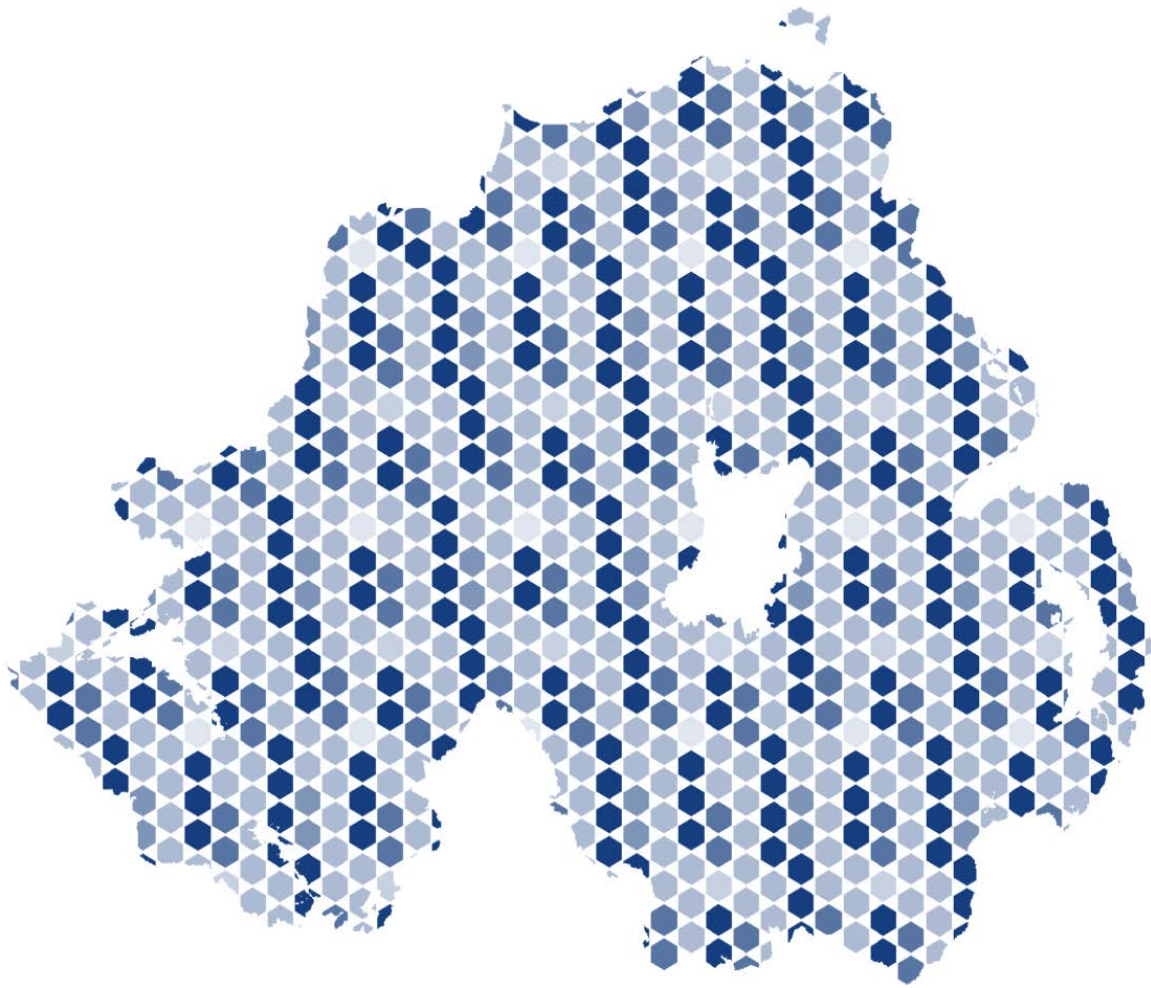


POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Regent House School,
Newtownards

Co-educational, 11-18 controlled, selective school

Report of an Inspection in
March 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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Appendix on trends in examination performance and other statistical data

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. Thirty percent of staff (55) responded to the questionnaires. They reported high levels of satisfaction and commented favourably on the leadership of the recently appointed principal, the clarity of the shared vision for improvement and the improved collegiality that is being fostered within the school. Ten percent of parents (118) responded to the questionnaires. Although most of the parents who completed the questionnaire reported that they were happy with the overall quality of education provided for their child, a majority of the written comments, provided by approximately one-half of the parents who responded, raised concerns. These concerns included: communication practice within the school; variation in the quality of the teaching and the impact this had on their child's learning and motivation; issues with subject choices; and, the need for the school to ask for, and take account of, their views on a more regular basis. All of the issues raised in the questionnaires were discussed with the governors and senior leaders and, where appropriate, comment is made in the main body of 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

Regent House School draws its pupils from a wide geographical area. The school is oversubscribed for year 8 entry, and is undersubscribed for post-16 entry. Overall, enrolment has remained steady over the last four years. The proportion of pupils achieving at or above the expected levels in literacy and numeracy on entry to the school is above the average for a selective school. Significant staffing changes at senior leadership level have occurred in the past two years, including the appointment of the principal and the reconstitution of the board of governors, both in September 2014. The school's participation in the North Down and Ards Area Learning Community has supported its improvement work and the school has recently hosted a careers, further and higher education convention for all schools within the area learning community. There is, however, no course collaboration at present at key stage 4 or post-16 with any other school or further education provider to extend the curriculum offer for pupils in the school or the wider community.

Regent House School, Newtownards	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Year 8 Intake	212	211	215	210
Enrolment	1449	1465	1443	1420
% Attendance (NI Average)	95.8 (95.7)	95.5 (95.3)	96.0 (95.8)	N/A (n/a)
FSME Percentage ¹	4.6	5.1	5.2	9.6
% (No.) of pupils on the SEN register	3.3 (48)	3.3 (49)	3.1 (44)	3.3 (47)
No. of pupils with statements of educational needs in the mainstream school	16	16	20	17
No. of newcomers	*	*	*	*
<i>Intake²:</i>				
% of Y8 pupils with L5 English	83.5	71.6	35.4	n/a ³
% of Y8 pupils with L5 mathematics	95.8	89.6	51.6	n/a
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in English	99.1	99.5	98.6	n/a
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in mathematics	99.5	99.5	99.1	n/a
<i>Source: data as held by the school.</i>				

* fewer than 5

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall Effectiveness	Satisfactory
Achievements and Standards	Inadequate
Provision	Satisfactory
Leadership and Management	Satisfactory

5. Quality of achievements and standards

- The pupils have the necessary skills and dispositions to support their learning. While the extensive range of extra-curricular activities helps them to develop their personal and social skills, there are too few opportunities in the classroom for them to develop their thinking and oral communication skills. Consequently, there is a need for the planning of teaching and learning to focus more specifically on the development of the pupils' skills and dispositions. When given the opportunity, the pupils are articulate, can participate in sustained discussions to develop their understanding, and can think flexibly and creatively.

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, end-of-year key stage 2 assessment data in 2014 was not made available.

- Given the high level of prior attainment of the pupils on entry to the school, the standards attained in public examinations are inadequate. Over the past three years, the percentage of pupils who attain 7 or more GCSE examinations at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, has declined from being in line with to being well below the NI average for selective schools in the same FSM category.
- The variation in the standards which the pupils attain in individual subjects at GCSE level at grades A* to B is too wide. Over the past three years, only one-third of subjects attained above the corresponding three-year Northern Ireland (NI) average at grades A* to B.
- Over the past three years, at GCE A level, the percentage of pupils achieving 3 or more grades at A* to C has fluctuated from being in line with, to well below, the average for similar selective schools. Approximately three-fifths of the subjects offered are above the three-year NI average at grades A* to C. However, in 2014, it is a concern that approximately 12% of pupils who completed the A2 course did not achieve three or more GCE examinations at grades A* to E.
- In English, the standards at GCSE and A level are satisfactory. Over the past three years, the outcomes in GCSE English language at grades A* to B are almost in line with the average for similar schools but in GCSE English literature, taken by all of the pupils, the outcomes are well below the average. Over the same period, attainment at A2 level in English literature, at grades A* to C is just above the NI average for similar schools.
- The pupils achieve very good standards in mathematics. A key strength is the progression in learning throughout key stage (KS) 3 and KS4 and the resulting achievement in GCSE mathematics which is well above the NI average for similar schools. Attainment at A2 level in mathematics, at A* to C, over the past three years is just above the NI average for similar schools. It is appropriate that the entry policy for GCSE has been reviewed in order to facilitate wider access to progression in mathematics.
- Over the past three years, over three-quarters of the pupils who require additional support with their learning attained 7 or more GCSE examinations including English and mathematics at grades A* to C. Due to a lack of rigour in the tracking of the progress in learning of those pupils who require additional support, the school is not able to evaluate robustly the standards achieved by them. It is important that the school develops the mechanisms to enable all relevant staff to evaluate if the standard of attainment is sufficient, given the nature of each pupil's educational need. In the same period, approximately three-quarters of the pupils entitled to free school meals achieve 5 or more GCSE examinations at grades A* to C including English and mathematics; this performance is well below the average for selective schools.
- For the academic year 2012/13, the proportion of year 12 pupils who progressed to year 13, and from year 13 into year 14, were well below the NI average. Approximately two-thirds of pupils who complete A2 study enter higher education; this figure is also well below the NI average.

6. Quality of provision

- Four-fifths of the lessons observed during the inspection were good or better. The very effective practice, in one-third of the lessons observed, was characterised by: very clear expectations for and of the learning; high levels of challenge; a brisk pace; and effective use of a variety of teaching strategies including paired, group and independent work to engage the pupils in their learning. Effective use of questioning by the teachers, and self and peer evaluation by the pupils, allows the teachers to assess well the extent of learning and to consolidate the pupils' knowledge and understanding.
- In the less effective practice, in one-fifth of the lessons observed: planning is insufficient to support successful learning and there is over direction by the teacher; low level tasks and closed questioning result in a lack of appropriate challenge and insufficient progress in learning; and marking for improvement is underdeveloped.
- There is too much variation in the quality of the planning, teaching, learning and assessment. Use of first-hand evidence is being developed in this academic year to support improvement in classroom practice. The teachers now need to focus more sharply on planning for progress in the pupils' learning through high quality teaching and assessment. It will be important to share more effectively the best practice which exists in the school to ensure consistently high quality learning experiences are provided for the pupils within and across departments.
- The provision for English is satisfactory. While there are examples of mature, thoughtful extended writing for different audiences and purposes across the year groups, the opportunities for independent writing are too limited and there is an over-reliance on the pupils completing comprehension-style exercises. The pupils' oral skills are not developed in a consistent manner. When given the opportunity to make extended oral responses and engage with their peers, the pupils respond confidently and articulately. This good practice needs to be disseminated across the school.
- The school has prioritised appropriately the need to develop literacy across the school in order to raise standards in talking, listening, reading and writing. An ICT-based reading programme, piloted recently with junior classes, is fostering effectively the pupils' wider experience and enjoyment of reading. The staff development programme has facilitated training for all teaching staff in, for example, the implementation of a common marking policy and initiatives to improve spelling and punctuation. This work, however, is at an early stage of development.
- The provision for mathematics is very good. The pupils are given purposeful and engaging activities at which they work with enthusiasm individually, in pairs and in small groups. The teachers provide clear explanations of key concepts, use formative assessment well and have high expectations for what the pupils can attempt and ultimately achieve.

- During the inspection, the teachers of other subjects approached the mathematical elements of the learning in their subject with confidence and competence and the examples observed augmented well the pupils' learning of mathematical concepts and skills. The school has initiated a fresh start to developing a cross-curriculum approach to numeracy and the inspection endorses the priorities identified by the numeracy team.
- The arrangements for the care, guidance and support of pupils are effective. Relationships are mutually respectful between the pupils and their teachers. Among the pupils there is a friendly, caring ethos. The older pupils appreciate the opportunity to develop their leadership skills and support the younger pupils in the role of school prefect, monitor and mentor. It is clear that communication with parents has not been sufficiently effective and work has begun to engage more meaningfully with them. The personal development programme lacks coherence and relevance and it is appropriate that the school has begun a review, commencing with the year 8 provision.
- The pupils enjoy an extensive range of high quality, extra-curricular activities which support well their personal and social development. A particular strength is the Scripture Union which is well-attended and is led effectively by the pupils. Also of note is the large number of opportunities for the pupils to participate in drama productions and musical events. The pupils spoke proudly of their representation of their school at local, national and international sporting, dramatic, musical and enterprise events.
- The pupils who require additional support with aspects of their learning work well alongside their peers and are integrated suitably into school life. They benefit from effective support by the learning support assistants who know the pupils well. The early identification, and the use of appropriate strategies to support these pupils, is being developed appropriately by the special educational needs co-ordinators. There is inconsistency in how well the individual education plans are being implemented in the classroom by teachers.
- A variety of guest speakers and external agencies inform the pupils' career decision-making, and work placement gives them experience of possible career routes. The subject departments provide specialist careers information and there is a strong focus on STEM-related careers. While the pupils have access to a range of up-to-date, written careers information in a well-resourced careers suite, it is inappropriate that they do not benefit from a coherent, structured programme of careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) or frequent, carefully planned guidance interviews at key transition points. As a result, the pupils' knowledge of career pathways open to them, including alternative routes and the associated examination grades, is insufficient.
- Across all key stages, the curriculum is broad and balanced⁴. It is appropriate that the school has recently reviewed and broadened the post-16 curriculum offer to take better account of the pupils' interests, abilities and career aspirations. Recent changes to the arrangements for subject choice at post-16 have increased the flexibility of the offer; the curriculum across all key stages, but particularly at key stage 4, needs greater flexibility to ensure it meets more fully the needs, interests, abilities and career aspirations of the pupils.

⁴ . At KS4 and post-16 the school is meeting the requirements of the Entitlement Framework.

7. Quality of leadership and management

- In the short period of time since the principal took up post, valuable work has been undertaken by the staff, pupils and governors in the creation of agreed aims and a shared vision for improvement. There is a clear recognition of the need for change and increased engagement of all staff to improve the quality of the provision and to raise the standards attained by the pupils. During this time, consultation with staff, pupils and parents has begun to assess the appropriateness of the priorities identified in the existing school development plan⁵ (SDP). The inspection findings endorse that the revisions to the priorities made to date within the SDP are appropriate.
- In the past two years, due to a number of unforeseen staffing changes at senior leadership level, substantial renegotiation of roles and responsibilities took place which resulted in senior leaders having to carry additional responsibilities. Senior leaders, therefore, undertook numerous new functions for which they had to develop the necessary expertise while in the role. This, ultimately, affected adversely the capacity of the senior leadership team to take forward the planned and necessary improvement work. There is evidence that the principal, along with the vice-principals and other key staff, are now addressing more effectively underachievement at subject, individual teacher and pupil level, providing timely, appropriate support and challenge.
- A renewed sense of vitality and collegiality and a culture of higher expectation at middle leadership and individual teacher level are being fostered by senior leadership. There is, at present, too much variability in the quality of middle leadership across the school. It will be important for senior leaders to develop the capacity of all middle leaders to evaluate more rigorously the quality of the pupils' learning experiences and outcomes in their respective areas of responsibility to ensure actions taken bring about the required improvement.
- Based on the evidence presented at the time of inspection, the Inspectorate evaluation is that there can be limited confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated. Whilst the governors are involved actively in the life and work of the school, their capacity to provide an effective challenge function and their role in self-evaluation are underdeveloped. At present, the role of governors in self-evaluation leading to improvement is also underdeveloped. In supporting the school's improvement work, the governors need to develop more open lines of communication with staff and parents to ensure decisions made are based on a sound evidence base and the outworking of key decisions are monitored and reviewed appropriately.
- On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the school has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding pupils, which reflect the Department of Education's guidance. In discussions with the pupils, they reported that they felt safe and know who to talk to if they have any concerns about their safety or wellbeing.

⁵ The school development plan meets the requirements of the School Development Planning Regulations (NI) 2010.

8. Conclusion

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided in this school is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in standards, provision and leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all of the pupils are to be met more effectively.

The main areas for improvement are to improve:

- the quality of planning, teaching and assessment in order to raise the overall standards attained by the pupils, particularly the levels of attainment in public examinations;
- the rigor and effectiveness of self-evaluation at all levels, including the role of the governors in self-evaluation leading to improvement, to ensure that actions taken bring about the required improvements; and
- the curriculum provision to ensure it meets more fully the needs, interests, abilities and career aspirations of the pupils.

The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement over an 18-24 month period.

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 Regent House Grammar 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 category⁶. 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 (10 pupils)	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	94.1	88.0	86.2
The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category	94.2	96.3	N/A
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics	93.2	87.6	83.8
The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category	92.6	92.8	N/A
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	99.5	94.5	94.3
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)	100	88.9	42.9

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

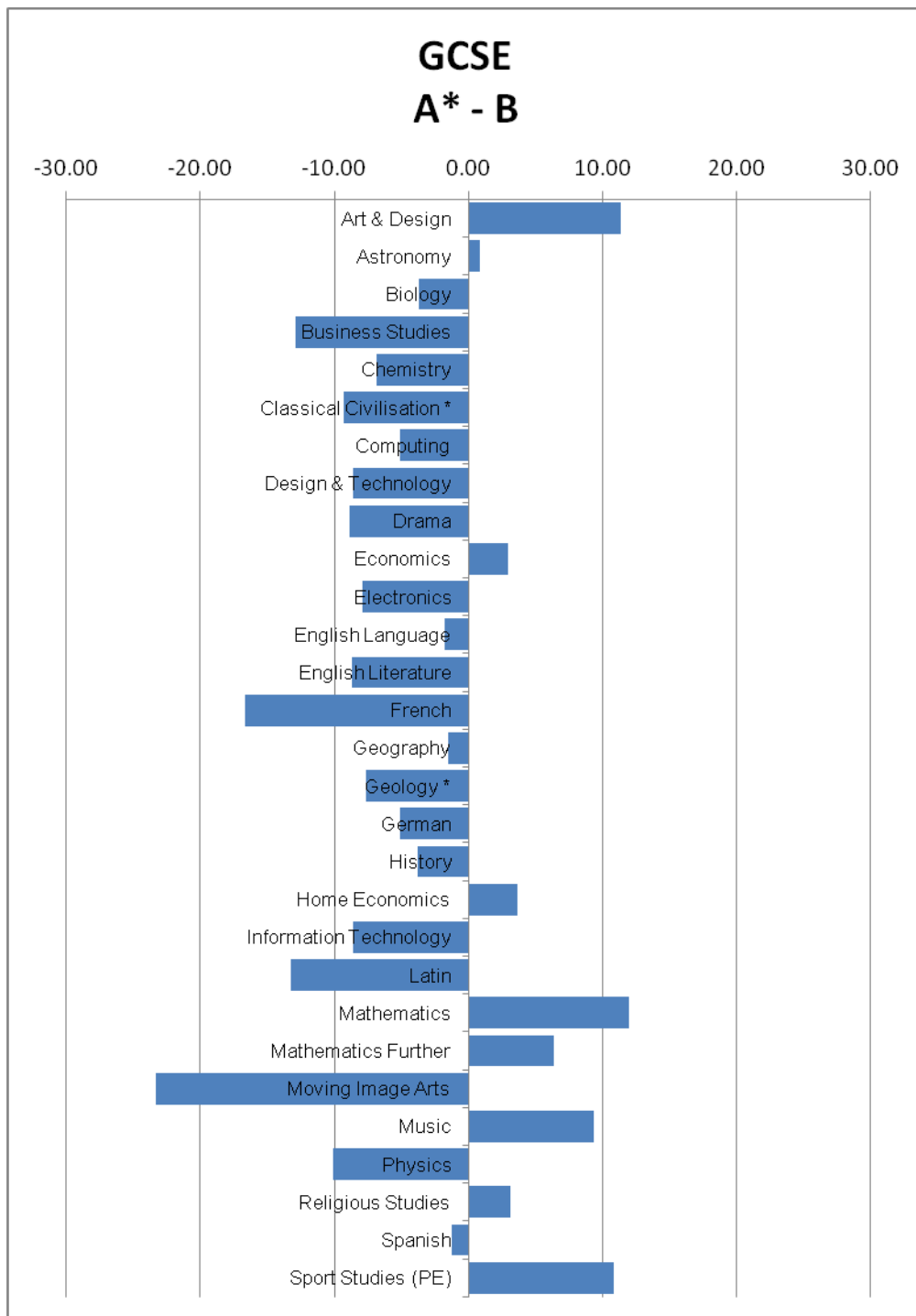
The table below shows achievements by the pupils in a GCSE examination for which NI benchmarking data for this examination is not available.

GCSE Subject	2012	2013	2014	Total entry over 3 years
	% A* to B	% A* to B	% A* to B	
GCSE Double Award Physical Education	100	100	-	30

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 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 at grades A* to 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

The table below shows the percentage of year 14 pupils in Regent House Grammar 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 category⁷.

GCE A Level or equivalent	2012	2013	2014
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels & Equivalents in at least 3 subjects	98	97	94
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	64	73	60
The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category	75.5	72.9	N/A

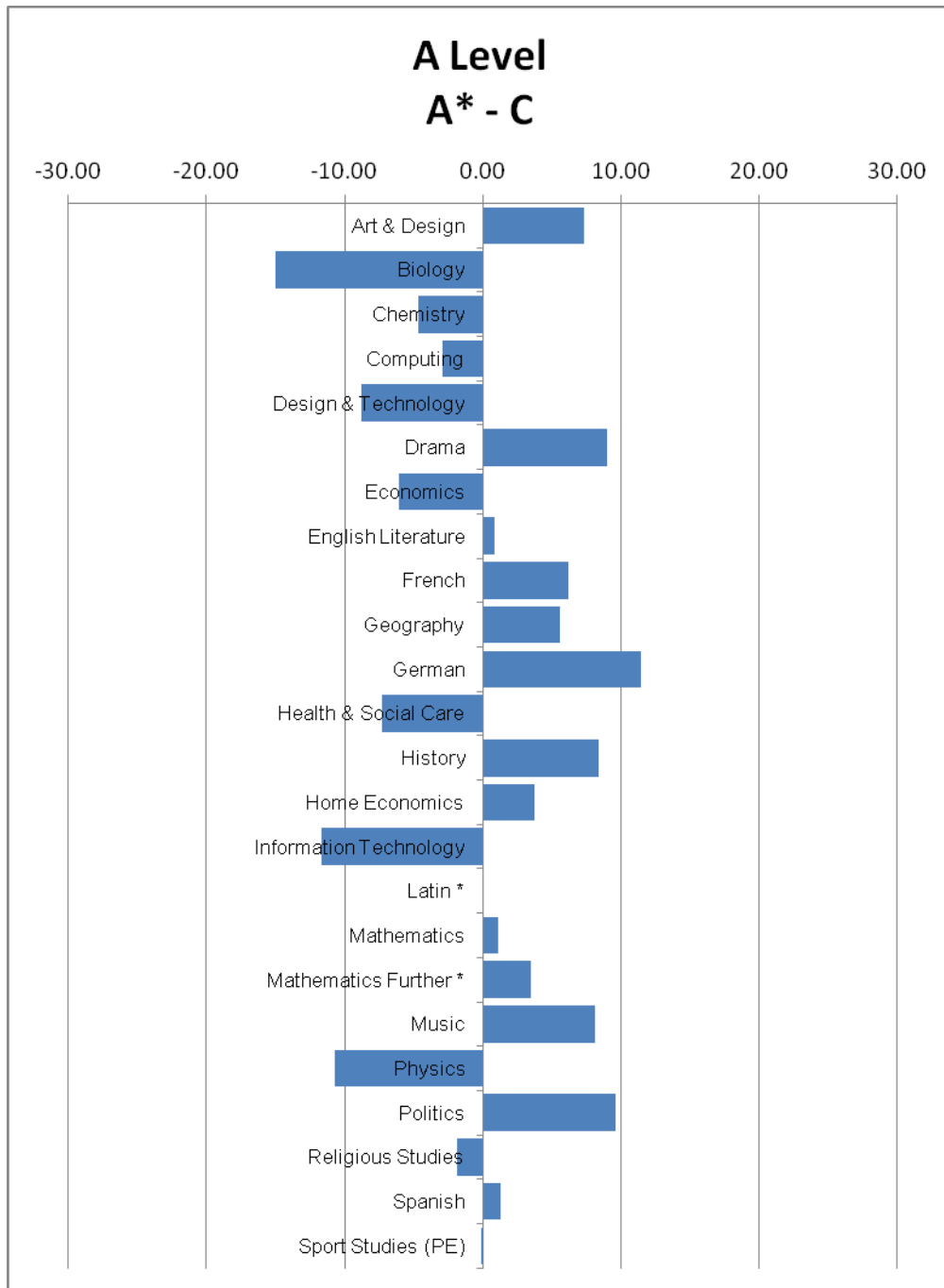
The table below show the percentage of year 14 pupils in Regent House Grammar School achieving grades A* to C in vocational/applied courses equivalent to GCE A level. No average is available from the examining boards for the subjects in this table to facilitate comparison.

GCE Subject	2012	2013	2014	Total entry over 3 years
	% A*-C	% A*-C	% A*-C	
Art and Design (vocational)	100	100	100	37

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 GCE A level subject at grades A* to 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.



*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 Regent House Grammar 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	81.5*
% Yr 13 staying on to Yr 14	94.3	87.7

* subject to an annual 5% reduction due to the size of the year 13 cohort being capped.

Leavers' destinations

Based on data held and verified by the school with ETI, the table below shows the percentage of pupils who leave Regent House 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.)	Level 4 % (No.)
Total Number of Leavers	252	9503			
Employment	4.8 (12)	3.4			
Further Education	25.4 (64)	21.2	3	49	11
Higher Education	66.7(168)	72.0	0	12	156
Work-based Learning (Training)	0.8 (2)	1.2			
Unemployed	1.2 (3)	1.2			
Unknown	1.2 (3)	1.1			

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