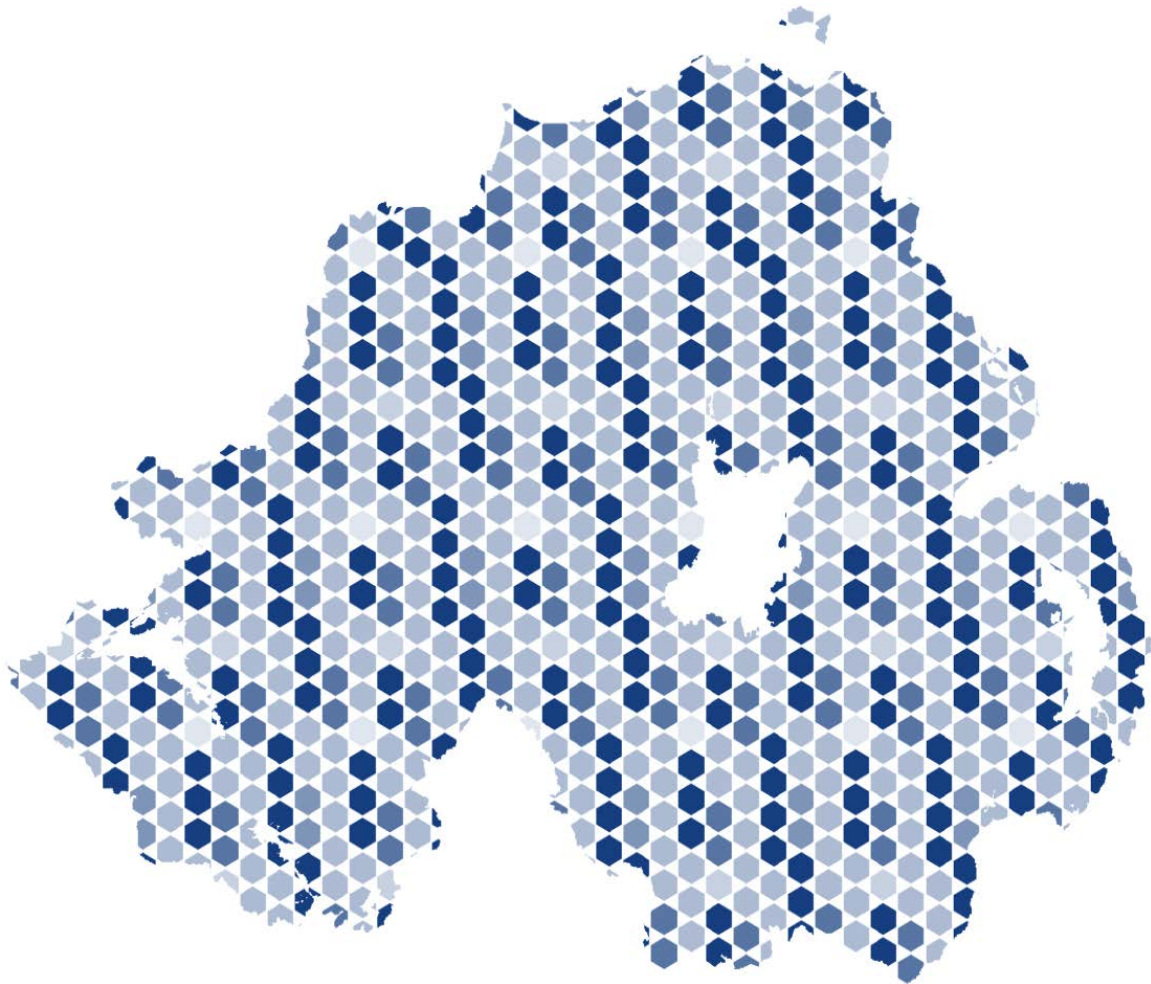


POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Dominican College, Portstewart

Voluntary grammar, 11-18, co-educational school

Report of an Inspection
in April 2013

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CONTEXT OF THE INSPECTION (METHOD)

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 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.

The arrangements for this inspection included:

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

Data on the questionnaire returns is shown in the table below.

Questionnaire	Number issued	Number returned	Percentage returned	Number with comments
Parents	100	70	70	58
Teachers	33	27	82	9
Support Staff	22	22	100	7

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 (Inspectorate) use the following performance levels (grades) in reports:

Performance Level	Descriptor
Outstanding	Outstanding characterised by excellence
Very Good	Consistently good; major strengths
Good	Important strengths in most of the provision. Areas for improvement which the school has the capacity to address
Satisfactory	Overall sound/satisfactory but with areas for improvement in important areas which need to be addressed
Inadequate	A few strengths; significant areas for improvement which require prompt action
Unsatisfactory	Poor; major shortcomings which require urgent action

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL

Dominican College overlooks the town of Portstewart. The college prides itself on its inclusive ethos, which appeals to a significant number of pupils who are not from the Catholic tradition (almost half in 2011/12). In addition, the school caters for pupils who have a wide range of abilities. The very high level of parental satisfaction with the school indicates strong community support. There is a steadily rising trend in enrolment and the school remains over-subscribed annually. The percentage of pupils entering the school over the past four years who are above the expected level in English and mathematics varies from year to year and has declined overall. There are 146 pupils in the sixth form.

Dominican College	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Year 8 Intake	71	69	72	70
Enrolment	484	491	500	503
% Attendance (NI Average)	93 (92.3)	94.6 (92.3)	97.2 (92.6)	N/A (N/A)
FSME Percentage ¹	8.25	6.52	7.2	10.1
% (No.) of pupils on the SEN register	5.99 (29)	5.3 (26)	6.4 (32)	6.16 (31)
No. of pupils with statements of educational needs	11	9	8	7
No. of newcomers	*	*	0	*
Intake				
% of Y8 pupils with L5 English	50.7	39.1	54.2	34.3
% of Y8 pupils with L5 mathematics	71.8	63.8	73.6	55.7
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in English	98.5	100	98.6	94.3
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in mathematics	100	100	100	98.6

Source: data as held by the school.

* fewer than 5

1.2 FOCUS AND SCOPE OF THE INSPECTION

The standard inspection of Dominican College Portstewart focused on achievements and standards, learning and teaching, curriculum provision and on leadership and management across the school as a whole.

Specialist inspectors paid particular attention to the English, physical education and science provision and gave detailed oral feedback to the teachers in these areas; a summary of the findings is reported in Appendix 2.

The inspection also focused on: the provision for pastoral care and the arrangements for child protection and safeguarding; the provision for pupils requiring additional support with their learning and their inclusion in all aspects of school life; the provision for careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG); and the progress towards the Entitlement Framework.

¹ The term 'FSME Percentage' refers to the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals.

1.3 OVERALL FINDINGS OF THE INSPECTION

Overall Performance Level	Good
Achievements and Standards	Good
Provision for Learning	Very Good
Leadership and Management	Good

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 The overall achievements and standards are good².

KEY FINDINGS

Almost all of the pupils demonstrate a positive disposition to learning and acquire and develop very effective inter-personal skills. They are flexible in their thinking, manage their learning well and are confident individuals with high levels of independence. All of the pupils who require additional support make good progress in their learning and are successful in public examinations by the end of KS 4. The school provides a wide range of rich learning experiences at post-16 that enable the pupils to become well-rounded, mature young adults. In 2012, nearly all year 14 leavers went on to higher education.

Data on Year 12 (Key Stage 4) performance

GCSE and GCSE equivalent subjects - *following permitted exclusions	2010	2011	2012
*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	74.6	86.5	93.1
<i>Comparison with the NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	<i>Well below average</i>	<i>Well below average</i>	<i>In line with the average</i>
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics	70.4	82.4	90.3
<i>Comparison with the NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	<i>Well below average</i>	<i>Well below average</i>	<i>In line with the average</i>
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	93	94.5	97.2
Percentage of school leavers entitled to free school meals achieving 5 or more GCSEs Grades A*-C or equivalent (including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics)	80	50	66.7

Source: Data as held and verified by the school, with DE benchmarks³

The pupils' achievement in GCSE⁴ at grades A*-C in at least seven subjects including English and mathematics has increased over the previous three years, and is currently in line with the average for similar Northern Ireland (NI) selective schools. There has been a rising trend over the last seven years at this level. The majority of subjects at GCSE level are within or above five percentage points of the respective NI average and there is

² For additional performance data in public examinations, including in vocational subjects, see Appendix 1

³ DE Circular 2011/03: 'School Development Planning and Target-Setting'.

⁴ General Certificate of Secondary Education

evidence of sustained improvement across most subjects. The small minority of pupils entitled to free school meals who attain at the expected level in GCSE examinations is average for selective schools. The achievement of pupils at GCSE grades A*-B has been identified, appropriately, as an area for improvement by the school; this is endorsed by the findings of the inspection.

Data on Year 14 (A2) performance

GCE A Level or equivalent	2010	2011	2012
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels and equivalents in at least 3 subjects	96.3	94.6	96.9
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	68.5	72.9	59.4
<i>Comparison with the NI average for similar schools, based on FSME</i>	<i>Well below average</i>	<i>In line with the average</i>	<i>Well below average</i>

Source: Data as held and verified by the school.

The pupils achieve variable standards at GCE A⁵ level. In two of the last three years, the percentage of pupils achieving three or more GCE A Level grades at A-C has been well below the NI average for similar selective schools and, over this time, approximately one-third of the pupils failed to achieve at the expected level. Over the previous three years, a majority of subjects are within or above five percentage points of the respective NI average at GCE A-C. The school's results in the small number of vocational courses offered are good.

For a selective school, there is wide variation in the academic ability of the intake of the pupils in year 8 from year to year; the school's internal assessment data reveal that the ability of the Year 8 intake is low when compared with similar selective schools. The decline in the GCSE results in 2010, replicated in the GCE A level results in 2012, reflects the diversity in the ability level of the 2005-06 Year 8 intake, which was uncharacteristically low for this school. Overall, there is an improving and upward trend in GCSE and GCE 'A' level results over a sustained period. The school needs to provide more support and challenge for all of the pupils and, in particular, greater stretch for the more able.

3. PROVISION FOR LEARNING

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

KEY FINDINGS

3.1.1 The quality of the provision for learning, teaching and assessment is very good.

The provision in English and science is good, and in physical education it is very good⁶.

High quality teaching is a key feature of the school. Almost all the lessons observed were good or very good in almost equal measure, with a small number outstanding. Key strengths of these lessons include: brisk pacing, focused questioning, clear teacher exposition and regular opportunities for purposeful peer-evaluation of learning. There are high levels of mutual respect between teachers and pupils which enhances the learning.

⁵ General Certificate of Education Advanced

⁶ For detailed findings of the provision in English, physical education and science see Appendix 2.

Assessment and feedback, which helps the pupils to learn, is inconsistently effective across the school and needs to be improved.

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

KEY FINDINGS

The quality of the pastoral care is outstanding.

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is outstanding.

The significant strengths of the pastoral provision include: the inclusive community ethos within classes and throughout the school; the high degree of input that the pupils have into the life and work of the school and the very good levels of pupil participation in a range of extra-curricular activities. The school has developed effective working relationships with a wide range of external agencies and professionals which support the more vulnerable pupils and those at risk of marginalisation. The key outcomes of the excellent work in pastoral care include: the development of the pupils' independence and maturity in thought and action, high levels of confidence and self-esteem; exemplary behaviour and a strong sense of respect and fellowship which the pupils have for one another.

The pupils, the parents and the governors all expressed strong appreciation for the high quality of the care guidance and support.

The overall quality of the provision for pupils with special educational needs is good.

The pupils who require additional support with their learning achieve good standards and develop their confidence in a supportive school environment; almost all of these pupils progress to higher or further education. Individual pupils gain greatly from effective early identification of their needs, from tracking of their progress, from carefully planned and detailed individual support plans and from very good support from classroom assistants. There is a clear and effective commitment by the whole school to ensure the inclusion of pupils who have special educational needs, or who are more vulnerable or at risk of marginalisation, in all aspects of school life and to nurture their emotional development.

The quality of the provision for careers education, information, advice and guidance is good.

The pupils benefit from good quality careers advice and guidance. Their skills and personal qualities are developed through well-planned lessons, complemented by additional contributors from outside the school. The Department for Employment and Learning careers service staff advise pupils appropriately in making informed decisions and each pupil receives career guidance through individual interviews with the head of careers. Careers advice is enhanced through joint activities with other schools in the Coleraine Area Learning Partnership (CALP).

3.1.3 The curricular provision for the pupils is good.

KEY FINDINGS

The curriculum at Key Stage (KS) 3 is suitably broad and balanced. At KS4, the school is working towards the requirements of the Entitlement Framework and is well on course to meet the target by 2015. At post-16, the school has extended its curriculum to include a range of applied and vocational courses that are relevant to the career aspirations of its pupils. The senior leadership and management team (SLMT) has prioritised the need to develop further the range of vocational options at post-16, which, given the diverse range of the ability in the school, would benefit the pupils.

Throughout the school, there is a wide range of extra-curricular activities and initiatives which develop well the pupils' personal and inter-personal skills and promote their sense of social responsibility and respect for others.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 The overall quality of leadership and the management is good.

KEY FINDINGS

The Principal, SLMT and the governors provide coherent leadership and effective challenge and accountability. The leadership has identified appropriate whole school priorities for improvement, including the need to improve examination outcomes for the pupils. There is clear evidence that the priorities in the school development plan (SDP) are having a positive effect through the rising standards at GCSE level.

The effective leadership articulates a clear vision for the work of the school which is underpinned by the Dominican ethos. The school nurtures the individual needs of the pupils, encourages their diverse talents, promotes a sense of self-worth and develops their full potential as confident and well-rounded individuals who are able to contribute to society and the economy. The SMLT team has implemented very appropriate strategic actions to promote improvement and the links between the pastoral and academic support for the pupils is coherent and effective.

The middle managers are developing well their capacity for self-evaluation and they lead and manage their areas of responsibility effectively. While there are good links with the work of the SLMT and working relationships across the school are very positive, more formal, regular systems of monitoring and evaluation and more frequent dissemination of the most effective practices would further promote improvement.

The school development plan meets fully the requirements of the Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (NI) 2010 and is of a very good quality. The school development plan priorities are informed appropriately by consultation, self-evaluation and the use of performance data. The success criteria in the associated action plans lack sufficient quantifiable detail against which progress can be evaluated more closely.

The governors are well-informed of important aspects of the work and life of the school; they have a good understanding of whole-school performance in public examinations, financial matters and the need to maintain collaborative partnerships to widen curricular provision for the pupils. The parents, staff and school community can have a high degree of confidence in the effectiveness of the governance.

The ETI reported to the Principal and representatives of the governors the very few areas of concern arising from the questionnaires and, where appropriate, these have been commented on within the report. Some respondents, as well as the governors, are concerned about justified inadequacies in the accommodation. Nevertheless, the limited accommodation is managed as well as can be expected to support learning and teaching.

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 guidance issued by the Department of Education.

The school has established a very good range of purposeful links and partnerships, locally, nationally and internationally to support pupils' educational and pastoral needs.

5. CONCLUSION

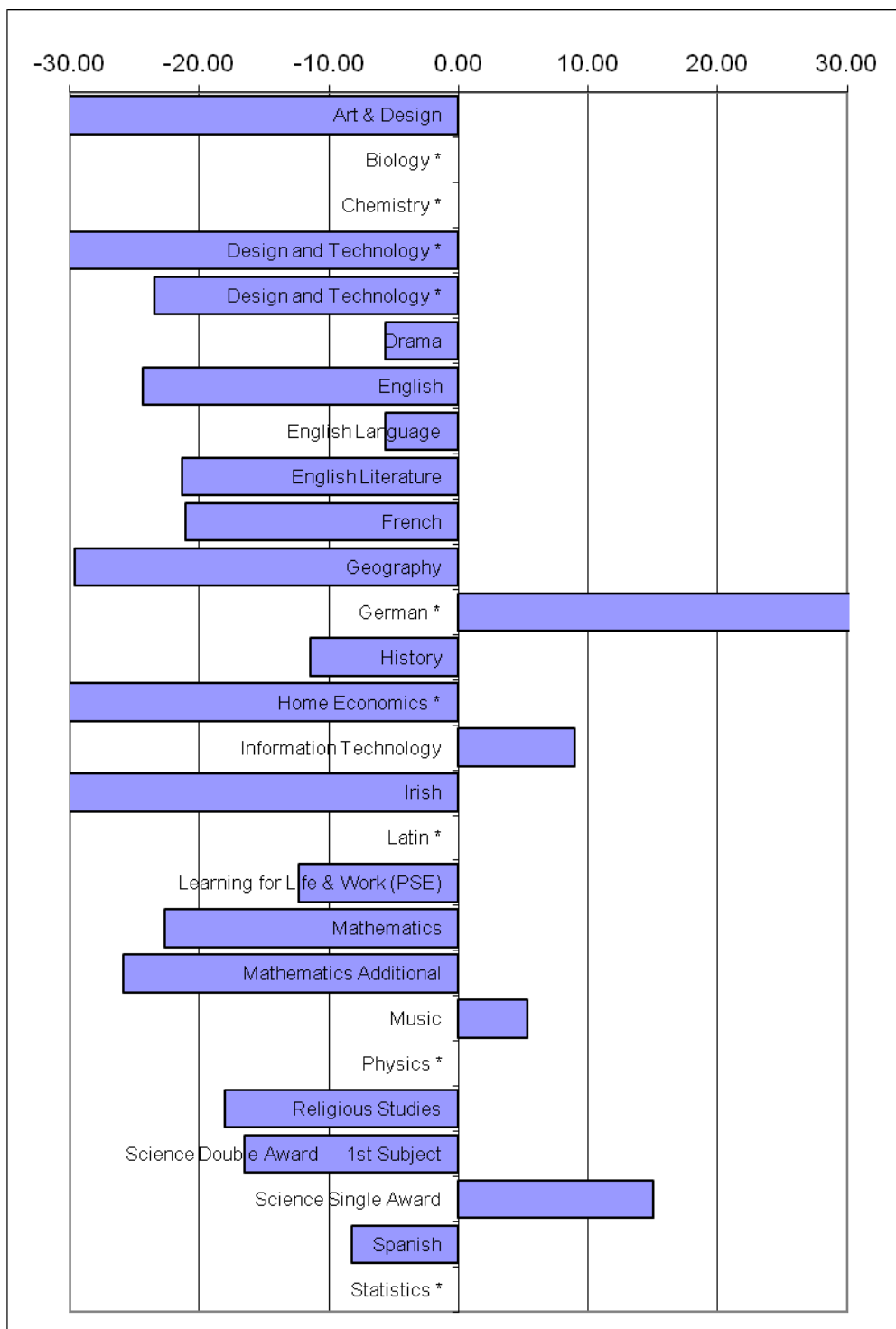
5.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school is good. The school has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address.

5.2 The area for improvement is: the need to raise the overall standards achieved by the pupils in public examinations, particularly at GCSE at grades A*-B.

ETI will monitor the school's progress on the areas for improvement.

GCSE EXAMINATION RESULTS

Comparison with the three-year NI average at grades A* to B from 2009-10 to 2011-12



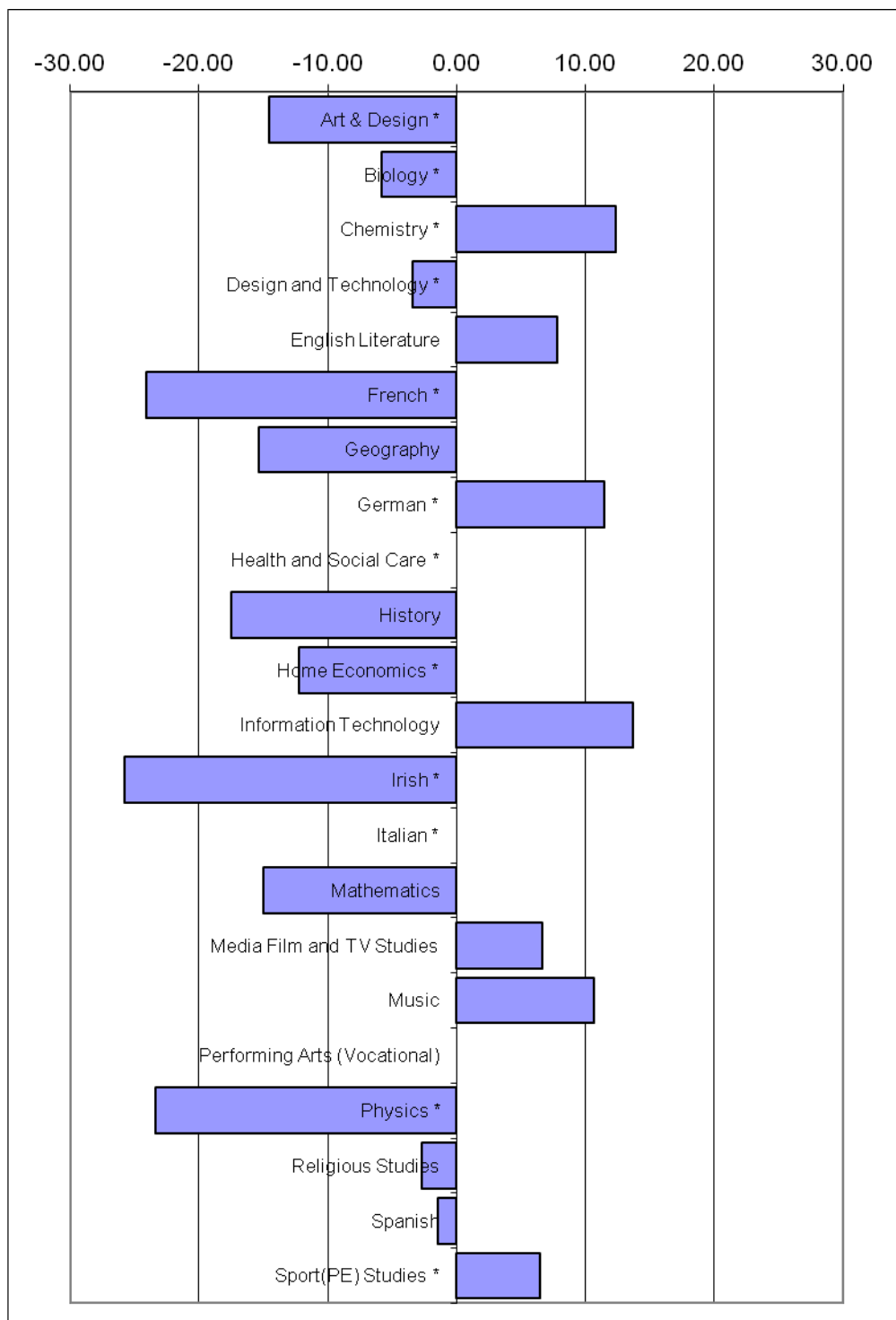
* fewer than 30 entries over the past three years

** fewer than 30 entries over the past three years with no entries in 2011 or 2012

*** new subject with first cohort of fewer than 30 entered in 2012

GCE EXAMINATION RESULTS

Comparison with the three-year NI average at grades A* to C from 2009-10 to 2011-12



* subjects with fewer than 20 entries over the last three years

OTHER RESULTS: Key Stage 4

Applied and Vocational Level 2 qualifications taken in the last three years.

OTHER EXAMINATION RESULTS: KEY STAGE 4

GCSE Subject	2010		2011		2012		Total entry over 3 years
	% A*-C	% A*-E	% A*-C	% A*-E	% A*-C	% A*-E	
Business & Communications Systems					A*-C 92.86%	100%	14

OTHER RESULTS: Post-16

Applied and Vocational Level 3 Courses taken in at least two of the last three years.

GCE Subject	2010		2011		2012		Total entry over 3 years
	% A*-C	% A*-E	% A*-C	% A*-E	% A*-C	% A*-E	
Health & Social Care	100%	100%	90%	100%	91.67%	100%	30
Performing Arts	90.91%	100%	100%	100%	92.31%	100%	31

Level 3	2010	2011	2012	Total entry over 3 years
	% pass	% pass	% pass	
<i>Construction</i>	100% 2 Distinctions 1 Merit			3
<i>Engineering</i>	100% 4 Distinctions	100% 2 Distinctions	100% 1 Distinction 1 Pass	8

LEAVERS' DESTINATIONS

2010/11

	Year 12	NI %	Year 13/14	NI%
Total Number of Leavers	15		60	
Another School	20%	32.5	3%	2.1
Employment	0%	2.4	5%	3.6
Full-time Further Education	73%	50.6	10%	10
Full-time Higher Education	N/A	N/A	80%	80.2
Full-time Training	7%	8.4	2%	0.8
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	0%	1.2	0%	1.3
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	0%	4.8	0%	2

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS: ENGLISH, PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

English

The provision for English is good.

The strengths include:

- the very good standards in A level English literature;
- the quality of the teaching observed, the majority of which was very good or better;
- the commitment and enthusiasm of the teachers who work in a productive spirit of teamwork;
- the effective leadership of the head of department who leads by example and promotes English and literacy across the school and in the wider community; and
- the high levels of engagement and motivation among the pupils.

The area for improvement is the need to:

- disseminate the very good and outstanding practice in the department in order to improve further the satisfactory standards in GCSE English and English Literature which have been improving steadily over the past three years.

Physical Education

The overall quality of the provision for physical education is very good.

The strengths of the work include:

- the very good leadership of the head of department, who places an important focus on sharing the very good practice within the department;
- the consistently high quality of the teaching, typified by excellent use of open-ended questions to develop the pupils' understanding and application of a wide range of skills;
- the high participation rates and enthusiastic response of the pupils to the well-planned lessons and the after-school sports activities;
- the very good quality of the self-evaluation cycle characterised by, for example, the introduction of applied courses in sports studies in response to the pupils' needs, interests and aspirations;

- the effective working relationships within the team of teachers who work hard to deliver a broad and balanced physical education programme; and
- the very good focus on building upon the youngest pupils' prior learning in physical education, including, importantly, the work they had completed during their primary education.

Science

The quality of the provision for science is good.

The strengths of the work include:

- the wide range of curricular activities related to science available to the pupils which promote well the pupils' enjoyment and understanding of science;
- the quality of the teaching observed which was always good or very good, and the effective use of practical, experimental and investigative work to consolidate and extend the pupils' knowledge and understanding;
- the good quality of self-evaluation and action to effect improvement, characterised by the commitment of all of the teachers to the rigorous and robust review of planning, classroom practice and outcomes;
- the recent and steady improvements in the standards attained by the pupils in public examinations, particularly in GCSE Single Award science; and
- the effective, collegial leadership and management of the science provision.

The area for improvement is the need to:

- raise further the standards attained by the pupils in GCSE Double Award science, particularly at grades A* to B.

ACCOMMODATION

Significant areas of the school's accommodation are inadequate and fall short of acceptable standards, such as the narrow spiral staircases in parts of the building. The current facilities do not support fully the pupils in certain areas of the curriculum. For example, the specialist accommodation for science (physics and chemistry), music and careers education have major deficiencies in areas like ventilation, lighting and storage. Despite the school's best efforts, the inadequate accommodation is impinging adversely on the quality of the learning experiences for the pupils.

HEALTH and SAFETY

The school needs to ensure that class sizes in Technology and Design comply with the Department of Education Circular 2004/5.

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