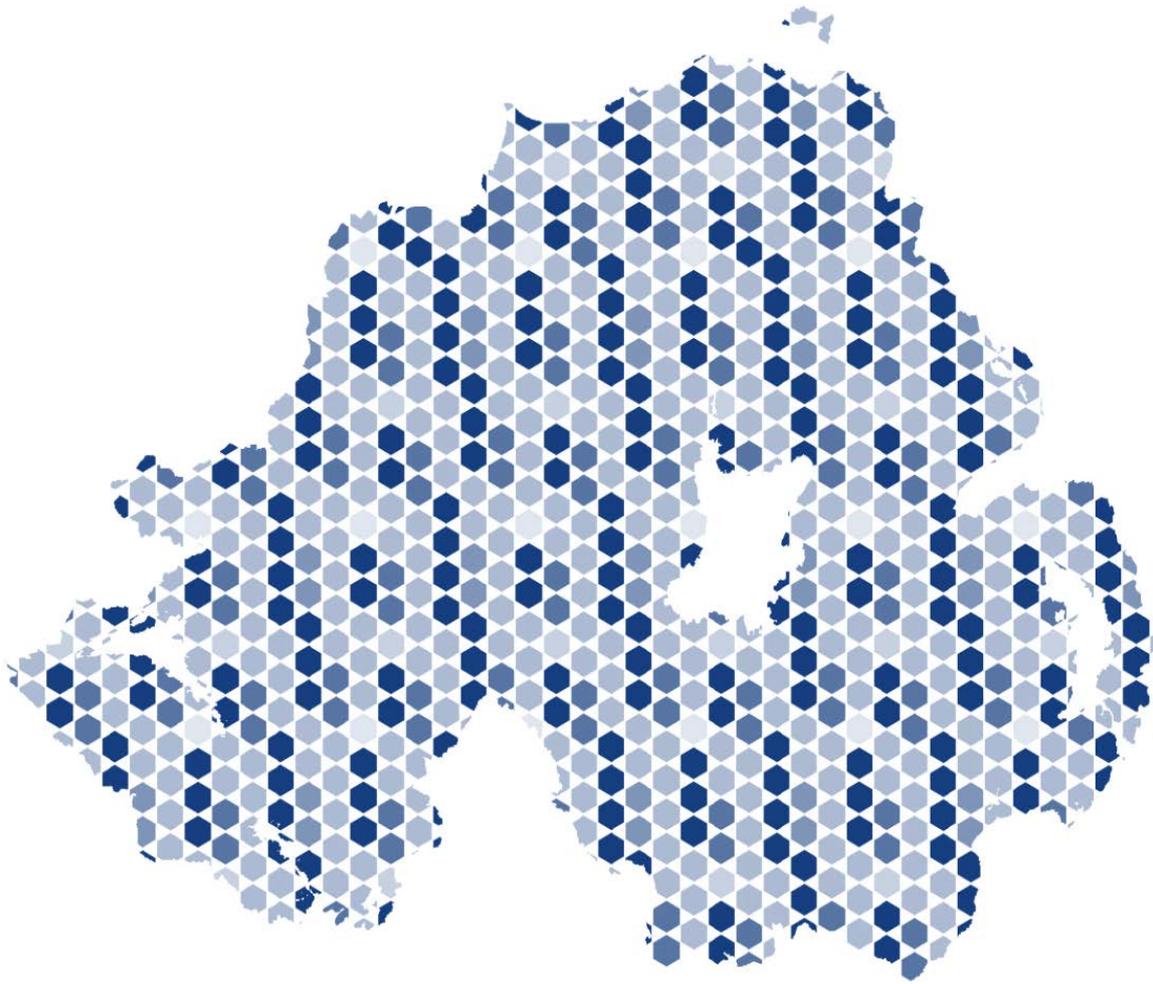


# POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

## St Catherine's College, Armagh

Roman Catholic maintained, 11-18, non-selective all-ability school,  
including a co-educational Irish Medium stream (An Sruth Gaeilge)

Report of an Inspection in  
November 2013



Providing Inspection Services for

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



## 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 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	990	27 <sup>1</sup>	*	18
Teachers	82	49	60	13
Support Staff	40	33	82	7

\* fewer than 5

## 2. Context

Enrolment has remained steady over the last four years; currently there are 1182 pupils enrolled, almost all of whom are girls. Seven percent of the enrolment is newcomer pupils. In 2002, the school opened An Sruth Gaeilge (an Irish Medium stream) the enrolment of which stands at 152, 64 of whom are boys. Approximately four-fifths of the pupils enter the school having achieved the expected levels of attainment in English and mathematics; this figure is comparable to the average level of attainment at key stage (KS) 2 in primary schools across Northern Ireland.

St Catherine's College, Armagh	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Year 8 Intake	182	178	176	185
Enrolment	1155	1167	1138	1182
% Attendance (NI Average)	93.8 (92.3)	93.8 (92.6)	93.0 -	n/a
FSME Percentage <sup>2</sup>	19.6	20.0	19.9	22.8

<sup>1</sup> The Education and Training Inspectorate 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 pupils on the SEN register	10.22 (118)	10.45 (122)	12.30 (140)	15.14 (179)
No. of pupils with statements of educational needs in the mainstream school	39	36	30	35
No. of newcomers	52	70	77	83
<i>Intake:</i>				
% of Y8 pupils with L5 English	22.10	26.97	24.57	8.65
% of Y8 pupils with L5 mathematics	25.41	26.97	33.14	10.27
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in English	78.45	88.21	81.14	82.70
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in mathematics	76.24	84.84	83.43	83.78
<i>Source: data as held by the school.</i>				

### 3. Focus of the 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>Outstanding</b>
<b>Achievements and Standards</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
<b>Provision</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
<b>Leadership and Management</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>

### 5. Achievements and standards

The school fosters an atmosphere of openness, enquiry and intellectual challenge to support pupils' development as knowledgeable and reflective individuals. The pupils possess excellent inter-personal and communication skills and have very positive attitudes and dispositions to their learning, which underpin good self-esteem and appropriately high aspirations for success. In addition, pupils are encouraged to 'have-a-go' and are taught how initial mistakes can be used as valuable learning opportunities to promote resilience and perseverance.

The educational tradition and ethos of the Society of the Sacred Heart is alive in promoting pupil action to redress social injustice, allowing pupils extensive opportunities to support the less privileged locally and globally and thereby allowing pupils to apply a wide range of problem-solving skills in real life contexts.

By the end of KS 3, KS 4 and post-16, the pupils attain excellent standards. Over the past three years, almost all of the pupils attain at least five or more GCSE subjects at grades A\* to C; this performance is well above the average for similar schools and is comparable with the NI average for selective schools. The percentage of pupils attaining five or more GCSE examinations at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics, is also significantly above the NI average for similar schools. The standards in almost all of the GCSE subjects are more than ten percentage points above the three-year NI average. At post-16, approximately three-quarters of the pupils achieve three or more GCE A levels at grades A\* to C; this performance is significantly above the average for similar schools and is comparable with the average for selective schools. Attainment in vocational subjects is also a significant strength. The standards attained by the pupils who are entitled to free school meals has fluctuated over the past three years, with, on average, one-half of the pupils attaining five or more GCSEs at grades A\* to C including English and mathematics; the school continues to work on providing support for these pupils.

Within An Sruth Gaeilge, the pupils benefit from the very positive learning environment, the high profile of literacy (in both English and Gaelge) and the high expectations of all of the teachers who help support the excellent attainment of these pupils which is broadly in line with that of the whole school. In 2013, all pupils in An Sruth Gaeilge achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A\* to C.

## **6. Provision**

Within the main school and An Sruth Gaeilge, the pupils benefit from the teachers' excellent planning which builds skilfully on the pupils' prior learning. Almost all of the teachers use pastoral and performance data adeptly to inform classroom practice. Consequently, the quality of almost all of the lessons observed was of a consistently high standard, with over one-half of the lessons evaluated as very good or outstanding. This highly effective practice is characterised by vibrant and inspirational teaching leading to engaged and sustained learning. There were many opportunities for the pupils to consolidate and extend their understanding through effective questioning and a key strength was the very good development of pupils' literacy skills, oracy in particular, across the curriculum. The support provided by the teachers for newcomer pupils is excellent.

Across the school, pupils are also given regular opportunities to reflect on their learning and teachers monitor their progress closely. In addition, there is excellent use of ICT to enhance learning and teaching. In An Sruth Gaeilge, the promotion of additive bilingualism, where Irish adds to rather than replaces English, has very positive effects on the standards of literacy.

Pupils benefit from the tightly fused integration of pastoral care and academic aspiration, with staff working relentlessly to meet well the needs of all of the pupils so that they can attain the highest standards academically, spiritually, socially and emotionally. The school, through both its excellent provision for the pupils who have special educational needs and the highly supportive pastoral provision, demonstrates a strong commitment to the inclusion and welfare of all of its pupils. The school identifies accurately, through appropriate testing and consultation, the needs of individual pupils and puts appropriate strategies in place to help support the pupil in overcoming his/her specific difficulty. There is a strong sense of community, with excellent working relationships between the pupils and all members of staff.

The pupils are given excellent leadership opportunities and they demonstrate high levels of maturity in taking responsibility for their learning which enables them to manage, reflect on and improve their work.

The pupils reported that they feel safe and secure in the school and know what to do if they have any concerns regarding their work, safety or well-being. Key strengths of the arrangements for safeguarding include the well-communicated child protection reporting arrangements and the very good quality of the whole school focus on e-safety.

Pupils benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum across the school, enhanced by an appropriate range of applied and vocational subjects which meets the needs of the Entitlement Framework. The curriculum is well-planned and adjusted annually to match pupils' abilities, interests and aspirations. The school curriculum is enhanced well through collaboration within the Armagh Learning Community. The school's policy and practice on entering pupils for public examinations with regard to number, level and type of examinations being taken is tailored closely to the needs, ability and aspirations of each pupil and is informed by thorough analysis of data.

In careers education, information, advice and guidance pupils are empowered to make appropriate and informed choices and have access to appropriate pathways for the transition to life after school. By the end of year 14, most of the pupils have an excellent understanding of the world of work and of the education and employment opportunities that are available to them.

## **7. Leadership and management**

The school development plan<sup>3</sup> is underpinned by extensive consultation, thorough analysis of performance data and robust self-evaluation of the provision to identify appropriate priorities for development. The leadership promotes well effective and innovative strategies to raise standards and to improve the overall quality of the learning experiences for all of the pupils.

The strategic leadership at all levels is outstanding; it is visionary, collegial and characterised by a relentless drive and motivation to keep improving the provision in the interests of the pupils. Through clear, empathetic and distributive leadership, the highly effective senior leaders support well the building of the capacity of all of the middle managers, teachers and learning support assistants to meet the needs of the pupils. They monitor and evaluate the provision rigorously, using the outcomes to improve the provision for the pupils further and plan suitable staff development opportunities. With exceptional professional knowledge, a clear and coherent vision for improvement, and high expectations of and aspirations for her staff and pupils, the principal provides outstanding leadership. She inspires confidence, leads innovation and fosters a culture of reflective learning and respect across the school. Middle managers have many opportunities to share with other colleagues aspects of their effective practice, and their work is instrumental to the high achievement of pupils and the wider successes of the school.

The governors are very well informed of, and provide appropriate support and challenge in, all aspects of the life and work of the school. The parents, staff and school community can therefore have a high degree of confidence in the effectiveness of both leadership and governance.

On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection the school has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children and young people. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education.

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<sup>3</sup> The SDP does not meet fully the requirements of the School Development Planning Regulations (NI) 2010 due to minor omissions which are being addressed by the school.

## **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.

## 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 ETI, the table below compares the percentage of year 12 pupils in this school achieving 5 or more GCSEs (A\* to C and A\* to E) and equivalent subjects, and the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals with the NI average for non-selective schools in the same free school meals category<sup>4</sup>.

<b><i>GCSE and GCSE equivalent subjects - *following permitted exclusions</i></b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
*Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE & Equivalents in at least 5 subjects	100	100	100
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	96	97	95.4
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category<sup>5</sup></i>	<i>69</i>	<i>58</i>	<i>-</i>
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics	72	77	72.2
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>-</i>
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 5 subjects	94.4	100	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)	29.4	63	49

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

<sup>5</sup> See benchmarking data and guidance contained in the DE Circular 2011/03: 'School Development Planning and Target-Setting'.

### Other examination results at key stage 4 from 2010-11 to 2012-13

Based on data held and verified by the school with ETI, the tables below show the percentage of year 12 pupils in this school achieving grades A\* to C and A\* to E in vocational and/or applied courses equivalent to GCSE level. No average is available from the examining board(s) for the subjects in these tables to facilitate comparison due to the small size of the cohort.

GCSE Subject	2011		2012		2013		Total entry over 3 years
	% A*-C	% A*-E	% A*-C	% A*-E	% A*-C	% A*-E	
Occupational Studies	72.7	100	83.3	100	92.3	100	39
Media: Communication and Production	100	100	100	100	100	100	29

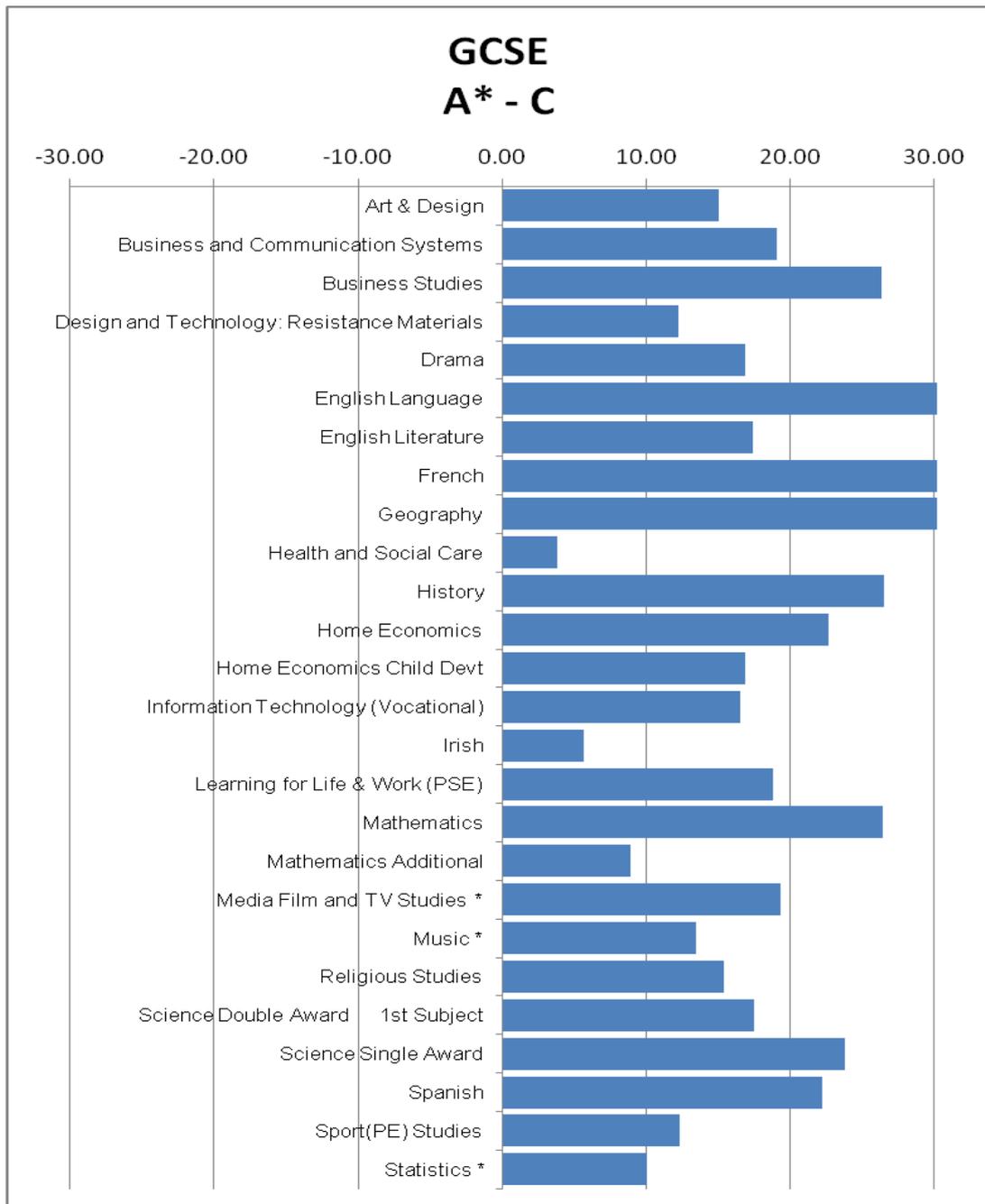
### Other courses taken in at least two of the last three years

Level 2	2011	2012	2013	Total entry over 3 years
	% pass	% pass	% pass	
COPE	100	100	100	121

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

Based on data held and verified by the school with ETI, the average over three years of the percentage of pupils achieving at GCSE level at grades A\* to C in individual subjects in this school is compared with the three-year NI average.

The comparison is shown below as the difference between these two values; a positive value (to the right) shows that the average individual subject performance is above the NI average. The number of entries to each subject will vary considerably and therefore 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 2010-11 to 2012-13

Based on data held and verified by the school with 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 non-selective schools in the same free school meals category<sup>6</sup>.

<b>GCE A Level or equivalent</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels & Equivalents in at least 3 subjects	95.5	97.6	92.6
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	75	77	79
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 2 A2 levels	100	100	100

## Other examination results: post-16

Based on data held and verified by the school with ETI, the table below shows the percentage of year 14 pupils in this school achieving grades A\* to C and A\* to E in vocational and/or applied courses equivalent to GCE A level. No average is available from the examining boards for the subjects in this table to facilitate comparison due to the small size of the cohort.

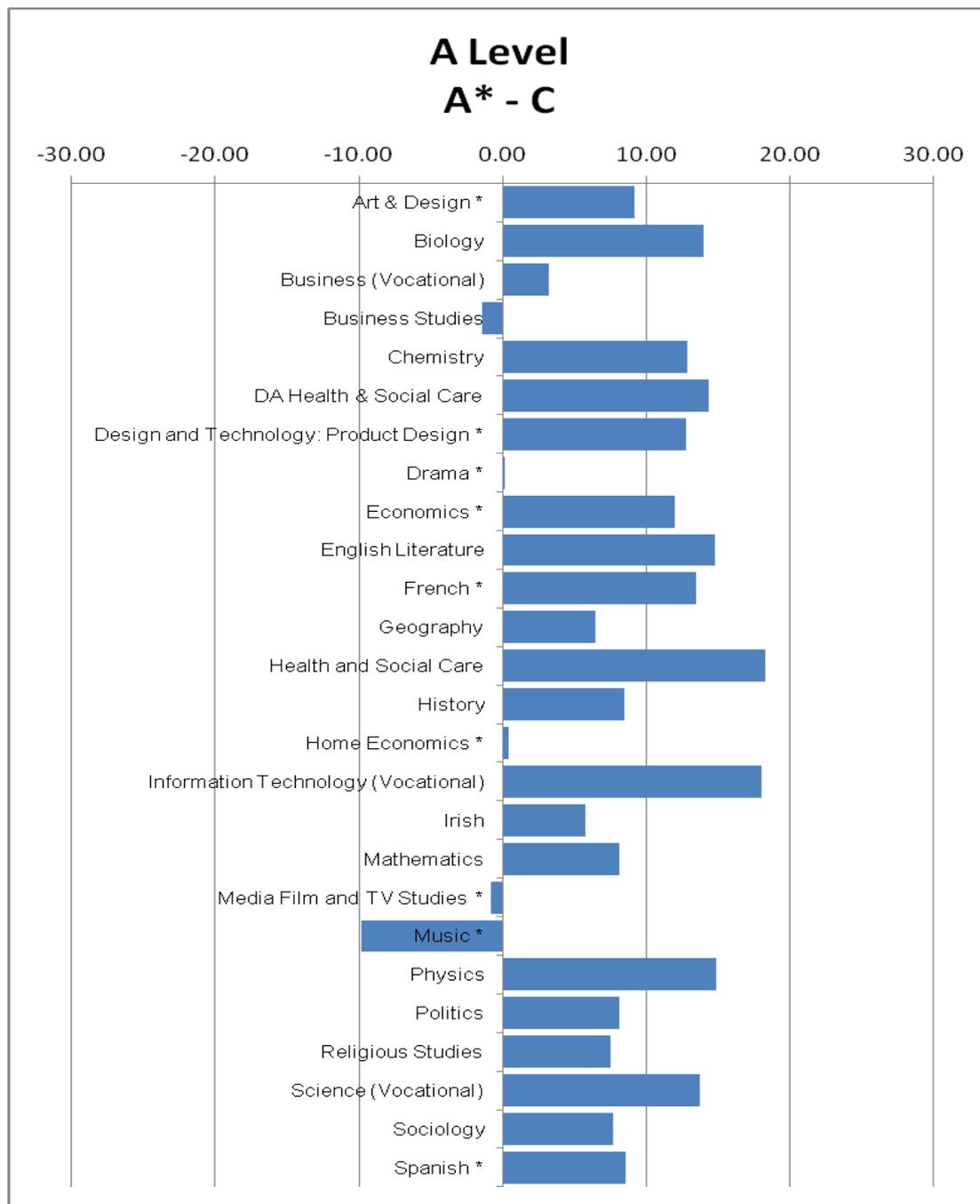
<b>GCE Subject</b>	2011		2012		2013		Total entry over 3 years
	% A*-C	% A*-E	% A*-C	% A*-E	% A*-C	% A*-E	
Moving Image Art	100	100	100	100	100	100	12

<sup>6</sup> 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

Based on data held and verified by the school with ETI, the average over three years of the percentage of pupils achieving at GCE level at grades A\* to C in individual subjects in this school is compared with the three-year NI average.

The comparison is shown below as the difference between these two values; a positive value (to the right) shows that the average individual subject performance is above the NI average. The number of entries to each subject will vary considerably and therefore comparisons between subjects should be treated with caution.



\*indicates fewer than 30 entries over 3 years

### **STAYING ON RATE** (Percentage staying on from year 12 to 13 and from year 13 to 14)

Based on data held and verified by the school with 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 all schools and for the most recent year for which data is available.

	<b>NI Average</b>	<b>School</b>
% Yr 12 staying on to Yr 13	52.3	83.4
% Yr 13 staying on to Yr 14	79.9	85.7

### **LEAVERS' DESTINATIONS**

Based on data held and verified by the school with ETI, the table below shows the percentage of all of the pupils who leave this school to enter further education, higher education or employment, or are seeking employment compared with the average for non-selective schools.

	2011/12 NI %	2011/12 School %	2011/12 School Nos.
Total number of leavers			181
Employment	7.9	*	*
Further Education	46.0	30.9	56
Higher Education	20.1	62.4	113
Training	18.2	*	*
Unemployed	4.4	*	*
Unknown	3.4	2.8	5

\* fewer than 5

**Accommodation**

- The accommodation for the provision of physical education is inadequate: it is not, however, impacting adversely on the pupils' learning experiences due to prudent planning by staff.

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