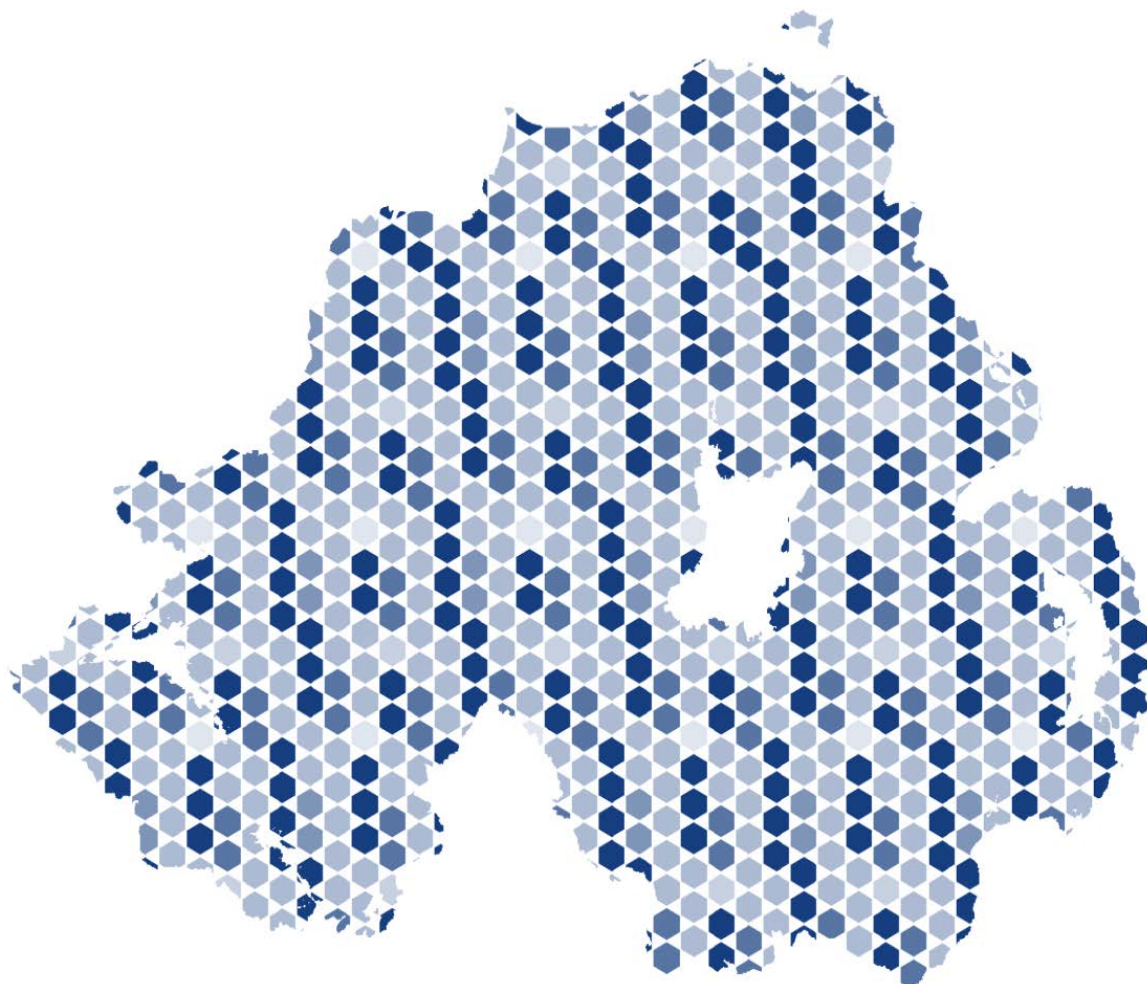


# POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

## Rathmore Grammar School

Voluntary, co-educational, 11.18, selective school

Report of an Inspection  
in October 2012

## CONTENTS

Section	Page
1. INTRODUCTION Including the overall finding of the inspection	1
2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS	2
3. PROVISION FOR LEARNING	3
4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	5
5. CONCLUSION	6
<b>APPENDICES</b>	
APPENDIX 1	PERFORMANCE & STATISTICAL DATA
APPENDIX 2	SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS: English, mathematics and modern languages
APPENDIX 3	ACCOMMODATION AND/OR HEALTH AND SAFETY

## 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	255	115	60%	73
Teachers	82	71	87%	27
Support Staff	44	16	36%	9

## 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

Rathmore Grammar School is situated in Finaghy on the outskirts of Belfast. The pupils are drawn from a wide area which includes South and West Belfast, Lisburn, Crumlin, Moira and the surrounding areas. The school is regularly oversubscribed. The proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals and those requiring additional support with their learning is small. The school's attendance figures are high and above the NI average.

Rathmore Grammar School	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Year 8 Intake	186	181	181	182
Enrolment	1277	1275	1273	1273
% Attendance (NI Average)	96 (95)	96 (95)	97 (95)	
FSME Percentage	3	4	4	4
% (No) of pupils on SEN register	3 (43)	4 (56)	5 (72)	10 (121)
No. of pupils with statements of educational needs	16	16	13	12
No. of newcomers	-	-	-	-
<b>Intake</b>				
% of Y8 pupils with L5 English	81	83	83	79
% of Y8 pupils with L5 mathematics	93	97	93	92
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in English	99	100	100	100
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in mathematics	100	100	100	100

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

### 1.2 FOCUS AND SCOPE OF THE INSPECTION

The standard inspection of Rathmore Grammar School 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, mathematics and modern languages 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, the progress towards the Entitlement Framework.

### 1.3 OVERALL FINDINGS OF THE INSPECTION

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

## 2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

### 2.1 The standards achieved by the pupils are outstanding.

#### KEY FINDINGS

The pupils are courteous, highly motivated, and display a clear sense of pride in their school. They achieve the high expectations they set for themselves, both in terms of behaviour and for their academic goals. Their behaviour in and out of class is exemplary, and they demonstrate very positive attitudes toward their learning. The school's caring and supportive ethos enables the pupils to develop their social, emotional and spiritual maturity as they progress through the school.

#### Data on Year 12 (Key Stage 4) performance

GCSE and GCSE equivalent subjects	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	99	99	99
<i>Comparison with the NI average for similar schools in the same FSM category</i>	<i>Well above 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 including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics	99	98	99
<i>Comparison with the NI average for similar schools in the same FSM category</i>	<i>Well above average</i>	<i>Well above average</i>	<i>Well above average</i>
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	100	100	100
Percentage of FSM entitled school leavers achieving 5 or more GCSEs Grades A*-C or equivalent (including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics)	100	100	88

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

The pupils' attainment at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level is outstanding when compared with similar selective schools. Over the past 3 years, the outcomes at GCSE level have remained consistently high and well above the Northern Ireland (NI) average. At grades A\*- B, the standards attained by the pupils in the majority of the subjects surpasses the NI average by 10% points or more.

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

### Data on Year 14 (A2) performance

GCE A Level or equivalent	2010	2011	2012
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels & Equivalents in at least 3 subjects	99	99	99
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	94	88	89
<i>Comparison with the NI average for similar schools in the same FSM category</i>	<i>Significantly above average</i>	<i>Significantly above average</i>	<i>Significantly above average</i>

The pupils' attainment at the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) level is also outstanding. Over the past three years, the outcomes, at GCE A level have remained significantly above the NI average. The percentage of Year 14 pupils attaining Grade C or above in at least 3 GCE A levels, in almost all of the subjects, surpasses the NI average by 5% points or more. A significant minority exceed the average by 10% points or more.

### 3. PROVISION FOR LEARNING

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

#### KEY FINDINGS

**The quality of the provision in English, mathematics and modern languages is very good<sup>2</sup>.**

The quality of the lessons observed ranged from outstanding to satisfactory. In two fifths of the lessons, it was very good or better; in one-quarter, it was satisfactory.

In the most effective practice, the pupils benefited from well-planned, structured lessons which were linked to previous learning. The lessons were well paced and the level of challenge remained constantly high. The teachers used skilful questioning to encourage pupils to think and express their opinions; the skills and knowledge acquired were consolidated effectively through skilfully-planned plenary sessions.

Around one quarter of lessons were satisfactory; in these lessons, in particular, the learning was not sufficiently matched to the needs, interests and abilities of all of the pupils. The school is presently developing its self-evaluation arrangements to identify and disseminate better the existing good practice; given that one quarter of the lessons observed needed improvement, the inspection confirms that this is an appropriate priority.

**The quality of the provision for special educational needs is very good.**

The school is strongly committed to supporting pupils identified as requiring additional support with aspects of their learning. The pupils identified with special educational needs, and those with significant challenges, often associated with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), demonstrate continuous improvement in their learning and social development. The majority of the pupils for whom learning support is provided, achieve in line with or above their abilities. The school has appropriately identified the need to develop a consistent whole-school approach to supporting all pupils who require additional support, and is at an early stage of developing strategies to address this area.

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<sup>2</sup> For detailed findings of the provision in English, modern languages and science see Appendix 2.

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

#### **KEY FINDINGS**

A particular feature of the school is its strong sense of community, including the positive working relationships between the pupils and staff.

The pupils are highly motivated to do well and take responsibility for their own learning. They are articulate and, when given the opportunity, they display high levels of critical thinking.

The pupils benefit from the high priority given by the pastoral staff to their emotional health and well-being delivered through the taught personal development programmes. These programmes have a particular and noteworthy emphasis on the development of the pupils' emotional intelligence. The pupils' learning experiences are enhanced further through a wide range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities.

The development of the pupils' personal and social skills through high quality learning experiences is inconsistent across the school. The school needs to formalise its arrangements for the rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the overall pastoral provision in order to address these inconsistencies.

The pupils who met with members of the inspection team spoke with maturity about their connections with the school community and their wide range of learning experiences; they feel safe and secure in school and reported that they know what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being.

### **3.3 The curricular provision for the pupils is very good.**

#### **KEY FINDINGS**

The curriculum is suitably broad and balanced and meets effectively the learning needs of all of the pupils. The Principal and senior leadership team have a clear vision for, and demonstrate a strong commitment to the rationale which underpins the aims of the Entitlement Framework. This is communicated clearly to all staff and is integral to the school's pupil centred ethos. The school, through its own provision and through its participation in the South Belfast Area Learning Community (SBALC) is currently meeting the requirements of the Entitlement Framework at both KS4 and Post 16. There is good collaboration between the school and other education providers within the SBALC.

The very good quality and continuous improvement of the school's curriculum provision is directly linked to the school's development planning processes. The curriculum offer post 16 is relevant and appropriate to the pupils' interests and career aspirations. Almost all of the pupils who enrol in year 13 stay on for A level examinations and nearly all progress to higher education. Nevertheless, the school has rightly identified the need to explore pathways, particularly in vocational qualifications, to further extend the options available to all pupils.

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

All pupils in the school benefit from the well- planned range of taster events and talks targeted on specific careers which allow them to make better-informed career choices. The careers programme in the school provides good quality opportunities for the pupils in year 10 and year 12 to participate in careers interviews with the careers staff to help inform them on



appropriate subject choices at GCSE and GCE A level. The pupils in year 13 have good access to recently timetabled CEIAG classes which assist them well in making appropriate career decisions. There is a need, however, to provide discrete careers classes for KS3 and KS4 pupils to ensure they develop more effective personal career planning skills. The school has a clear vision for the future improvement of the provision, and has set realistic targets to achieve this goal, including a better embedding of careers advice within the individual subjects.

#### **4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

##### **4.1 The leadership and the management are very good.**

#### **KEY FINDINGS**

The Governors, Principal, senior leadership team (SLT) and staff are focused on maintaining and improving the excellent standards and outcomes obtained by the pupils.

The Principal provides very good strategic leadership of the school. She leads by example and is highly committed to meeting the pastoral and academic needs of all pupils. She sets appropriately high standards, both pastorally and academically, for herself, the staff and the pupils. She has a clear strategic vision for the school which is communicated effectively to all the staff. She is well supported by the senior leadership and middle management teams.

Since taking up appointment, the Principal has planned and implemented effective changes to the roles and responsibilities of the senior leadership team to take forward the identified strategic development priorities for the school. In addition, the SLT was strengthened further by the inclusion of new members and there is clear evidence from the inspection that these changes and adjustments are having a significant, positive impact on the school's development and further improvement. There remains a need to further strengthen the working links between the members of the SLT and their designated linked members of middle management, particularly in identifying and facilitating the dissemination of the most effective practice across the school to bring about further improvement.

The quality of work of most of the middle management in the school is very good and is instrumental in effecting school improvement. There is a need to support and develop further the leadership and professional capacity of middle managers in the school; in particular, to develop further their skills to monitor evaluate and lead change as necessary within their areas of responsibility.

The SDP meets fully the requirements of the School Development Plan Regulations (NI 2010). It is of a good quality and includes a very useful succinct summary of strengths, challenges and opportunities appropriate to the school. The governors are well informed about the life and work of the school; they work effectively with the Principal to ensure that the school is well-managed and provide challenge where needed. Given the findings of the inspection, the school meets the needs and expectations of the school community very effectively. The school's accommodation is excellent and contributes very well to the attractive learning environment throughout the school.

The ETI reported to the Principal and governors the many positive responses and the few concerns emerging from the questionnaires.

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

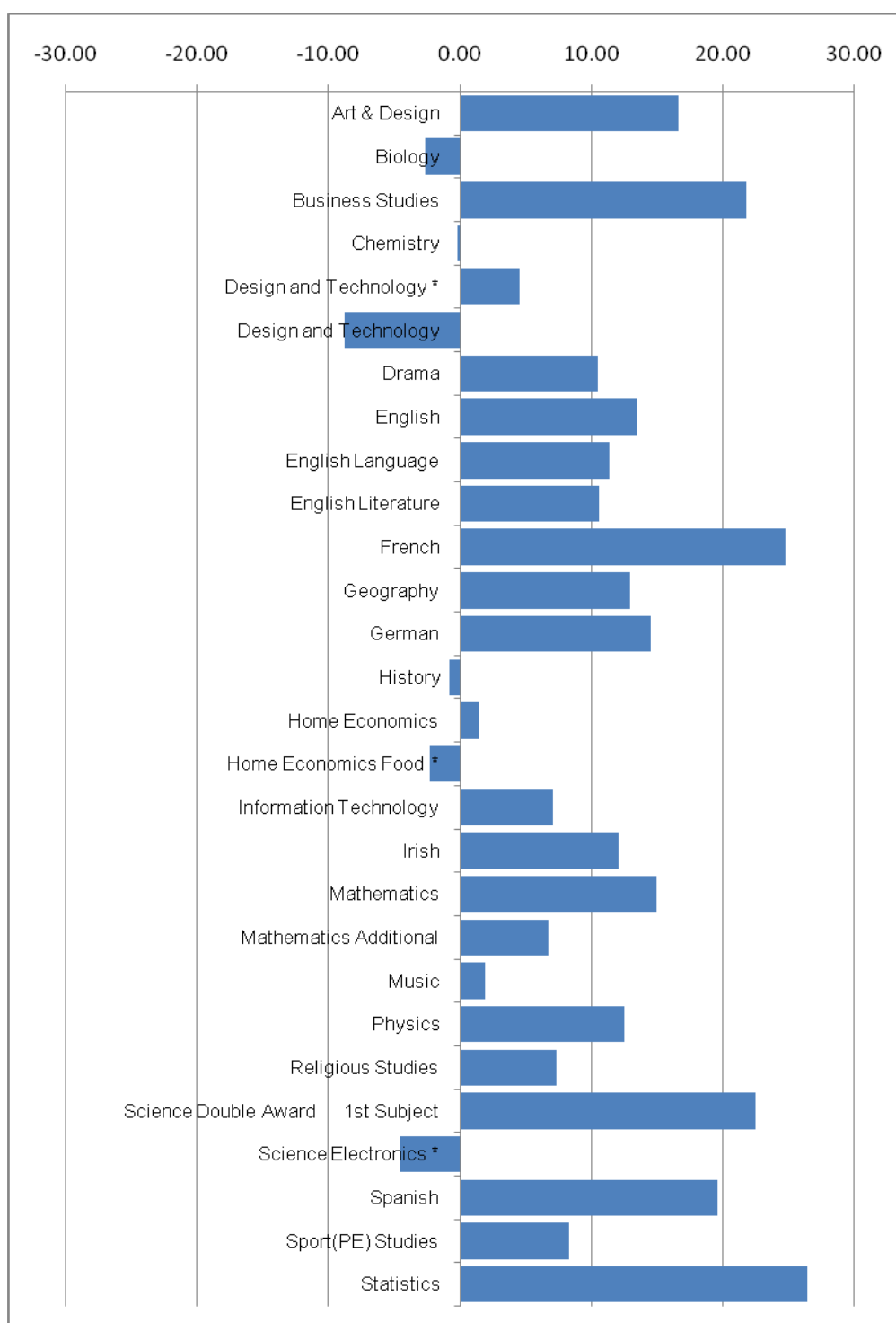
Very good links and partnerships are maintained with a wide range of organisations and external agencies including, schools and support services which broaden the range of the pupils' experiences and support well their learning.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

**5.1 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.

## 1.1 GCSE EXAMINATION RESULTS

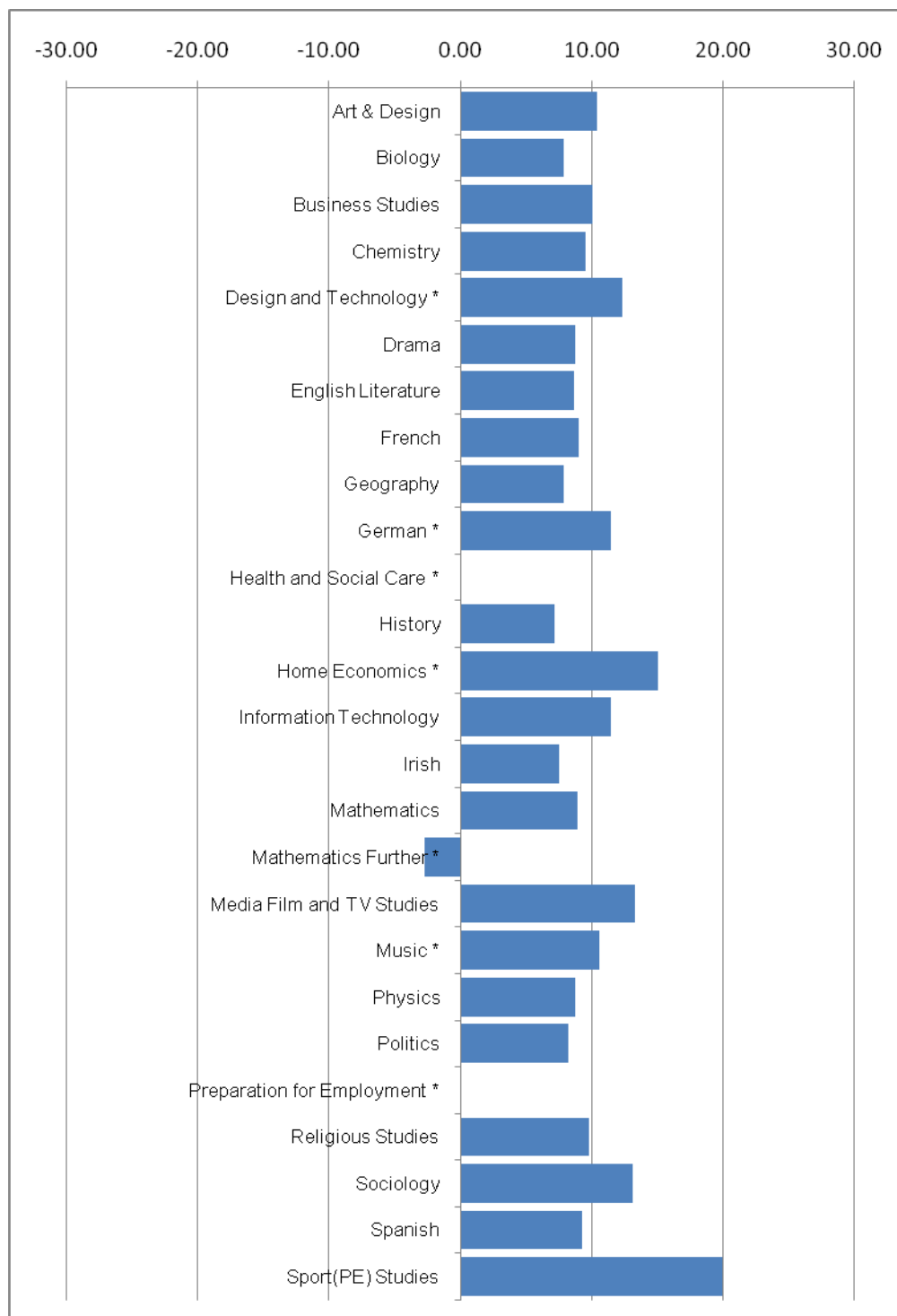
### Comparison with the three-year NI average at grades A\*- B



\* total number of entries fewer than 30

## 1.2 GCE RESULTS

### Comparison with the three-year NI average at grades A\* - C



\* total number of entries fewer than 20

**SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS: ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND MODERN LANGUAGES**

**English**

The provision for English is very good.

The main strengths are:

- the outstanding results achieved in public examinations;
- the behaviour, motivation and general attitude of the confident and articulate pupils;
- the quality of the teaching observed, which ranged from satisfactory to outstanding with most being good or better;
- the good leadership of the head of English, supported by the hard work and commitment of his department;
- the sound textual knowledge of the teachers, together with their enthusiasm for the promotion of their subject; and
- the literacy rich environment, including the library and the many opportunities provided for pupils to enhance their learning experiences in English.

**Mathematics**

The provision for mathematics is very good.

The main strengths are:

- the strong collegiality within the department and the commitment of the teachers;
- the individual support provided for the pupils;
- the good or better quality of teaching in a majority of the lessons observed;
- the high levels of participation at GCE Mathematics and Further Mathematics;
- the outstanding standards achieved in public examinations; and
- the range of activities used to promote mathematics.

## **Modern languages**

The provision for modern languages is very good.

The main strengths are:

- the outstanding results achieved in public examinations;
- the positive attitudes to the learning of languages displayed by most of the pupils;
- the wide range of effective teaching approaches, in particular at A level, which motivate and engage the pupils;
- the effective integration of ICT to support and progress the pupils' learning;
- the hardworking and committed teachers who provide meaningful enrichment and extra-curricular learning experiences for the pupils; and
- the very good leadership, as evidenced by the high degree of collaboration between the teachers and common approaches across the four languages.

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