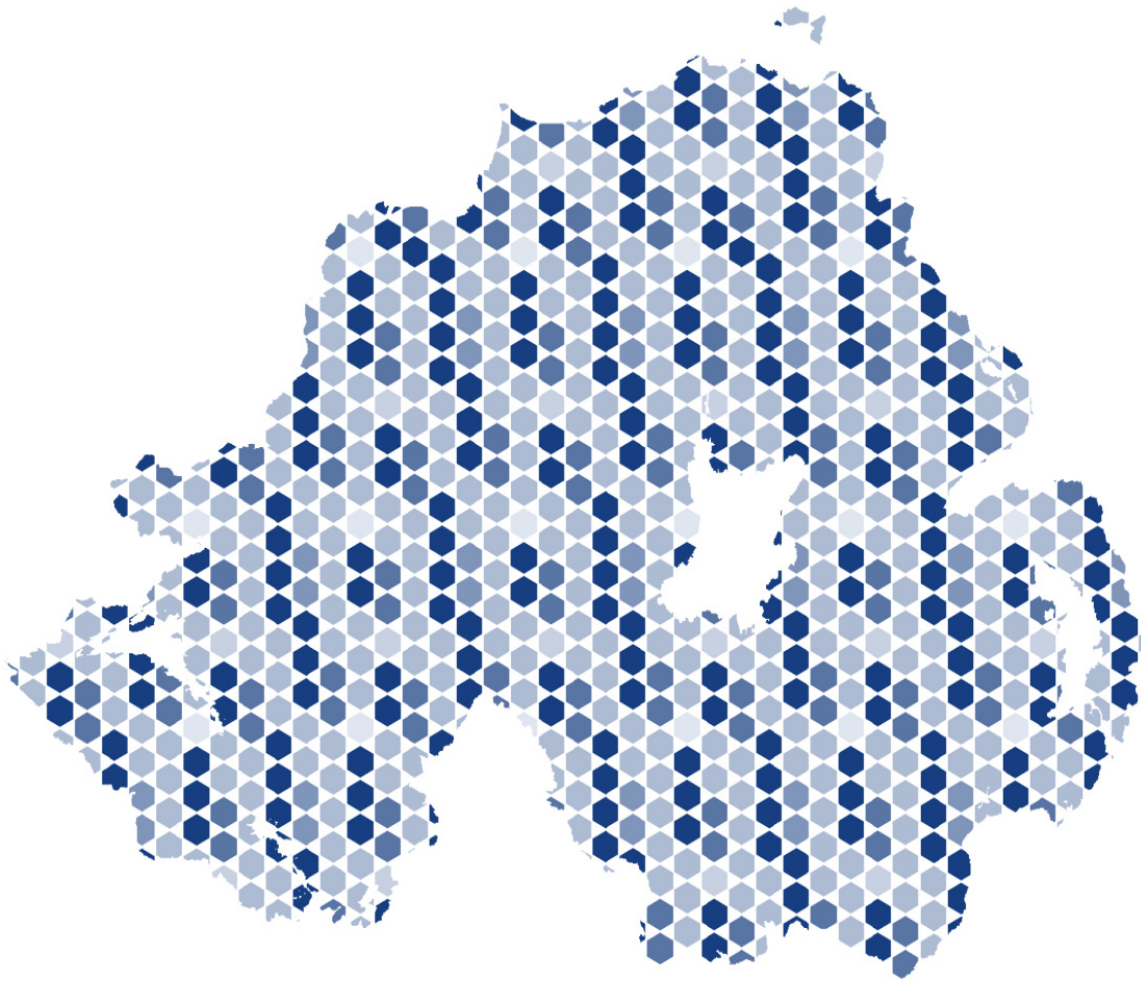


POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Ballymena Academy

Voluntary, co-educational, grammar school

Report of an Inspection
in April 2012



Providing Inspection Services for
Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

CUSTOMER
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EXCELLENCE



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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%

In assessing the various features of the provision, Inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE REPORT

The term '*similar schools*' refers to schools in the same free school meal category as defined by DE, whether they are selective or non-selective.

CEIAG	Careers Education Information Advice and Guidance
DE	Department of Education
ETI	Education and Training Inspectorate
EF	Entitlement Framework
FSM	Free School Meals
GCE	General Certificate of Education
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
IEP	Individual Education Plan
KS	Key stage
NI	Northern Ireland
SDP	School Development Plan
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
SMT	Senior Management Team
STEM	Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics

1. CONTEXT

1.1 Ballymena Academy draws its pupils from the town and wider rural areas. The current enrolment is 1217 pupils with approximately 26% of the pupils in the sixth form; the enrolment has remained steady over the last four years and the school is regularly oversubscribed. Approximately 5% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals, and the school has identified 2% of the pupils as requiring additional support with their learning.

Ballymena Academy	2008	2009	2010	2011
Enrolment	1201	1205	1206	1217
FSM Percentage	2	2.2	2	5.3
% (No) of pupils on SEN register	~ ¹	~	~	1.8 (16)
<i>No. of pupils with statements</i>	~	~	~	~
<i>No. of newcomers</i>	~	~	~	~
Intake				
% of Y8 pupils with L5 English	74.2	59.7	74.7	65
% of Y8 pupils with L5 mathematics	92.7	85.2	92.7	94.4
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in English	99.4	85.8	91.6	99.4
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in mathematics	99.4	98.3	100	100

Source: Data as held by the school.

2. OVERALL FINDINGS OF THE INSPECTION

2.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the 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.

3. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

3.1 The overall standards achieved by the pupils are very good.

KEY FINDINGS

The pupils are highly motivated; they are conscientious and very willing to learn. The pupils' oral contributions during class discussion are of an extremely high standard and demonstrate their ability to think critically and creatively. They have excellent personal and social, and independent learning, skills.

¹ Fewer than five.

Data on Year 12 (KS4) performance:

Comparisons	2009	2010	2011
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 including English and mathematics	92	97	97
Comparison with the NI benchmarking for similar schools in the same FSM category	In line with the average	Well above average	Well above average
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects	93	97	98
Comparison with the NI benchmarking for similar schools in the same FSM category	In line with the average	Above average	Well above average

Source: Data on Year 12 (KS4) performance as held by the school, with DE benchmarks.

The pupils attain very good standards at GCSE level. Over the past three years there has been an improvement in the proportion of pupils achieving seven or more subjects, including English and mathematics, at grades A*-C. The performance of most of the individual GCSE subjects, at grades A*-B, is within five percentage points of, or above the corresponding three-year NI average and a majority of subjects are more than ten percentage points above the average.

Data on Year 14 (A2) performance:

Comparisons	2009	2010	2011
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels & Equivalents in at least 3 subjects	93	96	87
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	70	73	77
Comparison with the NI benchmarking for similar schools in the same FSM category	Below average	Below average	In line with the average

Source: Data on Year 14 (A2) performance as held by the school, with DE benchmarks.

Overall, the standards attained by the pupils at GCE A level are good. The proportion of pupils entered for three or more A levels is consistently above the NI average. The percentage of pupils attaining grades A* to C in three or more subjects at A level over the past three years has risen from being below to being in line with the NI average for similar schools. Most of the subjects are within five percentage points of, or above the corresponding three-year NI average and a significant minority are more than five percentage points above the average. Almost all of the pupils progress from A2 study into higher education.

The school has prioritised appropriately the need, and is implementing a wide range of strategies, to continue to raise further the pupils' levels of attainment at A level.

The uptake of, and levels of the pupils' achievement in, STEM courses in science and mathematics is outstanding.

The pupils who require additional support with aspects of their learning make good progress and achieve success in public examinations.

More information about the results achieved in public examinations is given in Appendix 2.

4. PROVISION FOR LEARNING

4.1 The quality of the provision for learning is very good.

KEY FINDINGS

The provision in science² is outstanding, in mathematics it is very good, and in physical education it is good.

The teachers are extremely hard-working and prepare thoroughly for lessons; the overall quality of the planning for learning is very good.

The quality of the teaching observed ranged from outstanding to satisfactory; almost all of lessons were evaluated as good or better, two-fifths were very good and a further one-fifth were outstanding.

In the more effective practice: the pupils participated actively, and showed initiative and independence in their learning; the learning intentions were explicit and understood clearly by the pupils; the learning was set within contemporary, meaningful real-life contexts; the teachers' had an excellent subject knowledge and used skilful questioning to promote high level thinking and to encourage extended, articulate responses from the pupils; and a wide range of effective teaching strategies were used which resulted in the pupils achieving very good or better outcomes.

There is a variation in the effective use of assessment for learning strategies. The school has identified the need, and has established a working group, to identify and disseminate good practice in this area; the inspection findings confirm that this is an appropriate area to focus on.

4.2 The overall quality of the care, guidance and support of pupils is very good.

KEY FINDINGS

The quality of the pastoral care is very good. The pupils are very well cared for as a result of the holistic approach to their educational, social and emotional development. They respond positively to the supportive and inclusive ethos evident in classrooms and throughout the school. The behaviour of the pupils during the inspection was excellent.

The Year 8 pupils settle well as a result of the very effective induction programme, the support received from key staff and peer mentors and the effective links established with the local primary schools. As the pupils progress through the school, they benefit from the wide range of opportunities available to them to accept responsibility and to develop important leadership and inter-personal skills by being involved in activities, such as, school assemblies, the school councils and the very effective peer mentoring programme. The pupils give a high level of support to local and global charitable causes.

The personal development programme is suitably varied and features well-targeted activities which encourage and support the pupils in exploring personal and social issues.

The school is currently reviewing how best to improve the mode of delivery of its personal development programmes; the inspection findings endorse this review.

² Focusing, in particular, on chemistry at all levels, and KS3 and KS4 science.

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, thereby encouraging the pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles.

4.3 The curricular provision for the pupils is very good.

KEY FINDINGS

The school provides a suitably broad and balanced curriculum which meets the abilities and career aspirations of almost all of the pupils. There is a clear vision and strong commitment to the rationale which underpins the EF and to strengthening the relevance of the curriculum offer to the specific needs and interests of the pupils. There is effective, regular analysis and review of the curriculum provision; consequently, the school has increased the curriculum offer by widening the range of applied courses in recent years. The current sixth form curriculum offer meets the requirements of the EF, and the SDP includes appropriate targets to meet the requirements at KS4 by 2013.

There is a wide-ranging extra-curricular programme which meets very effectively the pupils' needs and interests, including: an extensive sporting and non-sporting programme; educational visits; curricular clubs; and opportunities to participate in local and national competitions.

The quality of the provision for CEIAG is very good.

The taught careers programme is well conceived and provides good opportunities for pupils to develop their self awareness and the skills and qualities to support their progression to further study and employment. The programme is delivered appropriately by the school's team of qualified careers staff. The head of careers and the 'learning for life and work' team have worked collaboratively to integrate effectively employability into the year 10 careers programme. The Year 14 timetabled careers classes are well planned and provide the pupils with comprehensive support for the application process to higher education. The pupils benefit from an extensive programme of visiting speakers, relevant educational visits, careers conventions and a wide range of additional careers events. In addition, all sixth form pupils undertake work shadowing and a work placement which is relevant to their chosen progression pathways.

The overall quality of the provision for the small number of pupils with SEN is satisfactory.

Currently, the IEPs and intervention strategies implemented are not monitored, reviewed and evaluated sufficiently; the effectiveness of the support provided is not consistent across the school. The school has identified appropriately the need to develop the IEPs and to involve teachers in writing subject specific strategies to meet the needs of all learners.

The acting SENCO has worked closely with the Vice-principal (Pastoral) to develop the SEN provision and provide useful SEN guidance materials for the subject teachers.

The school is committed strongly to supporting pupils who are at risk of marginalisation and, through effective strategies, ensures their inclusion and retention in school.

5. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.1 The leadership and the management are very good.

KEY FINDINGS

The Principal, who has been in post for seven years, sets high standards and expectations, and is committed to the pastoral and academic needs of the pupils. He has established a distributive approach to leadership and a culture of reflective practice across the school. The Principal works closely with two Deputy-principals and the Vice-principal whose respective roles are clearly defined; collectively, they provide very good leadership and they value, challenge and support appropriately the staff.

The Principal, Deputy- and Vice-principals are supported by the SMT who hold a wide range of operational and whole-school responsibilities; together they lead and monitor effectively the pastoral and curricular work of the middle management.

There is a strong sense of collegiality and excellent internal communication between the senior leadership and the teachers.

The overall quality of middle management is also very good. The middle managers are enthusiastic about their role, and review regularly the planning of the provision and the pupils' outcomes.

There is a comprehensive SDP which has been reviewed recently in line with The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (NI) 2010. The SDP priorities are informed appropriately by wide-ranging self-evaluation, the appropriate analysis of available performance data, and consultations with staff, pupils, parents and governors. At middle management level, there is variation in the quality of the action plans to support development work; in general, at individual department level, the action plans are not sufficiently specific and measurable.

There is a need for the senior leadership and middle management to monitor more closely the quality of the provision in order, in particular: to identify and disseminate aspects of the very good and outstanding practice across the school to bring about further improvement; and to address the SEN issues identified within this report.

The staff development programme is linked closely to the school's key priorities for development, and appropriate training has taken place to assist staff in carrying out their curricular, pastoral and management responsibilities.

The school has very good, comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the DE.

The governors are very well informed about, and maintain a strategic overview of, the work of the school and the outworking of the SDP.

The school has developed effective curricular and pastoral links with local primary schools and a range of external agencies. There are also strong links with local businesses to support the work of the school. The school hosts a range of events throughout the year to involve the local community in the life and work of the school.

The available accommodation is well maintained and is used effectively to support learning and teaching. A health and safety issue relating to the school's accommodation is detailed in Appendix 5.

Given the findings of the inspection, the school meets the needs and expectations of the school community very effectively.

6. CONCLUSION

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the 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.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

- 1.1 i. School: Ballymena Academy
 ii. School Reference Number: 342-0011
 iii. Age Range: 11-18
 iv. Status: Voluntary Grammar
 v. Date of Inspection: W/C 16/04/12
 vi. Area of Study: Standard Inspection

1.2 Intake/Enrolment

School Year	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Year 8 Intake	178	176	176	177	
Total enrolment	1201	1205	1206	1217	

1.3 Attendance

Year 2010/11	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average 2010/11	NI Average 2009/10
% Attendance	98	96.9	96.4	96.2	97	97.2	94.7	97	95

- 1.4 i. Total Number of Teachers: 85.6 iii. Contact ratio (percentage of timetabled time in direct class contact): 0.75
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 14.2

Year 2011/12	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTAL
Enrolment: Boys	94	85	76	77	94	83	82	591
Enrolment: Total	83	94	99	104	84	82	80	626
PTR	177	179	175	181	178	165	162	1217

- 1.5 Staying On Rate (2009/10) (Current year 13/14 as proportion of year 12 from 1/2 years previously)

Year 13	93.3	NI Av Year 13	93.9
Year 14	84.9	NI Av Year 14	86.9

1.6 Leavers' Destinations

2009/10	Year 12	NI%	Year 13/14	NI%
Total Number of Leavers	12		164	
Another School	17%	30.7	0%	17
Employment	8%	3	2%	3.6
Full-time Further Education	67%	54.1	9%	10.2
Full-time Higher Education	N/A	N/A	89%	80.6
Full-time Training	0%	6.5	0%	0.5
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	0%	0.7	0%	1.3
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	8%	4.9	0%	2

TABLE 1 outlines the school's GCSE EXAMINATION RESULTS

HEADLINE STANDARDS

NB: The NI average for all selective schools for pupils obtaining grades C or above in at least 7 subjects including English and Mathematics in 2011 was 90.4%.

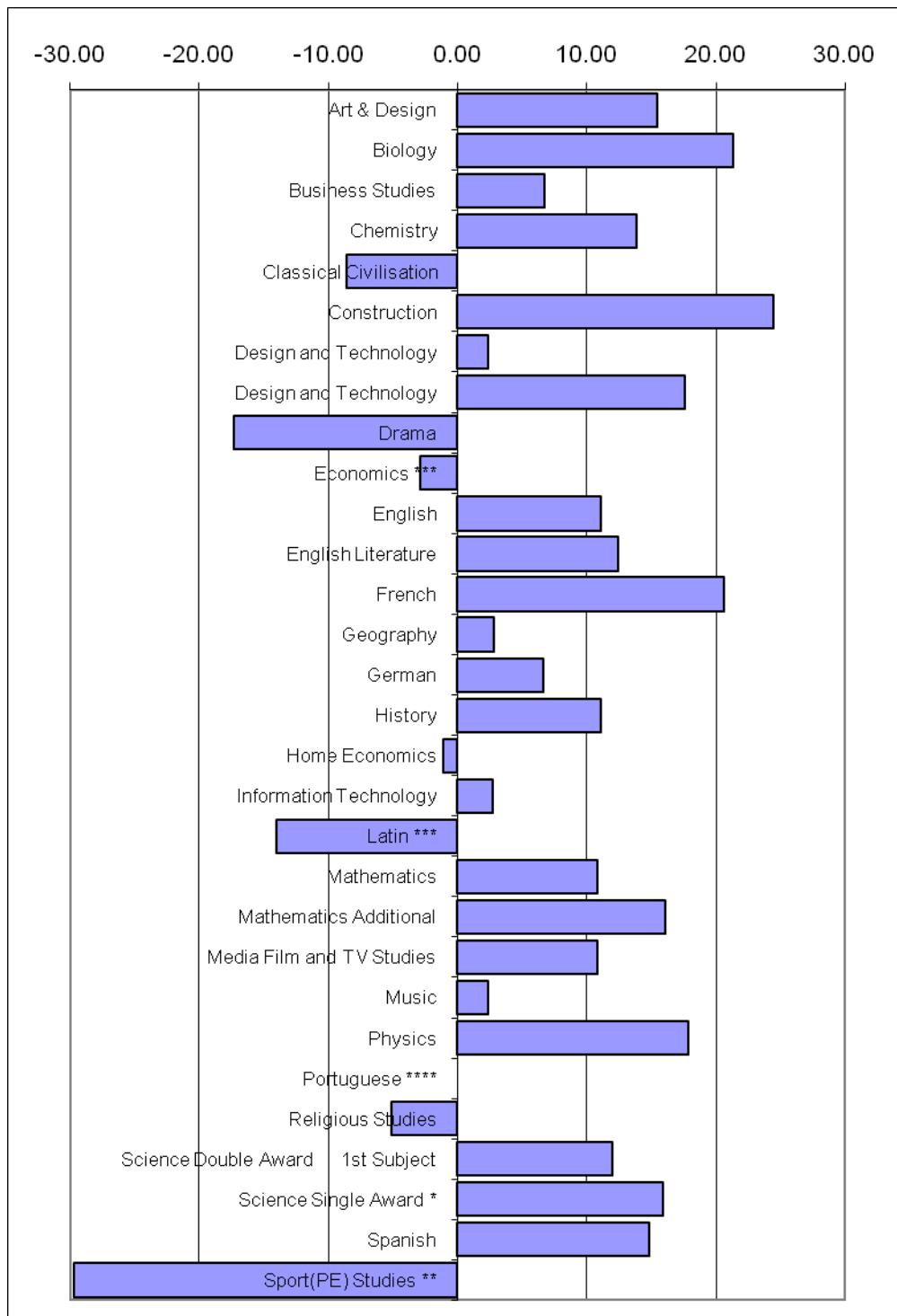
Data on Year 12 (KS4) performance:

Comparisons	2009	2010	2011
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 including English and mathematics	92	97	97
<i>Comparison with the NI benchmarking for similar schools in the same FSM category</i>	<i>In line with the average</i>	<i>Well above average</i>	<i>Well above average</i>
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects	93	97	98
<i>Comparison with the NI benchmarking for similar schools in the same FSM category</i>	<i>In line with the average</i>	<i>Above average</i>	<i>Well above average</i>

Source: Data on Year 12 (KS4) performance as held by the school, with DE benchmarks.

Table 2

Comparison with the three-year NI average



* fewer than 30 entries over the past three years

** new subject with the first cohort, of less than 30 pupils, entered in 2011

*** fewer than 30 entries over the past three years with no entries in 2011

**** fewer than 30 entries over the past three years with no entries in 2009 or 2011

Table 3

TABLE 3 outlines the school's GCE (A2) EXAMINATION RESULTS

HEADLINE STANDARDS

NB: The NI average for all selective schools for pupils entered for A2 level or equivalent obtaining grades C or above in at least 3 subjects in 2011 was 76.5%.

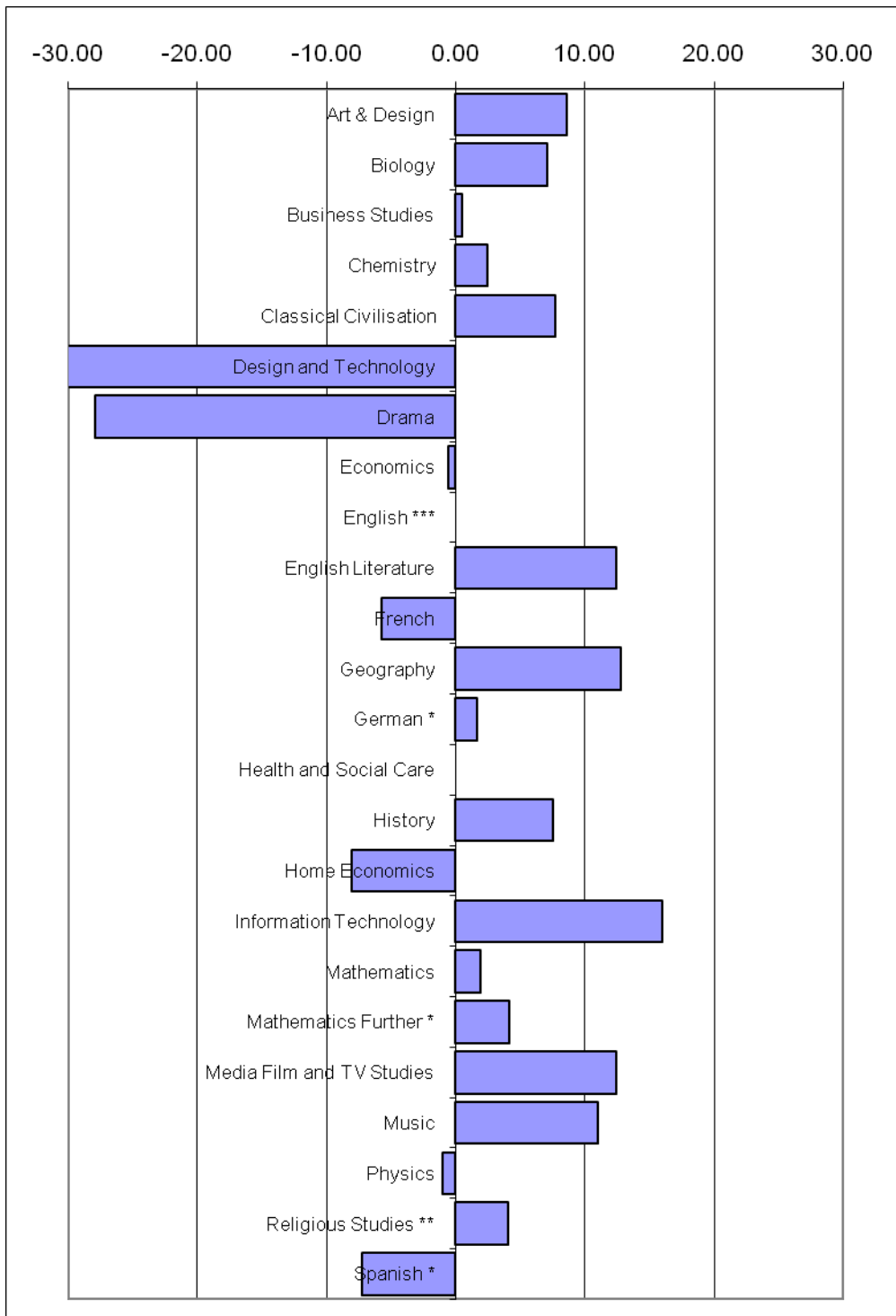
Data on Year 14 (A2) performance:

Comparisons	2009	2010	2011
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels & Equivalents in at least 3 subjects	93	96	87
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	70	73	77
<i>Comparison with the NI benchmarking for similar schools in the same FSM category</i>	<i>Below average</i>	<i>Below average</i>	<i>In line with the average</i>

Source: Data on Year 14 (A2) performance as held by the school, with DE benchmarks.

Table 4

Comparison with the three-year NI average



* fewer than 20 entries over the past three years

** fewer than 20 entries over the past three years with no entries in 2009

*** no entries over the past three years

OTHER EXAMINATIONS

Key Skills Application of Number (CCEA)	2009		2010		2011	
	<i>No of pupils</i>	<i>% pass</i>	<i>No of pupils</i>	<i>% pass</i>	<i>No of pupils</i>	<i>% pass</i>
<i>Level 3</i>	45	100	-	-	21	100

Key Skills Communication (CCEA)	2009		2010		2011	
	<i>No of pupils</i>	<i>% pass</i>	<i>No of pupils</i>	<i>% pass</i>	<i>No of pupils</i>	<i>% pass</i>
<i>Level 3</i>	59	100	-	-	22	100

Key Skills Information and Communication Technology (CCEA)	2009		2010		2011	
	<i>No of pupils</i>	<i>% pass</i>	<i>No of pupils</i>	<i>% pass</i>	<i>No of pupils</i>	<i>% pass</i>
<i>Level 3</i>	11	100	-	-	36	100

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE SUBJECTS UNDER FOCUS

MATHEMATICS

The quality of the provision for mathematics is very good.

The strengths include:

- the outstanding standards achieved in public examinations;
- the high levels of participation at GCE mathematics and further mathematics;
- the very good or outstanding quality of the teaching in a majority of the lessons observed;
- the wide range of activities being used to promote mathematics;
- the strong collegiality within the department and the commitment of the teachers; and
- the very good leadership and management of the mathematics department.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

The quality of the provision for Physical Education is good.

The strengths of the work include:

- the very positive relationships between teachers and pupils in all of the lessons observed;
- the high levels of participation and the good standards achieved by pupils in their practical work;
- the extensive range of extra-curricular sports activities and the success of the school in a wide range of sports events and competitions;
- the good or better quality of teaching in most of the lessons observed;
- the very good working relationships across the department and the collegiality between the physical education staff; and
- the effective leadership of the acting head of department.

The area for improvement includes the need:

- to raise the standards achieved by the pupils in GCSE physical education.

SCIENCE

The quality of the provision for science³ is outstanding.

The strengths of the work include:

- the very good to outstanding standard of the pupils' practical and written scientific work, and the outstanding standards attained in public examination across all of the science subjects;
- the very good to outstanding quality of the teaching in most of the lessons observed, characterised by the active involvement of the pupils who show initiative and work independently and in groups to complete work at a brisk pace and to a very high standard;
- the wide range of activities provided beyond the taught lessons, which promote well the pupils' enjoyment of science;
- the detailed planning, including the high quality schemes of work and associated learning resources, and the detailed action plans for further improvement;
- the good quality of self-evaluation leading to improvement, including the very effective use of quantitative and benchmarked data to track the standards the pupils attain in public examinations; and
- the outstanding leadership of, and strong sense of teamwork among, the heads of physics, chemistry, biology and junior science.

³ Focusing, in particular, on chemistry at all levels, and KS3 and KS4 science.

SCOPE AND METHOD OF THE INSPECTION

The standard inspection of Ballymena Academy focused on achievements and standards, learning and teaching, curriculum provision and on leadership and management across the school as a whole. The key questions and quality indicators which guide inspection and self-evaluation in these three aspects of post-primary schools, which were applied to this inspection, are available in the Inspectorate's 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 scrutinised documentation and the pupils' written work and held formal and informal discussions with pupils, teachers and staff with specific responsibilities. Specialist inspectors paid particular attention to mathematics, physical education and science⁴ providing detailed oral feedback to the teachers in these areas. Detailed findings are reported in Appendix 3. In total, 105 lessons were inspected across the school.

The inspection also focused on the provision for pastoral care and the arrangements for child protection; CEIAG; the provision for pupils requiring additional support with their learning and their inclusion in all aspects of school life and on progress towards the EF.

The arrangements for the inspection included:

- the opportunity for the parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire to the inspection;
- meetings with representatives from the governors; and
- meetings with groups of pupils from years 8, 10, 12, 13 and 14.

Questionnaire	Number issued	Number returned	Percentage returned	Number with comments
Parents	242	111	45.9	59
Teachers	89	66	74.2	10
Support Staff	56	15	26.8	7

The responses from the parental questionnaires returned were highly affirmative about most aspects of the work of the school. The parents commented positively on, in particular, their general satisfaction with the quality of education and pastoral care provided for their children, the arrangements to help the pupils' transition from primary to post-primary school, and the quality of the leadership of the school. The returns from the questionnaires completed by the teachers and support staff were positive in almost all respects. Concern was registered: by a minority of the teachers in relation to the adequacy of resources for learning and teaching; and by a significant minority of the support staff who responded about the effectiveness of communication with senior managers. The ETI reported to the Principal and representatives of the governors areas of concern emerging from the questionnaires and, where appropriate, these have been commented on within the report.

⁴ Focusing, in particular, on chemistry at all levels, and KS3 and KS4 science.

The pupils with whom discussions were held talked about the caring ethos of the school. In particular, they highlighted the helpful staff, the wide range of extra-curricular activities available, and the very good opportunities provided for them through the school councils to be involved in decisions about relevant aspects of the school's provision. They reported that they are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- There is a lack of changing facilities for pupils in physical education.

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