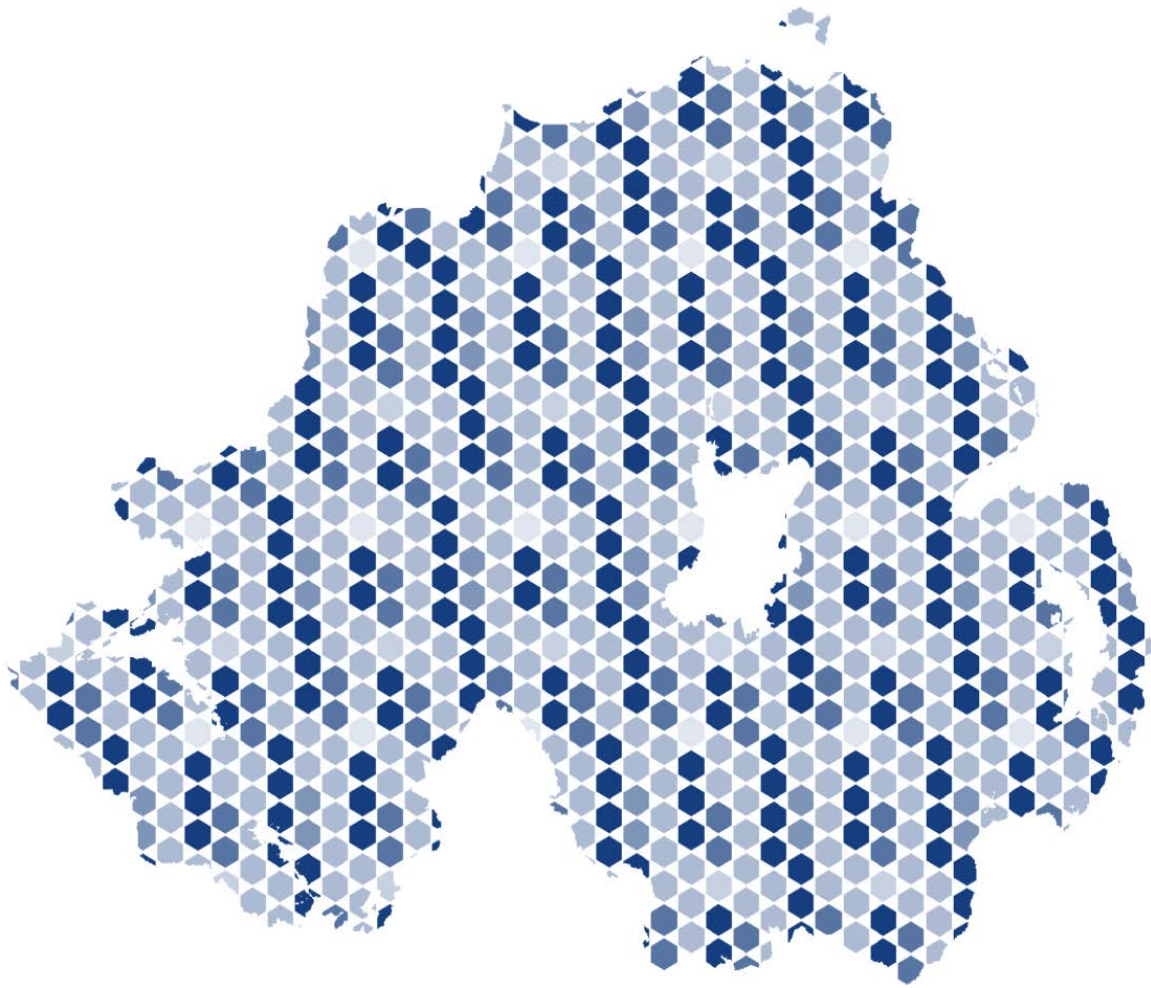


POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

The Royal School Armagh

11-18, co-educational, voluntary, selective school

Report of an Inspection in
April 2014



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

Contents

Section	Page
1. Inspection method and evidence base	1
2. Context	1
3. Focus of inspection	2
4. Overall finding	2
5. Achievements and standards	2
6. Provision	3
7. Leadership and management	5
8. Conclusion	5
Appendix	

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 [#]	550	84 ¹	15 [#]	43
Teachers	45	30	67	*
Support Staff	61	14	23	*

* fewer than 5

available to all families; return as percentage of families

2. Context

The Royal School Armagh is a long-established co-educational voluntary grammar school with boarding provision. Approximately 90% of the enrolment is selected using academic performance as the main entry criterion; almost all of the pupils enter the school having achieved the expected level in English and in mathematics and the school is regularly over-subscribed. The sixth form provision caters currently for 204 pupils.

The Royal School, Armagh	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Year 8 Intake	102	101	103	101
Enrolment	682	707	706	703
% Attendance (NI Average)	94 (92.6)	94 (93)	95 (92.9)	
FSME Percentage ²	3	3	4	3
% (No.) of pupils on the SEN register	3 (21)	3 (22)	4 (25)	4 (28)
No. of pupils with statements of educational needs in the mainstream school	8	9	10	11
No. of newcomers	14	*	*	*

¹ The 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 questionnaire may be low.

² The term 'FSME Percentage' refers to the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals

<i>Intake:</i>				
% of Y8 pupils with L5 English	52	57	67	26 ³
% of Y8 pupils with L5 mathematics	83	78	87	27 ²
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in English	97	92	96	90 ²
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in mathematics	97	92	96	93 ²
<i>Source: data as held by the school.</i>				

* fewer than 5

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

Overall Performance Level	Very Good
Achievements and Standards	Very Good
Provision	Very Good
Leadership and Management	Outstanding

5. Achievements and standards

- The school's strong, guiding ethos of 'whole person' education is manifested in the consistent promotion of excellent standards in all aspects of pupils' work and learning. The staff provide the pupils with a diverse range of extra-curricular and enhancement opportunities and, as a consequence, almost all of the pupils acquire and develop well the dispositions, skills and capabilities necessary for a successful transition to the next stage of their education and the world of work.
- As the pupils progress through the school, they develop excellent leadership skills through a range of in-school, local and international initiatives; they take on responsibilities maturely, have a strong sense of personal and social responsibility and are encouraged by the staff to be highly reflective and critical thinkers. They listen respectfully to one another, showing consideration for the needs of their peers, new pupils, all staff and visitors.

³ 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

- The priority given by staff to the development of literacy skills is reflected in the high standards of the written work and in the highly articulate and confident oral contributions made by most of the pupils. By the end of key stage 4, almost all of the pupils achieve at the expected levels in English. The pupils enjoy and participate actively in learning mathematics and numeracy. They discuss effectively their thinking with their peers, and consolidate independently their learning. Across key stage 4, they make expected or better progress in mathematics.
- The pupils who have special educational needs are integrated well with their peers and an appropriate focus is placed on fostering their independence. They attain very well at GCSE and GCE A level in line with their peers.
- The key strengths of attainment in public examinations are: the excellent attainment in individual subjects at both GCSE and GCE A level, with most subjects performing above the NI average for similar⁴ schools, and with almost one-half more than ten percentage points above; and, the very high attainment of pupils at grades A* to A at both GCSE and GCE A level. Over the last three years, the percentage of pupils achieving seven GCSE examinations including English and mathematics at grades A* to C has fluctuated from being above to being below the NI average for similar schools, however, the school's internal data indicates that almost all pupils attain in line with their ability. In the same period, the small number of pupils who are entitled to free school meals have all attained seven or more GCSE examinations including English and mathematics at grades A* to C.
- Over the last three years, the percentage of pupils attaining three or more GCE A levels at grades A* to C has improved steadily, increasing from being in line with to being above the NI average for similar schools. The percentage of pupils who move from year 13 to year 14 and the percentage of pupils who progress to higher education are also above average for similar schools.

6. Provision

- There is a coherent, systematic and whole school approach to the arrangements for planning, teaching, learning and assessment. Almost all of the lessons observed ranged from satisfactory to outstanding. Most lessons were good or very good in equal measure, with one-third very good or outstanding. In the most effective practice: the teachers questioning techniques extended the pupils' responses and provided good learning opportunities within lessons; the appropriate use of thinking time ensured that pupils had opportunities to apply and articulate their learning to their peers during well-paced, challenging activities; and, the work was set in meaningful, contemporary contexts with the teachers displaying enthusiasm for their subject. In the less effective practice, in a minority of lessons, opportunities to develop knowledge and understanding were limited by the narrow range of teaching strategies used, resulting in a lower level of pupil engagement.

⁴ See Appendix for data: note that when averages are compared, they are with the average for selective schools, as appropriate, with a similar proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals.

- At a whole-school level, a high priority is given to the development of the pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. During the inspection there was evidence of the appropriate use and promotion of numeracy in a small number of subjects. An audit has been completed recently to identify and map opportunities to learn and use mathematics across the curriculum; the inspection findings confirm that this is an appropriate area for further development. Literacy skills were promoted actively and effectively in almost all lessons through, for example, purposeful paired and group tasks, well-planned opportunities for pupils to present their work to their peers and the pupils' use of subject-specific terminology.
- The outstanding, comprehensive analysis and interpretation of assessment data at individual pupil, subject and whole-school level ensures that early identification and tracking of pastoral and academic progress takes place for each pupil. The teachers provide pupils and parents with regular, useful information on how each pupil can advance his or her learning. Appropriate intervention strategies, including peer-mentoring and support, guide well the pupils, where necessary.
- There is a caring, supportive and inclusive ethos which permeates all aspects of the work of the school. The importance placed by senior leadership on linking the pastoral and curriculum provision ensures a cohesive and holistic approach to supporting the pupils in their learning and developing their wider skills and dispositions. The high quality pastoral care enables the pupils to take responsibility for, manage and set targets for their own learning. The pupils have many opportunities, during school hours and through the high participation rates in the extensive range of extra-curricular activities, to develop friendships and skills, and to contribute to the ethos of their school; thus preparing them well for the next stage of their learning.
- Those pupils who require additional support with aspects of their learning access a wide range of support, including appropriate external agencies, which is highly effective in assisting them in their learning, and developing their resilience. The pupils value the excellent support they receive from the targeted peer-mentoring system. The parents are provided with valuable training on strategies to support their children in their learning. It will be important that the school continues to monitor the implementation of the support strategies to ensure that they are applied consistently across the school.
- The evaluation of and planning for careers education, information, advice and guidance ensures that there is progression in experiences, skills and qualities so that, by the end of year 14, the pupils understand well the range of education and employment opportunities that are available to them. The appropriate advice and guidance empowers pupils to make well informed subject and career choices and to plan for the future with confidence. Pupils have excellent access to independent, impartial advice and guidance through a well-planned programme of visiting guest speakers and careers visits. The school promotes well the study of STEM⁵ related courses; the percentage of pupils studying these courses is above average and reflects the career aspirations of the pupils.

⁵ The term 'STEM' refers to science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced and is informed by the needs of the pupils. Curriculum planning is adjusted to take account of pupils' abilities, aspirations and labour market data to provide curriculum and career pathways that are matched quite well to the needs of the pupils. The school curriculum is enhanced well through the collaborative subjects offered within the Armagh Learning Community at post-16 level. The excellent links between the schools within the Armagh Area Learning Community is evidenced by the uptake and retention of pupils within the collaborative courses. Pupils have access to a range of general and applied subjects which offers them a choice of suitable career pathways; the school meets the current requirements of the Entitlement Framework.

7. Leadership and management

- The approach taken to school development planning⁶, including self-evaluation and the analysis and interpretation of data, is rigorous, robust and highly effective at bringing about improvement; it is sector-leading. There are appropriately high expectations for all staff and pupils as learners. The school community has focused on redefining, confirming and embedding the school's ethos, culture and aims in all development work. The outworking of this initiative is evidenced by pupils who engage well in their own learning and have developed reflective practice, well prepared for the demands of life and work.
- Senior leadership complement and support each other very well, providing clear, visionary direction to the school improvement agenda in the pursuit of excellence for all the pupils. The systematic cycle of 'plan, do and review' empowers the teachers and middle managers to support collegially the achievement of the school's key, curricular and pastoral, strategic objectives. This development work is undertaken in a culture of continuous, critical reflection, with appropriate support, challenge and accountability at all levels. The pupils are involved well in the planning and review process. The staff are provided with appropriate opportunities to develop their expertise and to build their capacity to meet the present and future needs of the school and its pupils.
- The governors are highly committed to improving the quality of education provided for the pupils and through effective channels of communication are very well informed about the work of the school. They provide an appropriate support and challenge function to ensure effective governance and management 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 of the school.
- On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the school has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education. In discussions with the inspectors, the pupils reported that they feel safe in school and know what to do if they have any concerns about their well-being.

8. Conclusion

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is very good. The school is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the pupils; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

⁶ The school development plan meets the requirements of the School Development Planning Regulations (NI) 2010.

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 7 or more GCSEs (A* to C and A* to E) and equivalent subject with the NI average for selective schools in the same free school meals category⁷.

Data on Year 12 (Key Stage 4) performance:

GCSE and GCSE equivalent subjects - *following permitted exclusions	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
<i>*Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE & Equivalents in at least 7 subjects</i>	100	100	97
<i>*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects</i>	94.1	89.3	91.9
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	93.2	93.5	95.2
<i>*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics</i>	94.1	89.3	90.9
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	92.2	92.3	94.1
<i>*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects</i>	99.0	95.2	97.3
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	100	100

⁷ See benchmarking data and guidance contained in the annual DE Circulars on: '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.

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

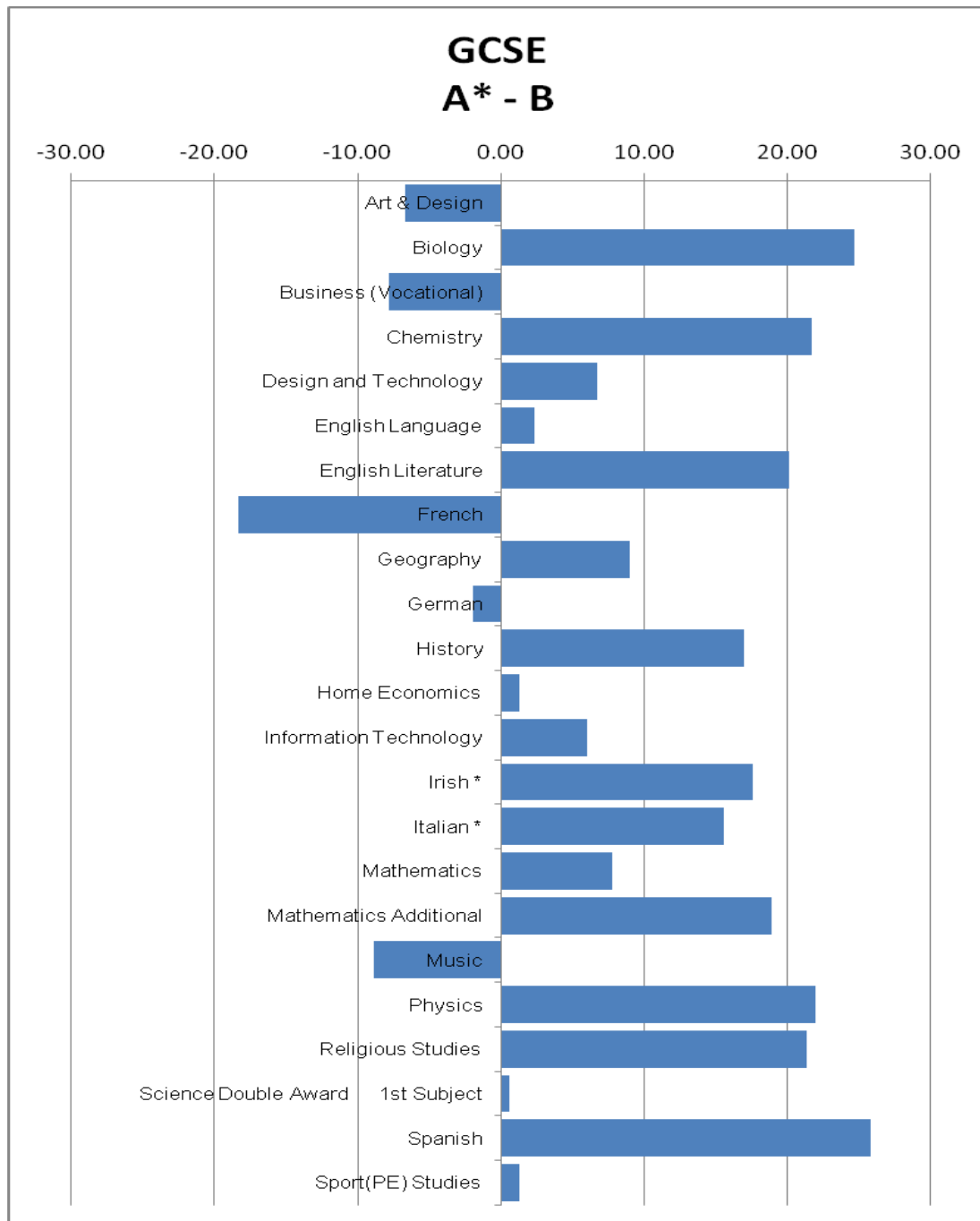
GCSE Subject	2011	2012	2013	Total entry over 3 years
	% A*-C	% A*-C	% A*-C	
Italian	100	100	67	9

Level 2	2011	2012	2013	Total entry over 3 years
	% pass	% pass	% pass	
BTEC Diploma Public Service	100	100	100	31

Attainment of pupils in individual subjects at GCSE level at grades A* to B 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 B 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

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. 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 category⁸.

Data on Year 14 (A2) performance:

GCE A Level or equivalent	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels & Equivalents in at least 3 subjects	96	97	98
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	79.2	81.5	83.0
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	78.2	77.3	78.8

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

Other examination results: post-16

Based on data held and verified by the school with ETI, the tables below show the percentage of year 14 pupils in this school achieving grades A* to C in vocational and/or applied courses equivalent to GCE A level. No average is available from the examining board(s) for the subjects in these tables to facilitate comparison.

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

GCE Subject	2011	2012	2013	Total entry over 3 years
	% A*-C	% A*-C	% A*-C	
Applied Business Studies	100	100	100	55
Health and Social Care	---	100	100	19

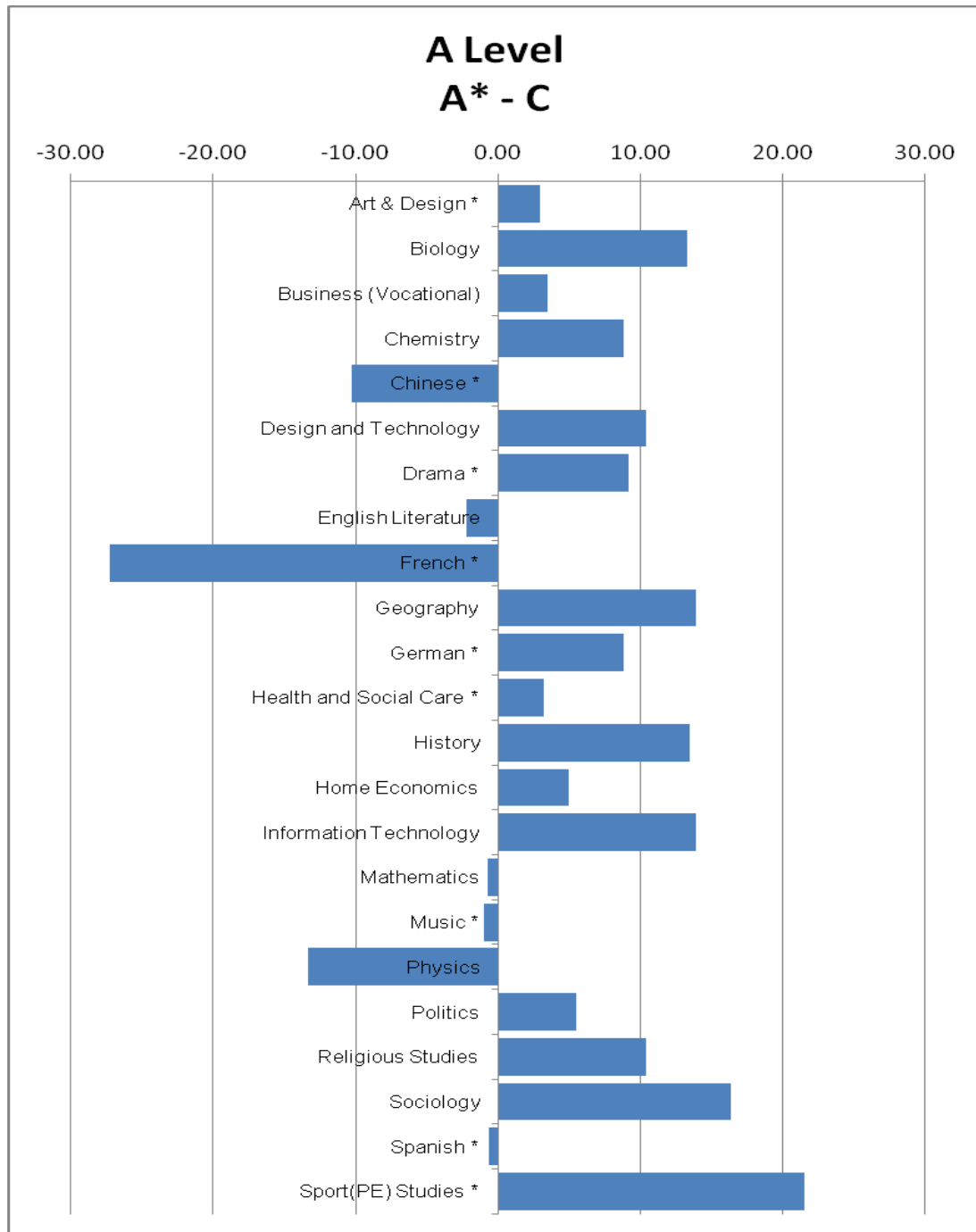
Level 3	2011	2012	2013	Total entry over 3 years
	% pass	% pass	% pass	
BTEC Construction	100	100	100	14

⁸ 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

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.

	NI Average	School
% Year 12 staying on to Year 13	95.0	94.2
% Year 13 staying on to Year 14	94.9	97.1

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 this school who leave school to enter further education, higher education or employment, or are seeking employment compared with the average for selective schools.

	Year 2011/12	School %	NI %
Total number of leavers	110		
Employment	2	1.8	3.8
Full-Time Further Education	17	15.5	19.0
Full-Time Higher Education	82	74.5	72.7
Full-Time Training	0	0	1.5
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	1	0.9	1.6
Unknown/Long-Term Sick/Pregnant	8	7.3	1.4

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