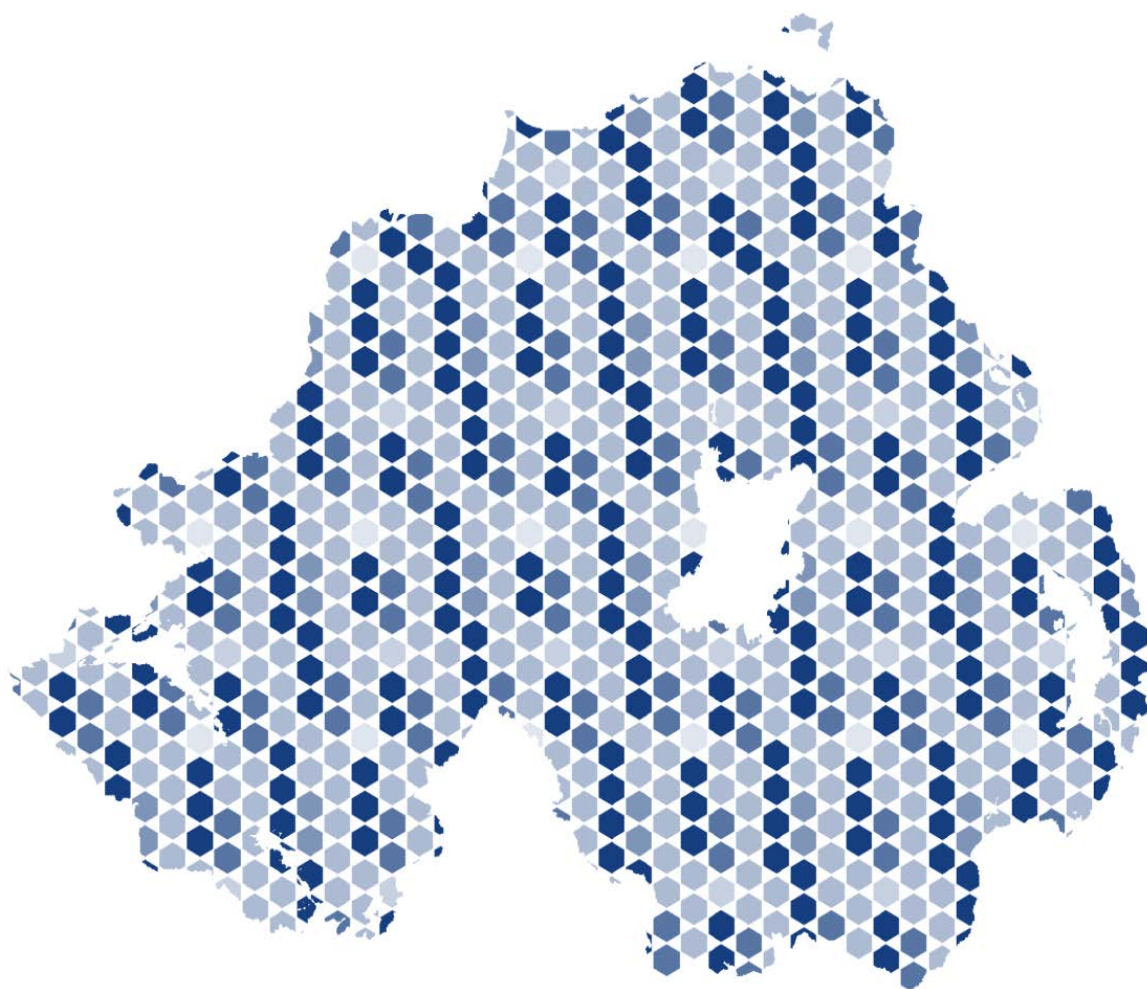


# POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Methodist College, Belfast

Co-educational, 11-18, voluntary grammar school

Report of an Inspection in  
March 2014

### 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 and the pupils' written work and held formal and informal discussions with pupils, teachers and staff with specific responsibilities.

The arrangements for this inspection included:

- a meeting with representatives from the governors;
- meetings with groups of pupils; and
- the opportunity for the parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

Data on the returns on questionnaires sent in advance of the inspection to parents and school staff is shown in the table below.

Questionnaire	Number issued	Number returned	Percentage returned	Number with comments
Parents	1389 <sup>1</sup>	229	16.5	106
Teachers	99	86	87	19
Support Staff	101	13	13	*

\* fewer than 5

## 2. Context

Methodist College Belfast is a co-educational, voluntary grammar school situated in the south of the City, near Queen's University. The pupils come from a wide geographical area and the school is over-subscribed regularly. Upon entry to the school most of the intake achieve above the expected level in English and, in mathematics.

Name of School	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Year 8 Intake	243	244	240	243
Enrolment	1777	1783	1784	1758
% Attendance (NI Average)	94.6 (92.6)	95.2 (93)	94.6 (92.9)	
FSME Percentage <sup>2</sup>	2.1	1.7	2	3.5
% (No.) of pupils on the SEN register	7.9 (141)	7.8 (140)	7.5 (134)	8 (142)
No. of pupils with statements of educational needs in the mainstream school	16	16	15	17

<sup>1</sup> ETI is trialling a range of methods for collecting the views of parents/carers about the life and work of the school. As a result, the response rate to the parent/carer questionnaires may be low.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'FSME Percentage' refers to the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals.

No. of newcomers	41	24	14	6
% of Y8 pupils with L5 English	78	72	70	58
% of Y8 pupils with L5 mathematics	90	86	85	66
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in English	99	98	98	98
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in mathematics	99	98	98	98 <sup>3</sup>
<i>Source: data as held by the school.</i>				

### 3. Focus of inspection

In order to promote improvement in the interests of all pupils, the purpose of the 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.

### 4. Overall finding

<b>Overall Performance Level</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Achievements and Standards</b>	<b>Very good</b>
<b>Provision</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Leadership and Management</b>	<b>Good</b>

### 5. Achievements and standards

- By the end of Year 14, the pupils develop an excellent range of personal and social skills; they are well-motivated, articulate and have a very positive disposition to learning. Throughout the school, the pupils display high levels of maturity, make informed presentations, speak confidently and listen to one another respectfully in a range of contexts. They write competently for a variety of purposes and audiences across the curriculum and they can reason and think mathematically to a high level.
- For two out of the past three years the percentage of pupils achieving seven GCSEs including English and mathematics, at grades A\* to C has been above the NI average for similar schools. There was a significant drop in results in 2012 to below the NI average. At grades A\* to B almost all of the subjects are above or in line with the NI average for selective schools; a significant minority are ten or more percentage points above the average for these schools.

<sup>3</sup> From 2013, KS2 standards in English and mathematics are reported as Levels of Progression and cannot be compared directly with KS2 data from previous years.

- Over the past three years, the percentage of pupils achieving three or more A levels at grades A\* to C has been above or in line with the NI average for similar schools. Most of the subjects are above the NI average for selective schools; a significant minority are more than five percentage points above the average for these schools.
- Across KS4, the pupils make expected or better progress in mathematics. At all levels, standards in mathematics are excellent; a high proportion of pupils achieve top grades in public examinations, and there is a very strong uptake of mathematics post-16.
- At A\* to B in GCSE English and English literature, and at grades A\* to C in A level English Literature the school's performance has been above the NI three year average.
- Most of the pupils on the special needs register attain five or more GCSE at grades A\*-C; two-thirds of the pupils on the special needs register achieve 3 A-Levels at grade C or above.

## **6. Provision**

- Planning, teaching, learning and assessment in the lessons observed ranged from outstanding to inadequate. Just over three-quarters of the lessons were good or better. The school is able to draw on examples of highly effective teaching in which: effective open-ended questioning enables the pupils to think rigorously and make extended oral responses with confidence; the pupils review their own learning and understand how to improve the quality of their work; and the teachers make effective use of available opportunities to extend the pupils' learning. In the one-quarter of the teaching which requires improvement, the lessons are overly directed by the teachers, the pupils are unduly passive for too long and the pupils do not develop independence in their learning.
- There is variation in the quality of the planning across the departments. In the most effective planning, there is a clear focus on the intended learning and on the use of the most appropriate strategies to extend the pupils' learning. To improve the planning further, the teachers need to match the learning more closely to the needs and abilities of all of the pupils.
- When given the opportunity, the pupils can peer- and self-assess effectively their work; throughout the school a high priority is given to homework. There is variation in the extent to which teachers provide helpful written feedback on what the pupils need to do to improve their work. In both the questionnaires and written comments, a minority of the parents identified this as an area for improvement. More generally, across the school, there is a lack of consistency in the effective use of assessment to promote learning by the teachers; particularly with regard to sharing explicitly the intended learning with the pupils and providing plenary sessions that consolidate effectively the learning.
- There is a systematic approach towards the use of assessment data at subject and whole-school level. At KS4 and post-16, available assessment data is used effectively to set individual targets for pupils and monitor their progress. At KS3, the school has identified appropriately the need, and has begun recently, to develop further the monitoring of pupil progress which includes the use of a

range of standardised tests and subject assessments to identify underachievement. The available data now needs to be used more effectively to: set meaningful targets to monitor progress; identify pupils who are underachieving and the associated specific actions to help them improve; and inform planning for learning.

- The pupils and staff have a strong sense of loyalty and pride in their school. The pupils' behaviour is excellent. There is an inclusive ethos and relationships among the pupils are collegial, caring and respectful. The pupils benefit from an excellent range of extra-curricular activities, which contributes well to their personal, social and academic development. In addition, the pupils value and excel in the extensive opportunities to represent their school, and their success is celebrated by their peers and the staff. The active school council, which develops the pupils' leadership and decision-making skills, is effecting improvements to benefit all of the pupils. The school has well-established external partnerships, including close links with universities, charities, and local schools. These partnerships provide the pupils with valuable experiences to develop their interpersonal skills, and an empathy and understanding of others.
- The pupils state that they feel safe in school and are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being.
- The pupils who require additional support for their learning make good progress and most attain standards in external examinations at GCSE and A-Level that are in line with their ability. The school has a system to identify the needs of individual pupils and puts strategies in place to help support them to overcome their specific difficulties. The teachers need to make greater use of appropriate diagnostic data in the individual education plans in order to monitor more effectively the pupils' progress.
- The pupils develop their skills, knowledge and understanding of careers through the employability and careers programmes. The learning activities provide good opportunities for the pupils to consider their aspirations, abilities and interests. The pupils benefit from access to intensive information sessions and careers-based enrichment opportunities such as training in interview skills, participation in work experience and input from guest speakers. By the time they leave school, the pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the career options open to them. Over the past three years the percentage of pupils achieving three or more A levels at grades A\* to C has decreased and the school is reviewing the arrangements and guidance for subject choice at A level. The inspection endorses this as a key area to take forward.
- The curriculum exceeds significantly the requirements of the Entitlement Framework and has appropriate breadth, with a wide range of subjects on offer that meet the needs, abilities and career aspirations of the pupils. The curriculum reflects well the cultural diversity of the school population and the school's commitment to raising the pupils' awareness of world issues and the global opportunities available to them. The school has reviewed appropriately the arrangements for the enrichment programme at post-16. In the next academic year the programme will provide greater coherence, balance and relevance of the learning experiences for all of the pupils.

## **7. Leadership and management**

- The school development plan is at the final phase of a three cycle and the school is currently in the process of seeking the views of pupils, teachers, parents and governors on a range of school improvement matters for the new plan. An important aspect of this work includes the use of a range of internal and external performance data to identify underachievement. It will be important that as this work progresses that leaders at all levels develop further the coherence of all of the associated action plans and the current arrangements for monitoring the impact of this work on pupil learning and achievement, and classroom practice.
- The senior management team has identified appropriately the need to develop further the taught provision, involving timetabling of discrete periods of careers in the transition years between the key stages. The statutory requirements for Learning for Life and Work in the Northern Ireland Curriculum are not currently being met at KS4.
- Following the recent reduction in staff, there has been a significant restructuring of senior and middle management posts in order to meet more effectively the needs of the school. The senior management team provide effective leadership and have worked hard to develop a culture and ethos of self-evaluation within the school and foster collegial working relations at all levels; for example, through the use of homework, departmental audits, qualitative and quantitative assessment data, the pupil survey of their learning, and the dissemination of effective classroom practice.
- There is variation across departments in the extent and use of qualitative and quantitative data; the school is addressing the need to make more effective use of diagnostic data across the school, to track the progression of the pupils' learning, in particular for pupils in key stage 3, and to set meaningful targets to track whole-school improvement.
- The teachers display high levels of subject knowledge, professionalism and commitment in their working relationships with staff and pupils in the school.
- The governors are very well informed and are strategically and actively engaged in the life and work of the school; they work in an effective and challenging way with the principal to ensure that the school is well managed and meets the needs of the pupils and the community. They have been particularly effective in reviewing and improving their internal governance structures and contributing significantly to the development of the school's inclusion and diversity policy.
- The parents, staff and school community can have a high degree of confidence in the effectiveness of the governors; they are well informed and very supportive of the principal and staff.
- On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education, but the following minor area needs to be addressed: to update the safeguarding training for designated staff.



## **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 an area for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address.

The area for improvement is the need to improve the quality of planning, teaching, learning and assessment through more rigorous and coherent processes for self-evaluation.

The ETI will monitor the school's progress in addressing this area for improvement.

## Performance and statistical data

## GCSE and equivalent examination results from 2010-11 to 2012-13

Based on data held and verified by the school with the ETI, the table below compares the percentage of year 12 pupils in this school achieving 7 or more GCSEs (A\* to C) including equivalent subjects with the NI average for selective schools in the same free school meals category.<sup>4</sup> The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is also shown.

<b>GCSE and GCSE equivalent subjects - *following permitted exclusions</b>	2011	2012	2013
*Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE & Equivalents in at least 7 subjects	98.8	100.0	100.0
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects	97.7	88.8	97.6
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	94.2	94.2	
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics	96.6	86.7	96.4
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	92.6	92.6	
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	99.6	93.8	98.8
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)	100.0	50.0	71.4

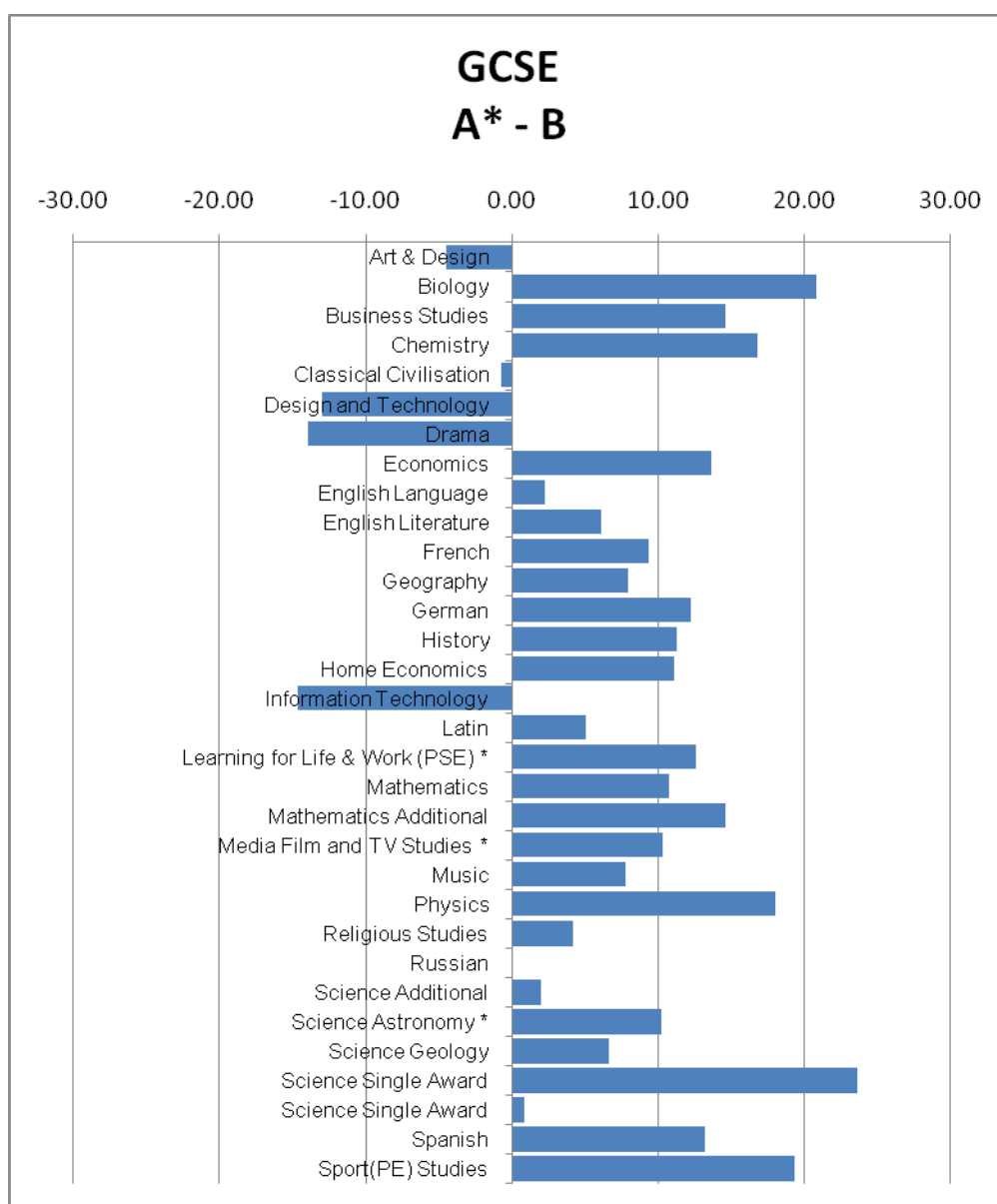
Source: Data as held and verified by the school, with DE benchmarks.

<sup>4</sup> See benchmarking data and guidance contained in the annual DE Circulars on: 'School Development Planning and Target-Setting'.

## GCSE EXAMINATION RESULTS

### Attainment of pupils in individual subjects at GCSE level at grades A\* to B from 2010-11 to 2012-13

The table below is based on the data held by the school and verified by the ETI to show attainment in individual subjects A\*-B over the last three years compared to the NI average for all pupils in selective schools. The values to the left of the centre line are below the average, the values to the right are above the average.



\*indicates fewer than 30 entries over 3 years

### Other examination results:

The table below shows other examinations at GCSE level achieved by the pupils; there is currently no benchmarking data for these examinations.

GCSE Subject	2011	2012	2013	Total entry over 3 years
	% A*-B	% A*-B	% A*-B	
Chinese	100	100	100	25
Polish	-	-	100	2
Greek	75	-	-	8
Psychology	-	100	-	1

### GCE A level examination results at grades A\* to C from 2010-11 to 2012-13

Based on data held and verified by the school with the ETI, the table below compares the percentage of year 14 pupils in this school achieving 3 or more GCE A levels at grades A\* to C with the NI average for selective schools in the same free school meals category<sup>5</sup>.

GCE A Level or equivalent	2011	2012	2013
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels & Equivalents in at least 3 subjects	100	99.6	100
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	81.1	76.6	73.9
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	<i>75.5</i>	<i>75.5</i>	

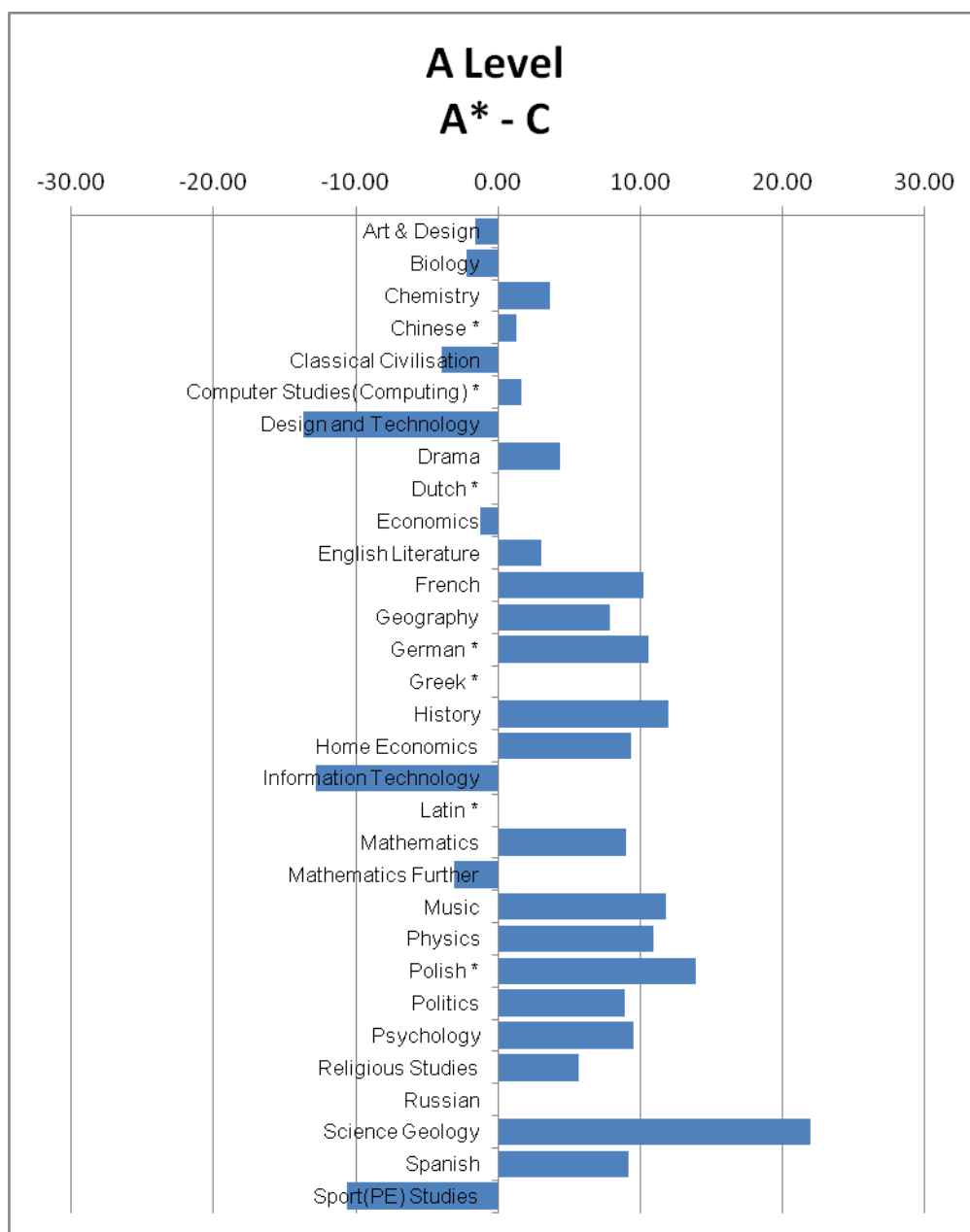
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<sup>5</sup> See benchmarking data and guidance contained in the annual DE Circulars on: 'School Development Planning and Target-Setting'.

## GCE EXAMINATION RESULTS

### Attainment of pupils in individual subjects at GCE A level at grades A\* to C from 2010-11 to 2012-13

The table below is based on the data held by the school and verified by the ETI to show attainment in individual subjects at A\*-C over the last three years compared to the NI average for all pupils in selective schools. The values to the left of the centre line are below the average, the values to the right are above the average.



\*indicates fewer than 30 entries over 3 years

### Other examination results: post-16

The table below shows other examinations at level 3 (equivalent to A levels) achieved by the pupils; there is currently no benchmarking data for these examinations.

GCE Subject	2011	2012	2013	Total entry over 3 years
	% A*-C	% A*-C	% A*-C	
Business (vocational)	100	100	94	56
HSC	75	50	-	10
Science Electronics	100	-	100	8

### Staying on rate and leavers' destinations

The tables below for leavers' destinations and staying on rates are based on data held by the school and verified by ETI and are compared with the appropriate NI average for selective schools.

#### Staying on rate

	NI Average	School
% Yr 12 staying on to Yr 13	95.0	94.9
% Yr 13 staying on to Yr 14	94.9	98.9

#### Leavers' destinations

	2011/12 NI %	2011/12 School %	2011/12 School Nos.
Total number of leavers			285
Employment	3.8	1.8	5
Further Education	19.0	15.4	44
Higher Education	72.7	81.8	233
Training	1.5	0.0	0
Unemployed	1.6	0.4	1
Unknown	1.4	0.7	2

\* fewer than 5

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