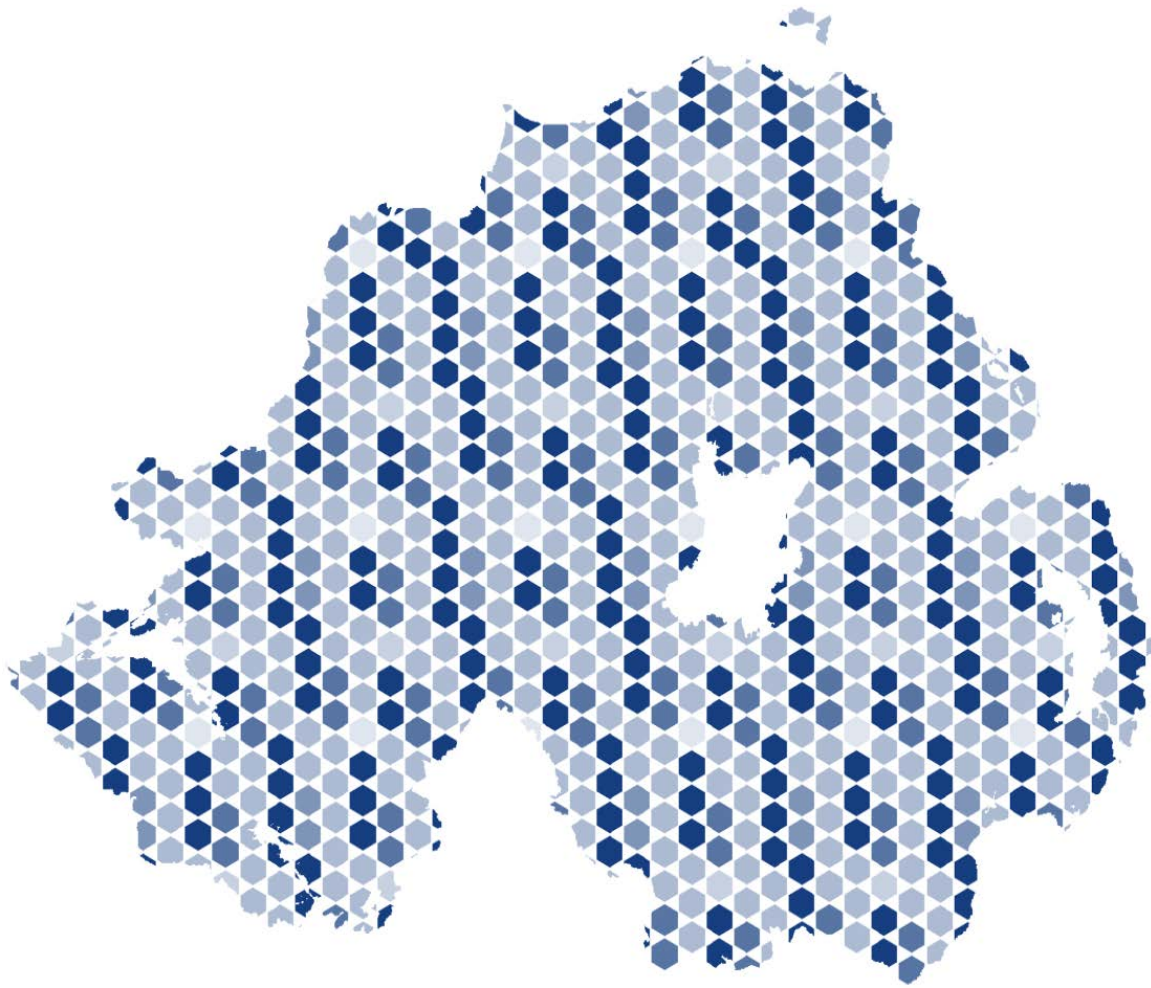


POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Our Lady's Grammar School,
Newry

All girls, voluntary selective, 11-18 school

Report of an Inspection in
January 2015

eti

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.etini.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.

Fifteen percent of parents (116) and 64% of staff (62) responded to the questionnaires. Almost all of the staff responses to the questions were very positive, as were most of the parental responses. The parents' comments reflected the successful outworking of the Mercy ethos, as demonstrated through the high quality pastoral support, the commitment of the staff and the leadership of the welfare and the learning of the pupils. The few concerns identified were discussed with the governors and the Principal, and where relevant, are addressed in the report.

2. Focus and purpose of the 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

Our Lady's Grammar School is situated close to the centre of Newry. Around one-third of the pupils come from the city and the rest from a wide catchment across the counties of Armagh and Down.

The school is regularly oversubscribed; pupils enter Year 8 from over 40 different primary schools and the ability of the pupils on entry is high. The percentage of pupils who stay on from year 13 to year 14 is in line with the Northern Ireland (NI) average, while in addition, a small number of pupils join the school in the sixth form.

The school is an active partner in the Newry and Mourne Learning Community and has very effective community links, connections with local businesses, and a strong international dimension. The school operates under the Trusteeship of the Sisters of Mercy, and its life and work are underpinned by their core values of Spirituality, Scholarship and Service.

Our Lady's Grammar School	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Year 8 Intake	121	120	122	120
Enrolment	864	861	858	845
% Attendance (NI Average)	95.2% (95.7%)	94.8% (95.3%)	95.0% (n/a)	N/A (n/a)
FSME Percentage ¹	9.3	9.8	9.4	16.2
% and (Number) of pupils on SEN register	*	0.6% (5)	1.0% (9)	1.8% (15)
No. of pupils with statements of educational needs in the mainstream school	*	*	5	*
<i>Intake²:</i>				
% of Y8 pupils with L5 English	66.94	65.00	30.33	16.67
% of Y8 pupils with L5 mathematics	80.94	78.33	42.62	25.83
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in English	98.35	96.67	96.72	47.50
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in mathematics	98.35	96.67	96.72	47.50
Source: data as held by the school. ³				

* fewer than 5

4. Overall findings of the inspection

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

5. Quality of achievement and standards

- Pupils and teachers, through mature and mutually respectful relationships, share high expectations for their learning outcomes. The pupils engage purposefully in lessons, listen carefully and develop extended responses both orally and in writing, in response to effective questioning and challenging learning activities. As a result, the pupils' abilities to think critically and creatively are highly developed.
- The pupils benefit from a broad range of learning experiences, including extensive opportunities to become involved in cultural, artistic and sporting activities; these facilitate the acquisition and development of personal and social skills, including leadership skills from year 8 onwards. The religious, spiritual and moral development of the pupils is afforded a very high priority by the school and as a result, the pupils display high levels of empathy and sensitivity; they embrace readily their roles as active citizens and are very well prepared to progress to the next stage of their education.

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. Not all primary school provided KS2 data to the school.

³ Not all primary school provided KS2 performance data to the school.

- All of the pupils are entered for both GCSE English and English Literature and attain high standards, particularly in GCSE English where the percentage of pupils attaining a grade A*-B has been either in line with, or above, the NI average over the past three years. At GCE A level, the outcomes for the pupils are high; the percentage of pupils attaining grades A*-C in English over the past three years is more than 5 percentage points above the NI average.
- Literacy is promoted effectively by individual departments throughout the school and through a wide range of enrichment activities, and is reflected in the high quality written and oral responses produced by almost all of the pupils. The school has identified appropriately the need to develop a more co-ordinated and coherent monitoring and evaluation of the provision.
- The pupils achieve very high standards in all public examinations in mathematics. They are significantly above the NI average for similar schools at GCSE level in both mathematics and additional mathematics; and are consistently above the NI average at GCE A level. The presentation of the pupils' work is of a high quality and they have well planned opportunities for purposeful investigations and for self-evaluation.
- There are well planned opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in numeracy through connected learning projects, STEM initiatives, competitions and cross curricular skills tasks, while numeracy-based careers are promoted appropriately.
- Through a range of creative practices, the use of ICT, including online teaching and the use of digital devices, supports learning effectively across the school. As a result of a well-coordinated approach to both the curriculum provision at KS3 and continuing staff development, high standards are attained in KS3 accreditation for using ICT.
- The pupils, including those entitled to free school meals, achieve consistently high outcomes in public examinations; these reflect the abilities and aptitudes of the pupils.⁴ While the percentage of pupils achieving 7 or more grades at A*-C including English and maths dipped slightly in 2014, almost all pupils achieve at this level and the outcomes for the pupils have remained consistently high and well above the NI average for similar selective schools.
- At GCSE level, the standards the pupils attain in the majority of individual subjects are above the corresponding NI averages for girls in selective schools at grades A*-B. All pupils who choose level 2 vocational subjects also achieve well. At GCE A level, the percentage of pupils achieving 3 or more grades at A*-C is consistently well above the NI average for selective schools in the same FSME category; nearly all of the individual subjects are above average for similar schools.
- The highly effective provision for careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) enhances the pupils' understanding of the career options available to them and enables them to make informed choices. As a result, all school leavers enter further or higher education; the percentage of pupils who enter higher education is significantly above the NI average.

⁴ The examination data and an analysis of trends in examination standards over the past three years are given in the appendix.

6. Quality of provision

- Most learning is highly effective; almost all of the lessons observed during the inspection were good or better and a majority were very good or outstanding. Through well-planned, paced and skilful teaching by teachers with strong specialist expertise, the pupils develop both their subject knowledge and high level thinking skills. As a result of clear exposition, appropriate challenge, supportive intervention and effective use of teacher, peer and self-assessment, the pupils make excellent progress.
- The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is outstanding. A distinctive ethos of trust and respect suffuses the life and work of the school. The school provides a very positive, nurturing, learning environment for all pupils, where they are empowered to reach their full potential. There are excellent working relationships at all levels and all of the staff are highly committed to the academic and pastoral needs of every pupil.
- The pupils are very welcoming, confident and courteous; their behaviour both in and out of the classroom is exemplary. Highly effective use is made of pupil consultation through the school councils to enrich the learning experiences for all pupils. In addition, the excellent range of extra-curricular activities develops well the pupils' interests, confidence, resilience and independence.
- 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. The pupils report that they feel safe in school and that their concerns are dealt with effectively; they are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being.
- The quality of provision for the small number of pupils with special educational needs is outstanding; the advice provided, through appropriate and regularly reviewed individual education plans, informs planning and teaching effectively. The school is responding appropriately to a gradual increase in the number of pupils identified as having special needs. Through a formal review process and the provision of additional mentoring support, the school is able to demonstrate that almost all of these pupils exceed expectations at GCSE level and progress to individually appropriate post-16 provision.
- There is a whole-school approach to the provision of CEIAG; it is integrated and embedded into the departments across the school. The pupils have access to a high-quality programme, with excellent opportunities to engage in personal career planning and to access impartial advice. In addition, the programme of events, guest speakers and visits supports the pupils' effectively in making informed career choices.
- The development of the school's curriculum is given a high priority by the school. The planning is coherent, the expansion of the curriculum offer is pupil-centred, and is informed well by the pupils' individual profiles. The analysis of labour market intelligence is effective in informing the development of the curriculum and, as a consequence, it has an appropriate focus on science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics subjects. The school has introduced a software systems design GCE A level course, complemented by extra-curricular software programming initiatives, to improve employability pathways for pupils into industry.

- The collaborative links with the further education college and a neighbouring school enable the pupils to access a wider range of general, applied and vocational courses. The school currently meets the requirements of the entitlement framework at KS4 and post-16.

7. Quality of leadership and management

- The school development plan⁵, which is informed by meaningful consultation and effective self-evaluation, details a range of appropriate priorities for school improvement. The associated action plans guide well the development work across the school and there are effective processes to monitor and evaluate the impact of the improvement work.
- The school's development work is pupil-centred. The focus on the welfare and learning of pupils is evident in the relentless pursuit of high standards and high quality provision, which enhance the experiences, opportunities and outcomes for the pupils and the wider school community.
- The senior leadership team, led most ably by a long-serving and highly strategic principal, provide outstanding leadership. They possess complementary leadership skills, set very high standards and expectations and inspire confidence and respect amongst the staff and the pupils. The senior leadership team are committed to empowering, supporting and enabling all members of the school community to achieve success both individually and collectively. This has resulted in an exceptionally engaged, ambitious, dynamic school community with a clear sense of identity and purpose.
- The middle managers provide very effective leadership and management of their areas of responsibility; they are responsive to change and have developed innovative practices which have improved the pupils' learning experiences, their well-being and their attainments. They are committed to the collegial vision of building resilience, promoting independence and enhancing experiences, opportunities and outcomes for all.
- The governors are highly committed to, very well informed about, and actively engaged in, the life and work 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.

8. Conclusion

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is outstanding; the quality of pastoral care is also outstanding. The school has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

⁵ 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

Based on data held by the school, and verified with ETI, the table below compares the percentage of year 12 pupils in Our Lady's Grammar 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 category⁶.

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	96.6	97.6	93.1
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	<i>93.7</i>	<i>96.3</i>	<i>N/A</i>
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics	96.6	97.6	92.2
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	<i>91.3</i>	<i>92.8</i>	<i>N/A</i>
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	97.5	100	98.3
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)	87.5	100	81.8

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

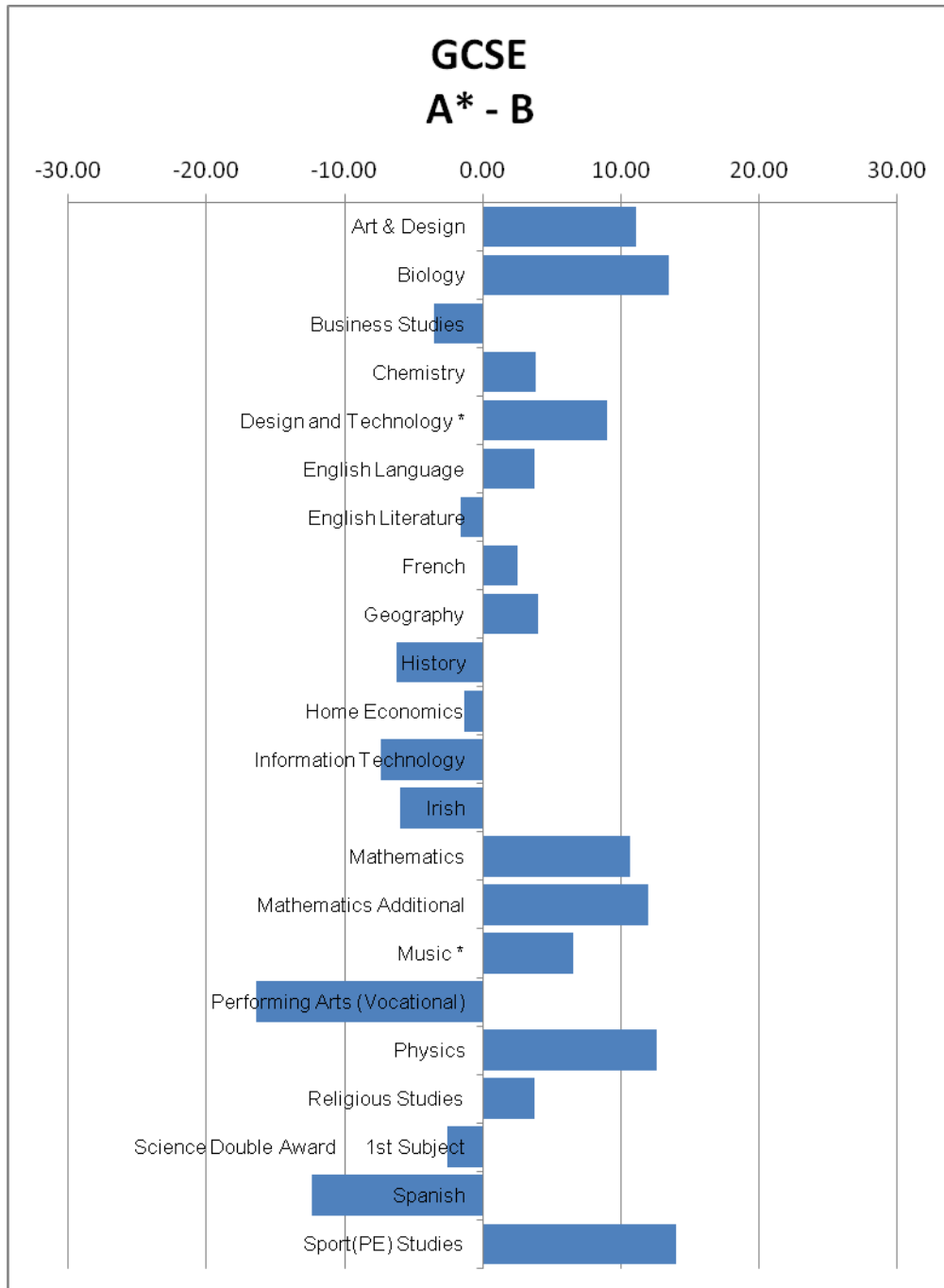
Based on data held by the school and verified with ETI, the tables below show the percentage of year 12 pupils in Our Lady's Grammar School achieving pass grades in vocational/applied courses equivalent to GCSE level. No average is available from the examining board(s) for the subjects in these tables to facilitate comparison.

Level 2	2012	2013	2014	Total entry over 3 years
	% pass	% pass	% pass	
BTEC Extended Certificate in Creative Media	100	100	100	28
BTEC Extended Certificate in Engineering	100	100	100	19
BTEC Extended Certificate in Health & Social Care	100	100	100	23

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 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 ETI, the performance of each GCSE subject, in all exam boards, compared with the three-year average for girls 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 ETI, the table below shows the percentage of year 14 pupils in Our Lady's Grammar School achieving three or more GCE A levels at grades A* to C. The table compares this percentage with the NI average for selective schools in the same free school meals category⁷.

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	91.7	84.3	86.1
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	<i>75.2</i>	<i>72.9</i>	N/A

Other examination results: post-16

Based on data held by the school and verified with ETI, the table below shows the percentage of year 14 pupils in Our Lady's Grammar School achieving pass grades in vocational/applied courses equivalent to GCE A level. No average is available from the examining board(s) for the subjects in this table to facilitate comparison.

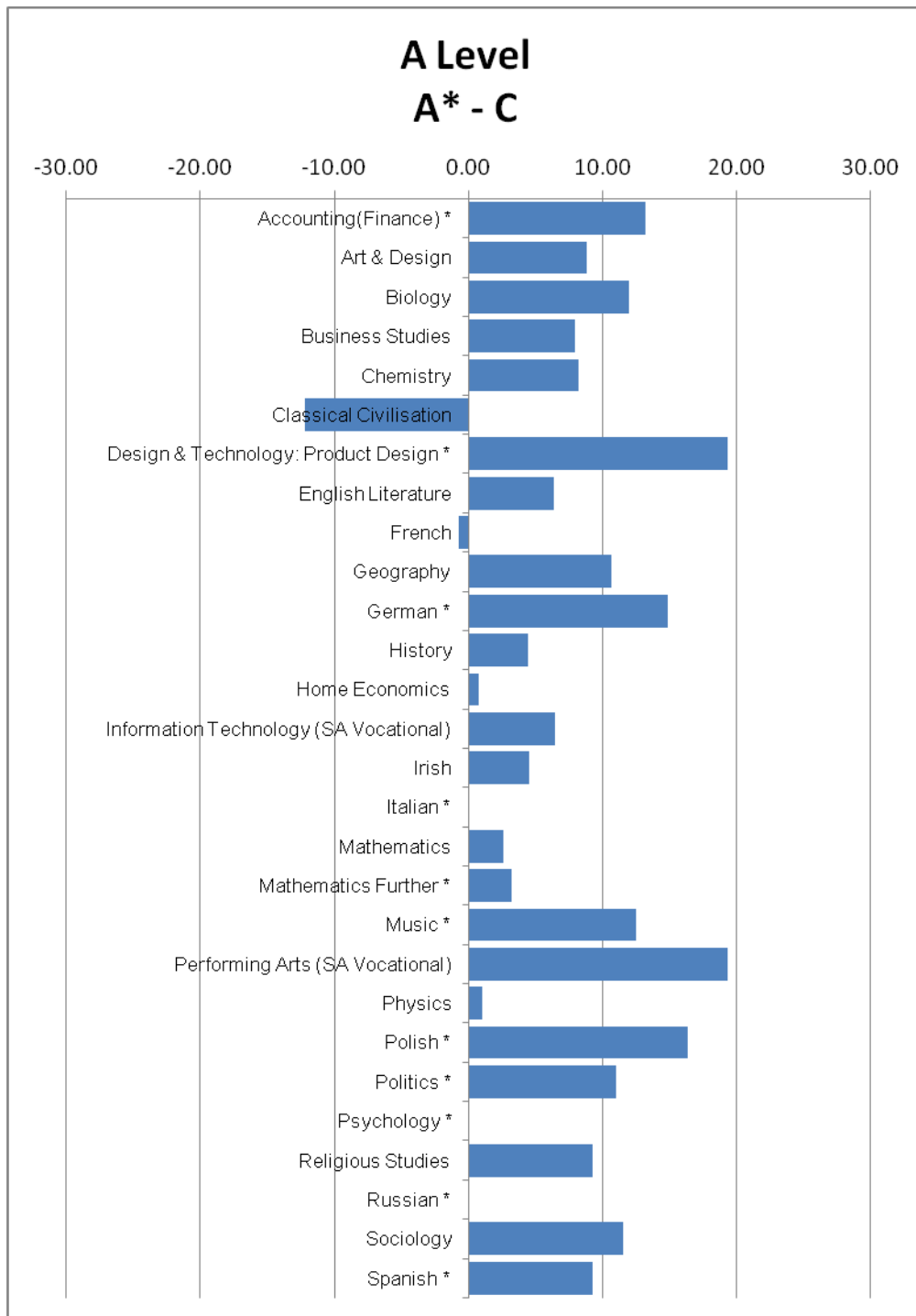
Level 3	2012	2013	2014	Total entry over 3 years
	% pass	% pass	% pass	
<i>BTEC Subsidiary Diploma in Sport</i>	100	100	100	7

⁷ 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 GCSE subject, in all exam boards, compared with the three-year average for girls 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.

Comparison with the three-year NI average at grades A* to C



*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 Our Lady's Grammar School from year 12 to year 13 and then from year 13 to year 14, compared with the NI average and for the most recent year for which data is available.

	NI Average	School
% Yr 12 staying on to Yr 13	95.7	94.5
% Yr 13 staying on to Yr 14	94.3	96.0

Leavers' destinations

Based on data held and verified by the school with ETI, the table below shows the percentage of all of the pupils from Our Lady's Grammar School who leave school to enter further education, higher education or employment, or are seeking employment compared with the average for selective schools.

	School % (No.)	NI	Level 3 % (No.)	Level 3 + % (No.)
Total Number of Leavers	131	9503		
Employment	0	3.4%		
Further Education	6.9% (9)	21.2%	0	6.9% (9)
Higher Education	93.1% (122)	72%	0	93.1% (122)
Training	0	1.2%		
Unemployed	0	1.2%		
Unknown	0	1.1%		

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