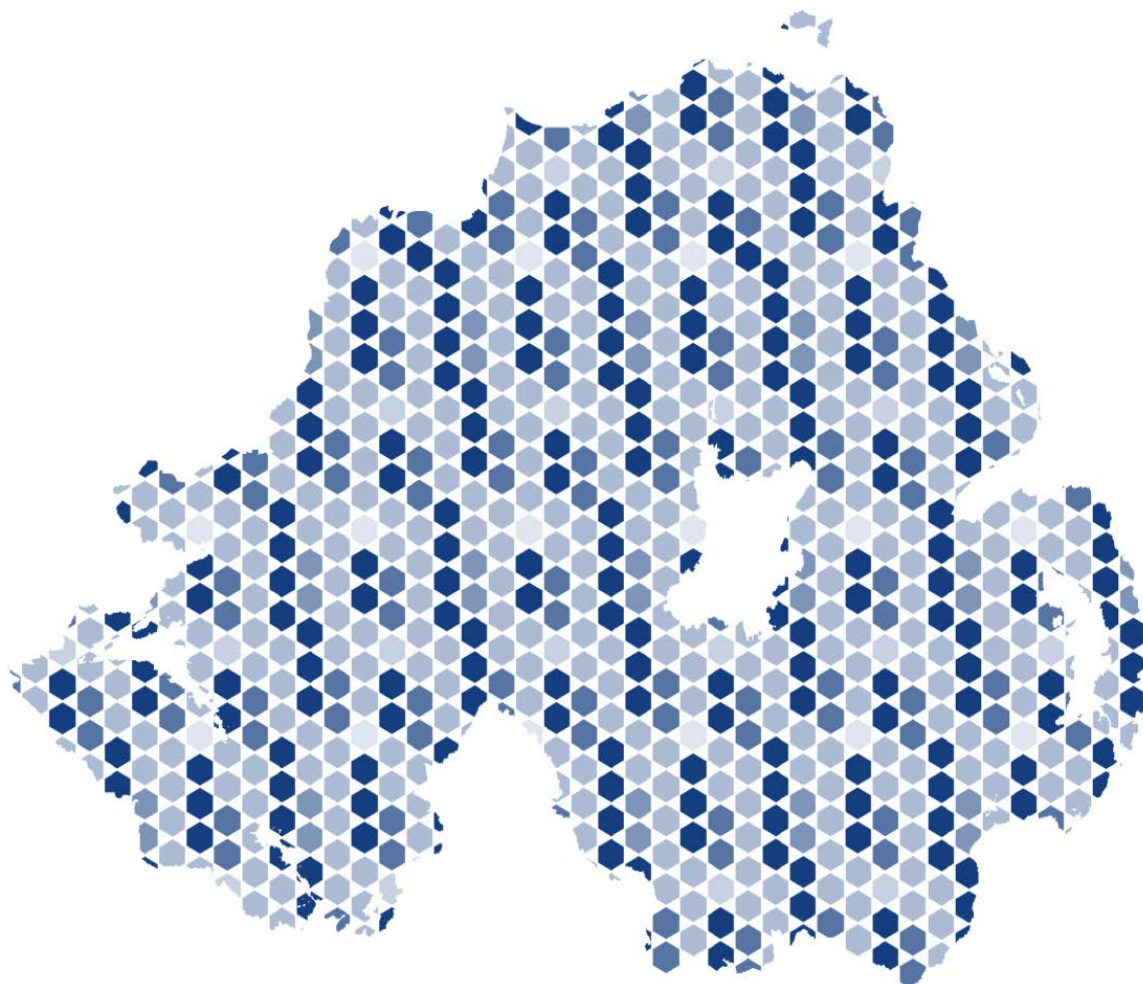


# POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Hunterhouse College, Belfast

Voluntary selective, girls, 11-18 school

Report of an Inspection  
in April 2013

## CONTENTS

Section	Page
1. INTRODUCTION Including the overall finding of the inspection	1
2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS	2
3. PROVISION FOR LEARNING	4
4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	5
5. CONCLUSION	7

### APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1	PERFORMANCE & STATISTICAL DATA
APPENDIX 2	SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS: English, science and history

## 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>.

## 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 (grades) in reports:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

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

Questionnaire	Number issued	Number returned	Percentage returned	Number with comments
Parents	145	69	47.5	50
Teachers	55	37	67	5
Support Staff	30	10	33	*

\* fewer than 5

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL

Hunterhouse College is situated on the Lisburn Road, near Finaghy, in South Belfast. Nearly all of the pupils come from the South Belfast and Lisburn areas. The enrolment has increased over the last five years and there are 199 pupils in the sixth form. The school has identified 10% of the year 8 to year 12 pupils as requiring additional support with their learning.

The school prides itself on its inclusive ethos as a cross-community college. In addition, the school caters for pupils who have a broad range of abilities. The very high level of parental satisfaction with the school, as expressed in the parental questionnaires returned, indicates strong community support.

Hunterhouse College	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Year 8 Intake	101	101	101	102
Enrolment	693	710	718	705
% Attendance (NI Average)	90 (92.3)	90 (92.3)	91 (92.6)	NA
FSME Percentage	6.5	7.0	5.9	7.0
% (No) of pupils on SEN register	8.1 (56)	8.7 (62)	7.5 (54)	10.1 (53)
No. of pupils with statements of educational needs	*	*	*	*
No. of newcomers	*	*	*	*
<b>Intake</b>				
% of Y8 pupils with L5 English	46.5	52.5	52.5	47.1
% of Y8 pupils with L5 mathematics	57.4	70.3	64.4	63.7
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in English	99	98	100	97.1
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in mathematics	99	98	100	96.1

**Source:** data as held by the school.

\* fewer than 5

### 1.2 FOCUS AND SCOPE OF THE INSPECTION

The standard inspection of Hunterhouse College 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 English, science and history provision, and provided 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 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, progress towards the Entitlement Framework.

### 1.3 OVERALL FINDINGS OF THE INSPECTION

Overall Performance Level	Satisfactory
Achievements and Standards	Satisfactory
Provision for Learning	Satisfactory
Leadership and Management	Satisfactory

## 2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

**2.1 The overall achievements and standards achieved by the pupils are satisfactory.**

### KEY FINDINGS

The pupils are courteous, highly motivated, and their behaviour in and out of class is exemplary. They exhibit a strong sense of pride and identity with their school, and most manage their learning very well. There is a clear sense of order around the school and the pupils of all ages mix well together.

The quality of the presentation of the pupils' work is invariably very good. In the majority of classes observed, the pupils are positively disposed to learn, exhibit a very good standard of thinking, communication, personal and social skills, and develop these well through a range of initiatives, including mentoring other pupils. The individuality and independence of the pupils are well fostered. The sixth form pupils develop good study skills through their participation in a well-conceived guided learning programme managed by a member of the senior leadership team. Overall, the pupils demonstrate a very positive disposition to learning, and most acquire and demonstrate very effective inter-personal skills.

The proportion of pupils progressing into higher education has increased; most recently, in 2012, nearly all year 14 leavers went on to higher education.

Most of the pupils identified as requiring additional support with their learning, achieve standards in line with or above their abilities.

In general, the quality and level of skills that all pupils develop to overcome barriers in their learning is good. However, the considerable strength of the work of the school in helping the pupils to develop as young people needs to be harnessed much more effectively in preparing for their success in public examinations.

### 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	86	84	94
<b>Comparison with the NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</b>	<b>Well below average</b>	<b>Well below average</b>	<b>In line with the average</b>
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics	84	79	87

<b>Comparison with the NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</b>	<b>Well below average</b>	<b>Well below average</b>	<b>Below average</b>
<i>*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects</i>	94	94	98
<i>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)</i>	100	100	100

**Source:** Data as held and verified by the school, with DE benchmarks<sup>1</sup>

While examination performance is improving at both GCSE<sup>2</sup> and GCE 'A'<sup>3</sup> level, examination standards require continued improvement.

Pupils' performance in GCSE grades A\*-C in at least seven subjects has increased over the previous three years to be in line with the average for similar Northern Ireland (NI) selective schools. The pupils' achievement in at least seven subjects at grades A\*-C, including English and mathematics is variable; while it improved from 2011 to 2012, it requires yet further improvement. Over the past three years the small proportion of the pupils entitled to free school meals achieved at the expected levels. GCSE results at grades A\*-B have been identified as a challenge that needs to be met by the school; this is endorsed by the findings of the inspection. Key academic subjects are below the three-year average. Two-fifths of the subjects are within or above five percentage points of the respective average for grammar schools. There is evidence of varied but sustained improvement across nearly all subjects at GCSE level which is confirmed by the school's own predictions based on standardised tests.

#### **Data on Year 14 (A2) performance:**

<b>GCE A Level or equivalent</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels and equivalents in at least 3 subjects	83	90	94
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	61	52	64
<b>Comparison with the NI average for similar schools, based on FSME</b>	<b>Well below average</b>	<b>Well below average</b>	<b>Well below average</b>

**Source:** Data as held and verified by the school.

While the results in GCE A level subjects have improved over the past six years, the percentage of pupils achieving three or more A Level grades at A\*-C is well below the NI average for similar selective schools. The school's analysis of GCE A level results, based on GCSE outcomes for individual pupils, shows that over the past three years 84% of the pupils are achieving at or above their predicted A level outcome. While outcomes reflect to some extent the range of ability of the year 13 intake, these examination results require significant further improvement.

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. The school has plans to extend this provision next year and the inspection findings endorse the need for the plans.

<sup>1</sup> DE Circular 2011/03: 'School Development Planning and Target-Setting'.

<sup>2</sup> General Certificate of Secondary Education

<sup>3</sup> General Certificate of Education Advanced

### **3. PROVISION FOR LEARNING**

#### **3.1 The quality of the provision for learning is satisfactory.**

##### **KEY FINDINGS**

##### **3.1.1 The quality of the provision for learning, teaching and assessment is satisfactory.**

The provision in English is good and in science and history, it is satisfactory.

In three-quarters of the lessons observed, the quality of the learning and teaching was good or better. The pupils work well in groups and in pairs, resulting in a high quality of learning, including their very good interpretation and synthesis of key concepts. The teachers build effectively on the pupils' responses, and the pupils use very well the responses of others to improve the quality of their learning, reaching the standards of which they are capable. The teachers make the learning intentions explicit for the pupils and use questioning skilfully. The teachers' positive and written feedback on the pupils' work helps to inform both the pupils' progress and the teachers' forward planning. The teachers plan a good range of learning activities, including the effective use of ICT, which engage the pupils actively in their learning.

In the one-quarter of the lessons observed which were less than effective, the pace of learning was too slow with insufficient challenge for the pupils, resulting in a considerable lack of progression in their learning. The teachers respond insufficiently to the needs and abilities of all of the pupils, and fail to plan to meet their needs. There is an over-emphasis on closed questioning; ICT is not utilised effectively.

The best practice needs to be adopted consistently by all departments across the school to ensure the necessary improvement in standards and achievements.

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

##### **KEY FINDINGS**

##### **The quality of the pastoral care is good.**

The pupils are enthusiastic about the good quality care and support provided by the teachers for their learning. The School Council provides an effective platform for the pupils to participate in the work of the school community. The staff work effectively to ensure that vulnerable pupils with personal, social, emotional and health issues are safe, and that they are helped to overcome barriers to their learning. The working relationships between staff and pupils are good.

Through good quality self-evaluation, the school has identified appropriately many of the necessary areas for development in the pastoral provision. These include: a review of staff development; effective transition through the key stages for pupils; assertive mentoring; dissemination of high quality learning and teaching; and, the introduction of a Pastoral Support Register.

The pupils indicated that they felt safe and secure in school, and reported that they know what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being.

**The overall quality of the provision for pupils who have special educational needs is good.**

The pupils who have special educational needs make good progress. The majority attain accreditation across a range of subjects and go on to higher education. They benefit from the highly integrated and inclusive ethos throughout the school, and gain much from their involvement in a wide variety of extra-curricular activities which develops their confidence and self esteem.

In the best practice, most of the teachers take good account of the individual education plans to inform their planning for differentiation in learning and teaching. As a result, the pupils are actively engaged in well-planned tasks. To improve the provision further, the special educational needs co-ordinator has identified appropriately the need to monitor and evaluate practice in the classrooms more rigorously and disseminate the best practice more widely.

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

The pupils make informed choices based upon sound advice during their key transition years. They make good use of 'e-progress files' to assess their personal skills and to guide their career decisions. Each pupil receives a well-structured and useful personal career guidance interview at strategically important times. A comprehensive range of teachers, guest speakers and external agencies is used very effectively to enhance the pupils' learning experiences and inform career decision-making. Timetabled CEIAG classes in year 10 are needed to improve the progression in the teaching programme for careers. The head of careers education provides effective leadership and has identified appropriate areas for improvement, based on her existing effective monitoring, evaluation and review of the current provision.

### **3.1.3 The curricular provision for the pupils is good.**

The curriculum at Key Stage (KS) 3 is suitably broad and balanced. The provision at KS 4 and post-16 meets the requirements of the Entitlement Framework.

At post-16, the school has extended its curriculum in recent years to include a broad range of applied courses that are relevant to the career aspirations of its pupils. Importantly, the school plans to extend further the post-16 curriculum to meet more effectively the needs and abilities of all of the pupils. Some pupils benefit from accessing a small number of courses offered in collaboration with other schools in the South Belfast Area Learning Community. Pupils would benefit further by accessing more extensively other collaborative courses offered by schools in the area learning community.

## **4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

### **4.1 The quality of the leadership and the management is satisfactory.**

#### **KEY FINDINGS**

Robust school leadership, provided collectively by the principal, with appropriate support, challenge and leadership from the governors, has led to a gradual improvement in standards over time. For example, key appointments including new heads of English and of technology and design have resulted in improved learning and standards in those subjects.



The senior leadership team has prioritised a more effective use of benchmarked assessment and examination data, already extensively gathered, to challenge low expectation and under-achievement. In addition, well-conceived strategies are being used to improve the quality of the pupils' learning in, for example, CEIAG, mentoring, the development of a learning resource centre and skill development. Through a weekly "learning and teaching forum" teaching staff present and disseminate examples of good practice. The school leadership is effective in ensuring that the pupils reach good standards in their personal dispositions, skills and their capability for life-long learning; the standards achieved in this respect range from good to very good.

However, the pace of improvement in examination standards remains too slow. The roles of the various members of senior management need to be re-defined, clarified that they need to work closely together and be more sharply focused on the necessary improvements.

The leadership and management of the school's work in implementing effectively the Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education policy and shared education objectives is very effective, including work on an IFI<sup>4</sup>-funded 'Change-makers' project. This important work has ensured that the pupils develop attitudes and dispositions which encourage them to play an active role as citizens in an increasingly diverse society.

School development planning<sup>5</sup> is based on an honest, in-depth analysis of data which identifies the urgent need to raise standards. There are examples of some good quality accompanying action plans.

The governors are well aware of the whole-school performance in public examinations and the need to raise further the standards attained by the pupils. They understand and exercise well their role in providing an effective leadership, challenge and support function to the Principal. The parents, staff and school community can have confidence in the aspects of governance inspected. The governors now need to develop their role further, to review and challenge, where necessary, evidence presented to them from a fuller range of post holders on the effectiveness of the action being taken to raise standards within their areas of responsibility.

The majority of the subject leaders and co-ordinators in most departments are developing well their capacity for leading self-evaluation resulting in improvement. They need to use a greater range of first-hand evidence on the quality of learning and teaching and to disseminate more effectively the existing very good classroom practice. Leaders at both senior and middle management levels need to develop their professional leadership capacity, and the skills of monitoring, evaluating and leading change within their teams.

The school has established a very good range of purposeful links and partnerships, locally, and further afield, which benefit the pupils' educational and pastoral development.

On the basis of the evidence available at the time of inspection, the school has comprehensive safeguarding arrangements which reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education.

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<sup>4</sup> International Fund for Ireland

<sup>5</sup> The school development plan meets the requirements of the School Development Planning Regulations (NI) 2010.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

**5.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school is satisfactory;** the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in achievements and standards, learning and teaching and leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all of the learners are to be met more effectively.

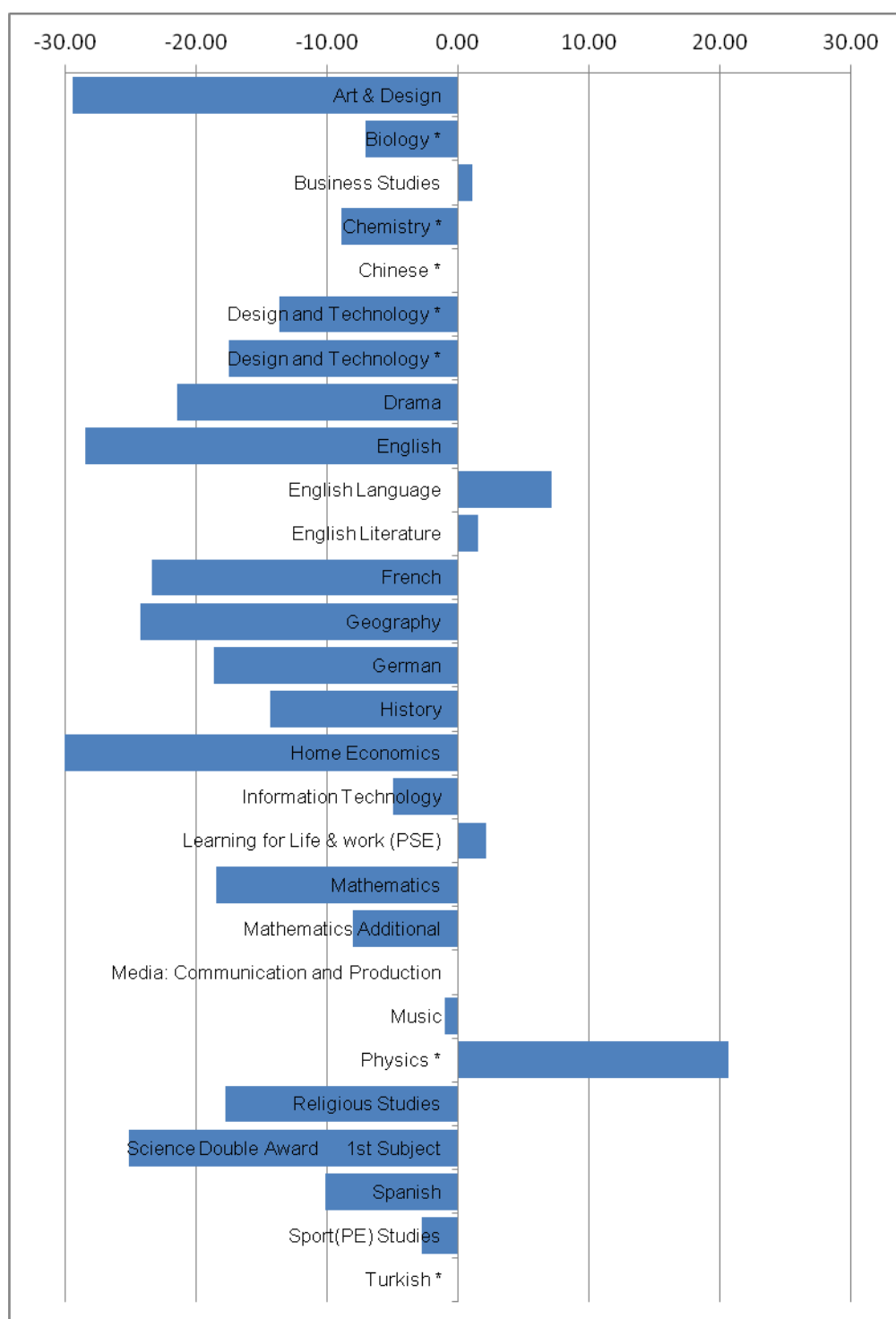
**5.2 The main areas for improvement include the need to:**

- raise further the overall standards attained by the pupils in public examinations at grades A\*-B at GCSE level and in general at GCE A level;
- improve further the quality of learning and teaching across the subject departments; and
- build further the capacity of managers at all levels, through well-targeted staff development, to monitor, evaluate and review the provision systematically in order to bring about improvement.

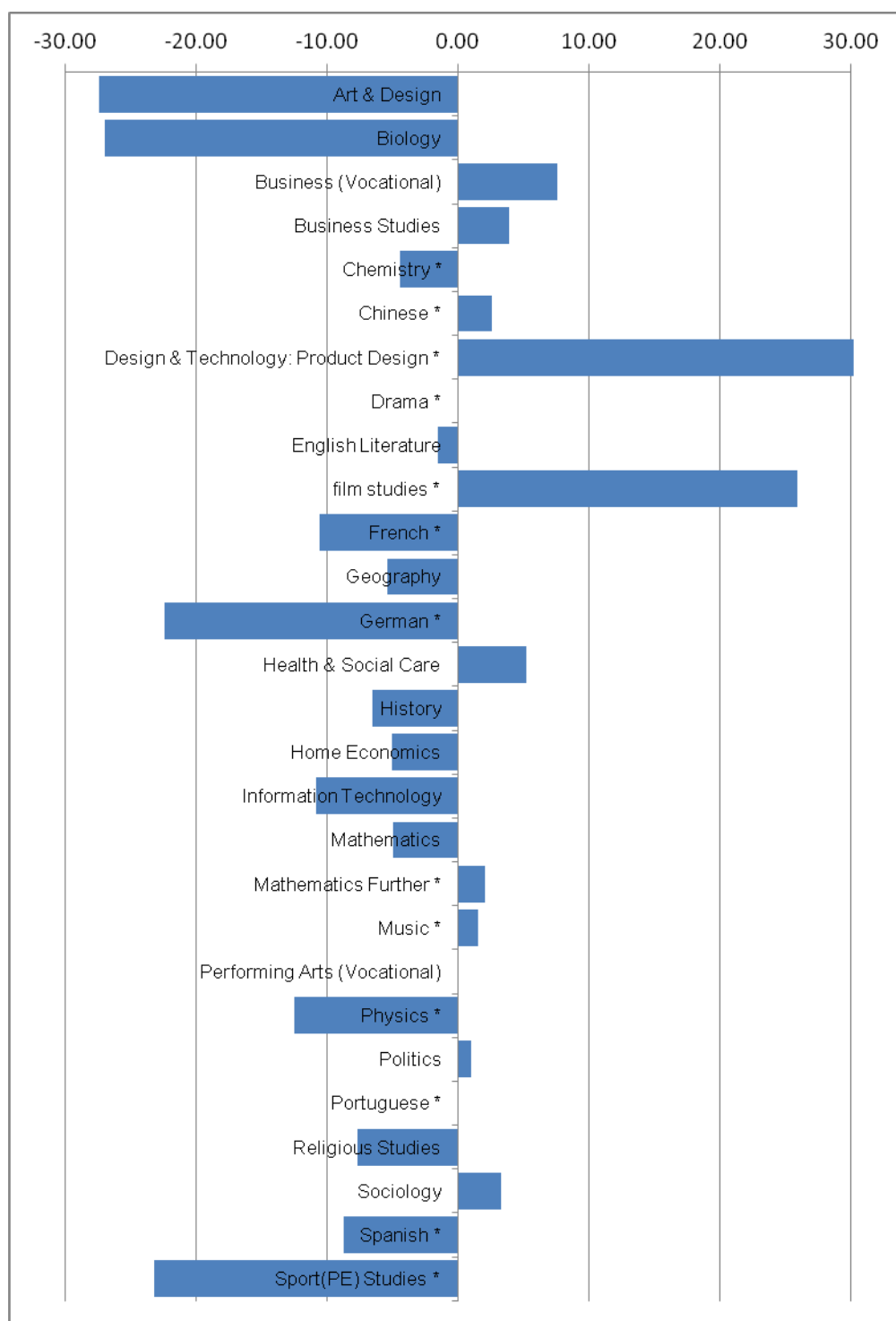
**5.3** The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement over the next 18 -24 months.

## APPENDIX 1

### 1.1 Comparison with the three-year NI average GCSE grades A\* to B 2009-10 to 2011-12



### 1.3 Comparison with the three-year NI average GCE grades A\* to C 2009-10 to 2011-12



#### 1.4 LEAVERS' DESTINATIONS 2010-11

	Year 12	NI %	Year 13/14	NI %
Total Number of Leavers	25		100	
Another School	48%	32.5	*	2.1
Employment	*	2.4	6%	3.6
Full-time Further Education	20%	50.6	12%	10
Full-time Higher Education	N/A	N/A	74%	80.2
Full-time Training	16%	8.4	*	0.8
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	*	1.2	*	1.3
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	8%	4.8	*	2

\*= fewer than 5

## **SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS: ENGLISH, SCIENCE AND HISTORY**

### **English**

#### **The provision for English is good.**

The strengths of the provision include the:

- very good working relationships in all of the classes observed;
- good standards attained in the GCSE English Language and A level English literature courses taken;
- quality of the teaching observed, most of which was good or very good, in almost equal proportion;
- updated planning and detailed schemes which guide the teaching and learning effectively; and
- effective leadership and the collegial ethos fostered by the head of department.

The areas for improvement are the need to:

- improve further the standards attained by the pupils in GCSE English courses taken; and
- develop further the processes for monitoring and evaluation within the department, in order to identify and disseminate the best practice in learning and teaching.

### **Science**

#### **The provision for science is satisfactory.**

The strengths of the work include the:

- wide range of curricular activities related to science available to the pupils which promotes well the pupils' enjoyment and understanding of science;
- quality of learning and teaching which was good or better in a majority of the lessons observed;
- effective use of practical activities to extend and consolidate the pupils' knowledge and understanding of scientific theory; and
- collegial management of the department, and the high level of commitment of the teachers to the review of resources to support the learning and teaching.

The areas for improvement are the need to:

- improve the standards attained by the pupils in public examinations; and
- develop self-evaluation further, including a more rigorous approach to the monitoring and evaluation of the work of the department, in order to improve the overall quality of the provision for science.

## **History**

**The provision for history is satisfactory.**

The strengths of the provision include the:

- opportunities for the pupils to develop their extended writing in KS3;
- quality of the resources at GCE A level to promote greater independence in the pupils' learning;
- use of educational visits to engage the pupils with the past in their locality; and
- rigorous analysis of data by the head of department to identify appropriate areas for improvement.

The areas for improvement are the need to:

- raise the overall standards of learning at KS3, GCSE and A-level; and
- ensure that all the pupils' learning experiences are of a consistently high standard through the precise planning for a wide range of learning activities, in particular to develop the pupils' thinking skills.

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