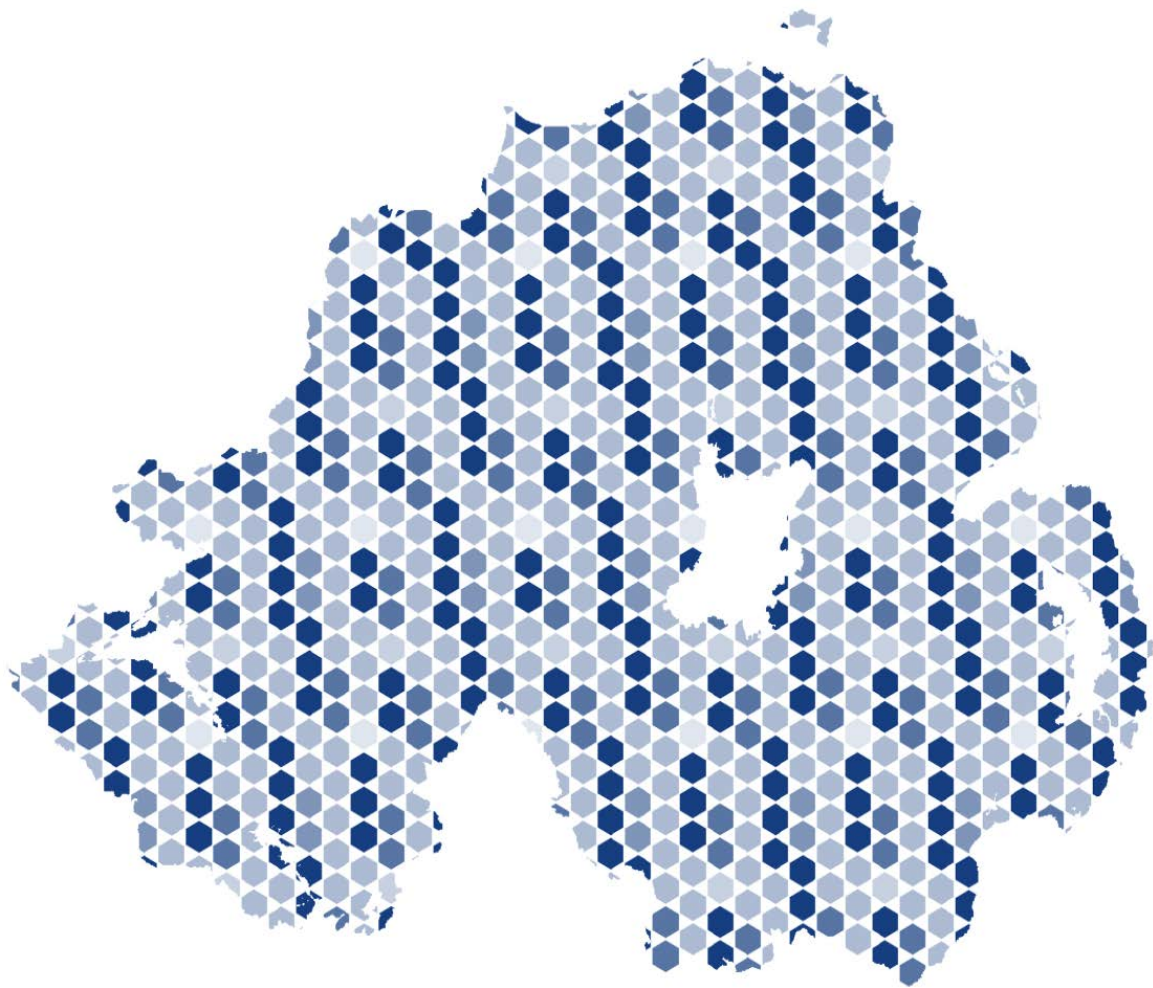


POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

St Mary's Grammar School,
Magherafelt

Co-educational, voluntary grammar school

Report of an Inspection in
February 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.

Almost 9% of parents (71), sixty-four percent of the teaching staff (41), and a number (25) of the support staff responded to the questionnaires.

All of the staff who responded commented positively on: the inclusive, welcoming and pastoral ethos in the school; the good opportunities to be involved in self-evaluation and development planning; and the appropriate opportunities for staff development. The parents who responded were positive about the school being well thought of in the community; their children enjoying learning at the school; and the helpful and regular information they receive about their children's progress. A small number of issues about communication, curriculum and aspects of leadership and management raised in the questionnaires were discussed with the principal and governors and, where appropriate, reference is made in 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
- inform the school's planning for improvement.

3. Context of the school

St Mary's Grammar School is situated on the north side of Magherafelt and draws its pupils from a wide area which includes the town and surrounding rural region. Over the last three years, the enrolment has remained steady and the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals has increased to 9%. The school has identified a very small proportion of the pupils as having special educational needs.

The school has continued success in gaining a wide range of national and international awards and accreditations; it was designated a Specialist School in science and sports.

The school is actively involved in a number of shared education and extra-curricular initiatives which benefit the young people not only in academic but cultural and sporting contexts giving them the opportunity to develop leadership skills, to gain prestigious awards in national public speaking and writing competitions and to enrich their pathways into continued education and employment.

St Mary's Grammar School	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Year 8 Intake	161	157	159	154
Enrolment	1078	1086	1097	1079
% Attendance (NI Average)	96.6 (93.0)	95.6 (92.9)	95.6 (93.5)	N/A (n/a)
FSME Percentage ¹	6.49	6.45	5.38	8.9
% and (Number) of pupils on SEN register	2.04 (22)	2.12 (23)	2.19 (24)	3.06 (33)
No. of pupils with statements of educational needs in the mainstream school	*	5	*	6
<i>Intake²:</i>				
% of Y8 pupils with L5 English	85.09	75.80	46.54	NR ³
% of Y8 pupils with L5 mathematics	92.55	84.08	56.60	NR
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in English	100	99.36	100	NR
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in mathematics	100	100	99.37	NR
<i>Source: data as held by the school.</i>				

*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

- The pupils are mature, courteous, well-motivated and articulate young people with high expectations. Their behaviour was exemplary during the inspection. They are encouraged, through highly effective teaching, to respond to challenging questions by developing and expressing their opinions with accuracy and confidence and asking challenging questions in return. The pupils collaborate enthusiastically with their peers, in purposeful paired or group activities, and contribute their ideas and thinking willingly. They are secure in their learning and have a confident understanding of what they need to do in order to achieve.

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 NR: Due to industrial action data from key stage 2 assessment was not made available.

- Throughout their time in school the pupils develop high quality skills in researching, interpreting and managing information and apply their knowledge and skills well in creative and problem-solving contexts. There is strong evidence that the school's goal that young people develop a range of 21st century core skills and capabilities is being successfully achieved.
- The pupils benefit from excellent opportunities to become involved in important decisions on aspects of school life that directly affect them, including for example, carrying out a pupil-led evaluation of teaching and learning.
- At GCSE level, the percentage of pupils attaining 7 or more grades at A* to C, and in 7 or more grades A* to C when GCSE English and mathematics is included, is significantly above the NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category. The performance of most of the individual subjects at grades A* to B is more the five percentage points above the corresponding Northern Ireland (NI) three year average for selective schools. A particular strength is the attainment of over one-half of subjects being more than ten percentage points above average.
- At GCE A2 level, the percentage of pupils attaining 3 or more subjects at grades A* to C is significantly above the average for similar schools. Almost all of the subjects are more than five percentage points above the corresponding NI three year averages for selective schools. The pupils also attain high standards in the small number of vocational/applied subjects at GCE A2 level. Almost all pupils progress to higher education.
- All of the pupils with special educational needs achieve high standards in GCSE and A level qualifications.
- There are a small number of pupils entitled to free school meals and in the last two years all achieved in line with their peers.

6. Quality of provision

- In almost all of the lessons observed during the inspection, planning, teaching and assessment were effective (good and better) at promoting learning.
- In the more effective practice, evident in almost two-thirds of lessons seen, the teaching incorporates appropriate levels of pace and challenge, and explicit links to literacy, numeracy, careers and ICT to motivate and engage the pupils in their learning. The teachers have excellent subject knowledge and a very good understanding and expertise in a range of effective teaching strategies which they use consistently and creatively to ensure that all of the pupils achieve to their full potential. Classroom practice is enhanced further by an emerging innovative use of ICT to enable pupils to research and manage information, organise their thinking and to express their views in a variety of ways.
- Assessment, in a good range of forms, including effective marking for improvement, is used well to support learning and to inform future planning. Pupils are given regular opportunities to reflect on their learning and teachers monitor their progress very closely and intervene, where appropriate.

- In English, all of the teaching is extremely well-managed and, at times, inspirational. The pupils read, write and talk with increasing assuredness and accuracy. The teaching, in subjects other than English, supports well the pupils' literacy development and there is strong evidence of the positive out-workings of school literacy audits and actions to promote improvement, which give literacy a highly visible presence in all classrooms.
- In the most effective mathematics lessons, the pupils have a high level of challenge, integrated with appropriate personalised support and are precise and thorough in their work. There is a coherent, well-targeted whole school approach to the promotion of numeracy from which the pupils benefit. They understand key mathematical concepts, use specific mathematical language and, notably, apply mental mathematics strategies confidently across the whole curriculum. Their achievements are celebrated with numeracy displays throughout the school.
- The school keeps its curriculum appropriately under review, with the clear goal to provide a curriculum passport which is always contemporary, outward looking, meeting the interests and abilities of all of the pupils and strategically informed by labour market forces.
- The curriculum at all key stages is broad, balanced and provides pupils with clear progression opportunities. Whilst at key stage 4, the pupils would benefit further from greater flexibility in the curriculum, the breadth and flexibility of the post-16 curriculum is a particular strength of the provision. The school's active participation in, and valuable contribution to, the Magherafelt Learning Partnership has supported whole school improvement work and has widened the formal and non-formal learning opportunities available to the pupils.
- The pastoral care is highly effective and is led well at all levels. The programme is reflective of the needs of the pupils, and flexibly takes account of contemporary issues; it is interwoven well with the pupils' academic progress, and their personal, social emotional, spiritual and moral development. Staff know the pupils very well and are committed to their wellbeing; there are appropriate and well-established links with external agencies to support the pupils and to help them overcome barriers to their learning. The school has identified appropriately that it needs to continue to build further partnerships with parents to support the pupils' needs.
- Outside the classroom, the pupils benefit from many opportunities, through the student leadership team, the student council and the recently-introduced house system to learn to take the initiative and develop leadership skills. The promotion of the core values of respect, integrity, compassion and responsibility are underpinned by the ethos of the original founders of the school, the Sisters of the Holy Family of Bordeaux.
- There is a clear focus on meeting the individual needs of every pupil, within a very supportive and inclusive ethos. There are effective monitoring arrangements and target-setting processes to identify any pupils that are experiencing barriers to learning. And, for those pupils who at certain times need additional support, there are effective interventions and support arrangements to address their educational, emotional and attitudinal needs through well-planned and targeted learning programmes, peer mentoring, behavioral support and counseling, as appropriate.

- The programme of careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) is well-planned and highly effective at meeting the needs, potentials and interests of the pupils, individually as well as collectively. The pupils demonstrate excellent knowledge and understanding of the career pathways open to them. The programme is integrated well across the curriculum, with all teachers taking ownership of, and responsibility for, the provision of effective, impartial CEIAG.
- Pupils and parents have access to comprehensive, up-to-date information and guidance which informs them of the wide range of educational and employment opportunities available. Pupils in year 13 have the opportunity to participate in work experience which enhances their understanding of the world of work. Peer support and mentoring is used well to guide the pupils in formulating and attainment of their individual educational and career goals.

7. Quality of leadership and management

- The leadership and management at all levels is outstanding, and is underpinned by a focus on the school's well formulated key priorities and strategic goals.
- There is a highly-evolved school development planning⁴ and improvement process which sets a very clear, appropriate and ambitious agenda for continuing enhancement and improvement of provision, in the best interests of the learners.
- The school improvement plan is informed by extensive consultation with parents, pupils, staff and the school governors and managed through a sophisticated methodology of effective teacher peer-mentoring and evaluation of progress.
- The well-planned and effective staff development, which is linked to the school improvement plan, is focused on developing leadership skills and the dissemination of innovative practice at all levels.
- The plan to implement blended approaches to teaching is bringing worthwhile improvements to learning for those pupils who are using online resources and facilities, including the use of digital tablets, and is enabling teacher 'champions' to try out and disseminate innovative methods and resources. The school provides extensive training and guidance on e-safety for pupils and parents.
- The governors have a wide set of skills which enables them to carry out their roles effectively; they are highly committed and provide high levels of both challenge and support to the work of the leaders and teachers in the school. They are: very well informed about the high standards the pupils attain; actively involved in development planning leading to improvements; and have a clear understanding of the strengths and weakness of the school at all levels. 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.

⁴ The SDP conforms to the Department of Education's School Development Planning Regulations (2010).

- 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 this school is outstanding. The school is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the learners; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

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 St Mary's 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 category⁵. 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 (no 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	98.1	99.39	98.04
The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category	93.7	96.4	N/A
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics	98.1	99.39	98.04
The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category	91.3	92.8	N/A
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	100	100	100
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	100

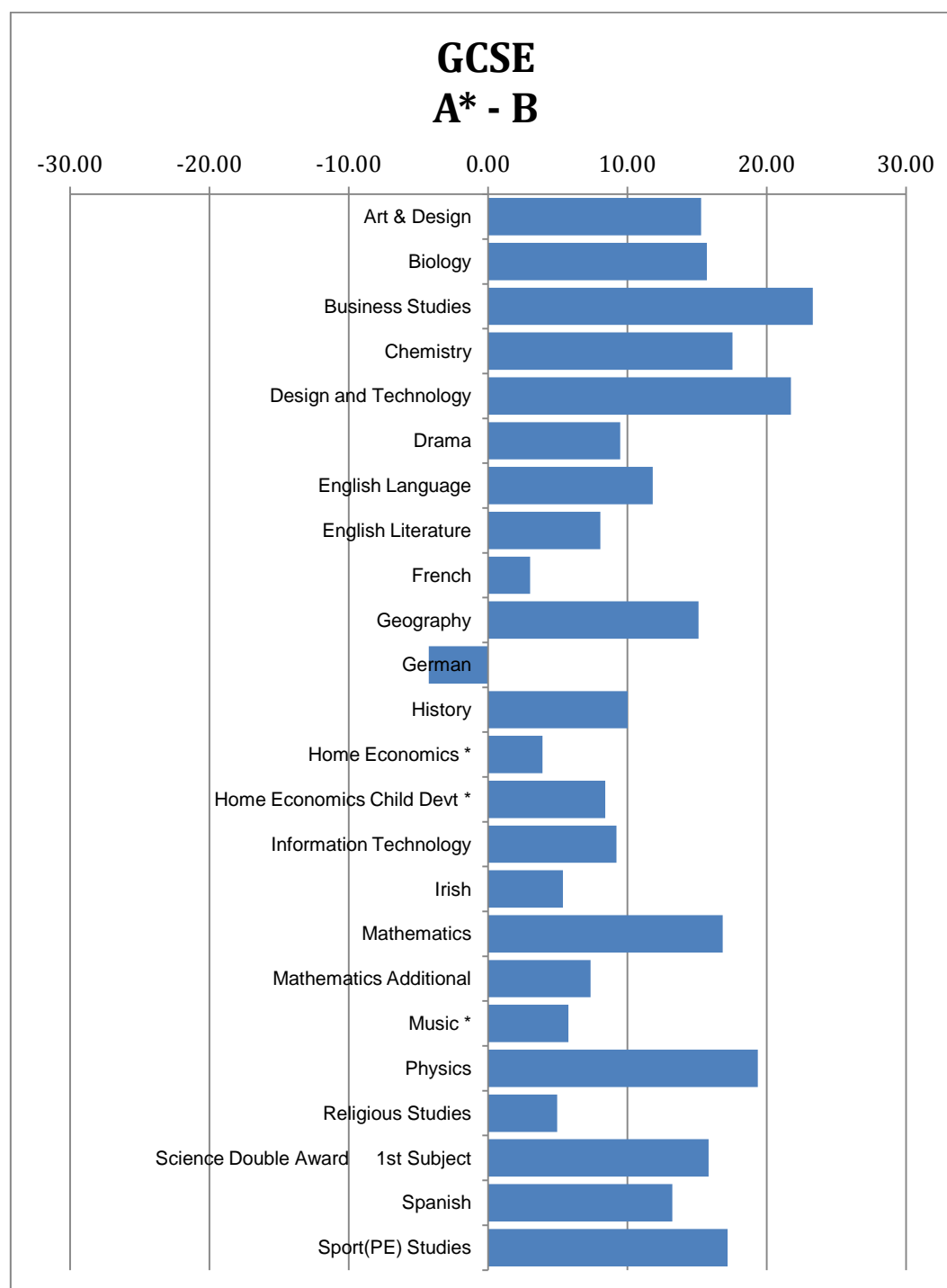
OTHER EXAMINATION RESULTS: KEY STAGE 4

GCSE Subject	2012	2013	2014	Total entry over 3 years
	% A*-B	% A*-B	% A*-B	
Performing Arts	-	-	100	13

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

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 St Mary's 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 category⁶.

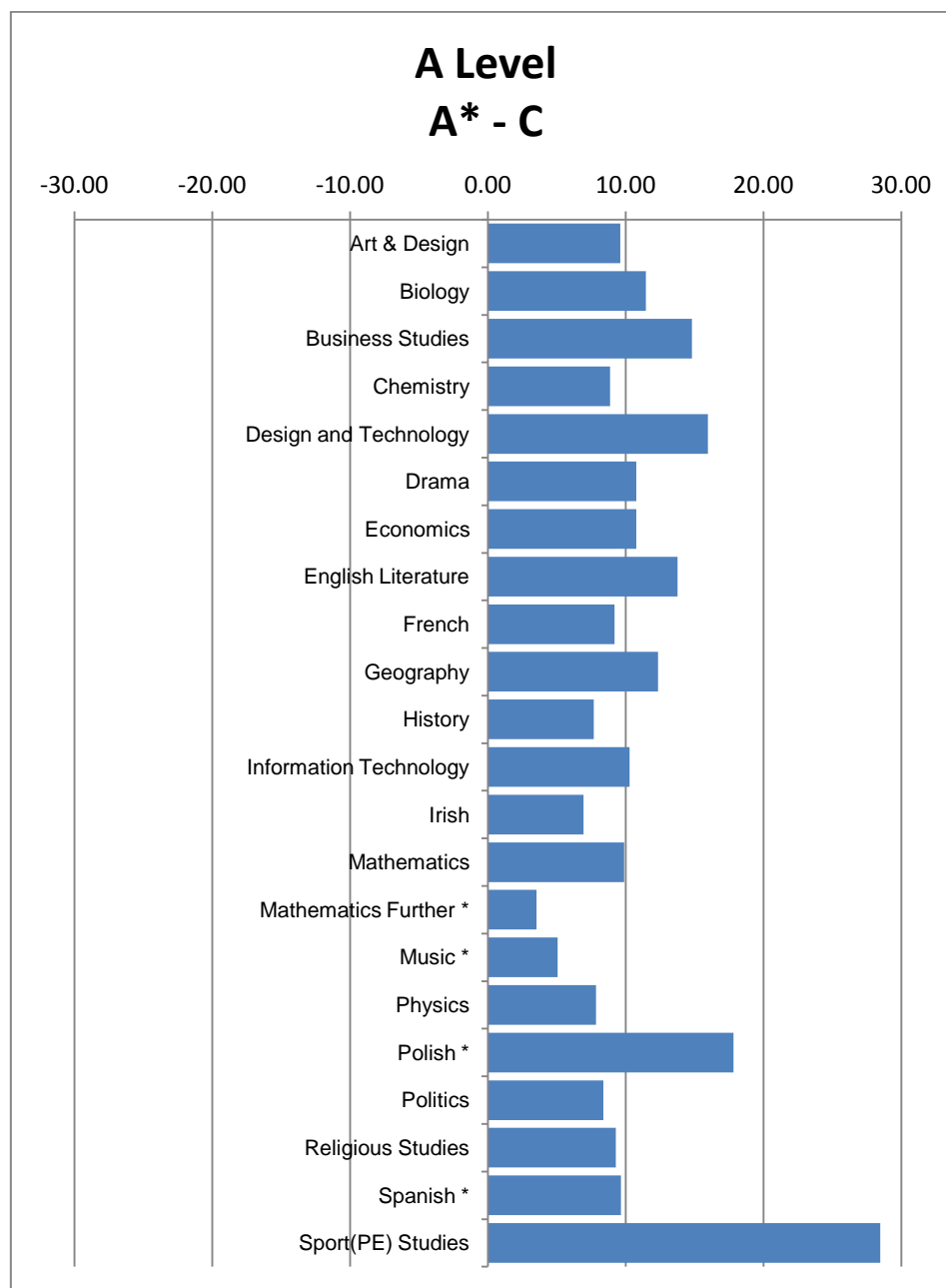
GCE A Level or equivalent	2012	2013	2014
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels & Equivalents in at least 3 subjects	98.56	100	98.7
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	87.59	88.81	87.41
The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category	75.2	72.9	N/A

The table below show the percentage of year 14 pupils in St Mary's 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.

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

OTHER EXAMINATION RESULTS: POST-16

Other [level 3] courses taken in at least two of the last three years.

GCE Subject	2012	2013	2014	Total entry over 3 years
	% A*-C	% A*-C	% A*-C	
Moving Image Arts	100	100	75	11
Health and Social Care	90.91	100	100	52
Vocational Business Studies	-	-	100	7

Staying on rate

Based on data verified by the school with ETI, the table below shows that the percentage of the pupils who stay on at St Mary's 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	97.6
% Yr 13 staying on to Yr 14	94.3	98.7

Leavers' destinations

Based on data held and verified by the school with ETI, the table below shows the percentage of pupils who leave St Mary's Grammar 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	Level 3	Level 3+
Total Number of Leavers	145	9503			
Employment	0%	3.4%			
Further Education	*	21.2%		*	0
Higher Education	95.2% (138)	72.0%			138
Training	*	1.2%			
Unemployed	*	1.2%			
Unknown	*	1.1%			

* = fewer than 5

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