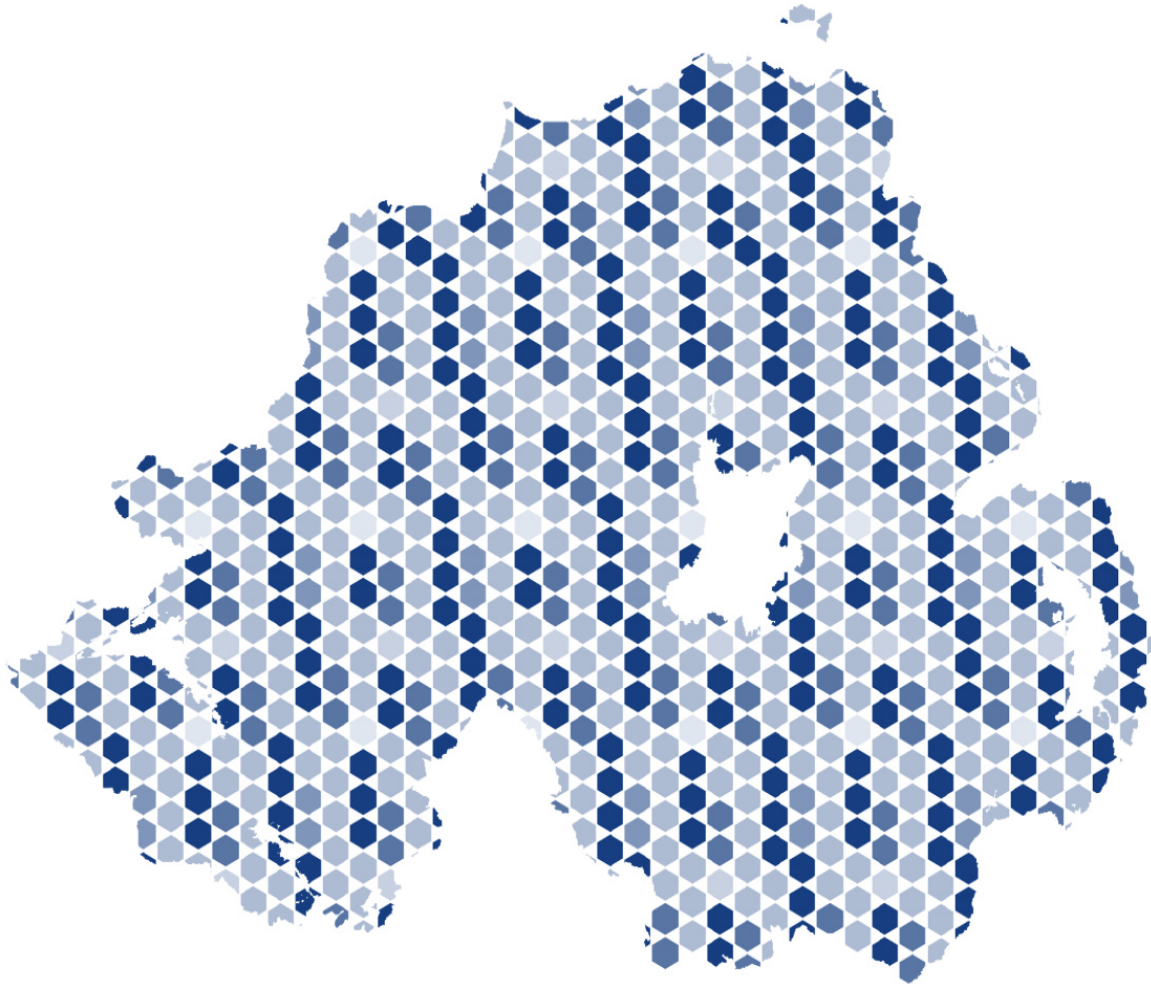


# POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

St Colm's High School,  
Twinbrook, Belfast

Report of an Inspection  
In November 2010

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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

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 CONTEXT**

St Colm's High School is a maintained, co-educational, 11-18 non-selective school. It is situated on the outskirts of West Belfast and draws most of its pupils from the surrounding Colin area. The enrolment has remained steady over the past five years and stands currently at 702. In recent years, almost 95% of the pupils entering year 8 either obtained a Grade D or did not participate in the Transfer Procedure. Approximately 51% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals and the school has identified 68% of the pupils as requiring additional support with their learning. Currently, there are two newcomer pupils. The school is in consultation with the Department of Education (DE) in relation to an economic appraisal application to provide new facilities.

### **1.2 FOCUS**

The inspection focused on:

- achievements and standards;
- learning and teaching;
- provision across a wide range of subjects with a particular focus in English, modern languages and technology and design, including the provision for information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum;
- the progress being made towards an extended curriculum;
- the views of the pupils, parents, teachers, support staff and the Board of Governors (governors);
- the provision for pastoral care and the arrangements for child protection;
- the approach to promoting healthy eating and physical activity;
- 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
- leadership and management at all levels across the school.

## **2. OVERALL FINDINGS OF THE INSPECTION**

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school is outstanding.

### **2.1 The main strengths of the school include:**

- the distinctive inclusive ethos and unique climate within the school;
- the outstanding quality of pastoral care, guidance and support for all of the pupils including those with additional and special educational needs;

- the outstanding strategic leadership of the Principal, supported effectively by the Vice-principal, the leadership teams and the governors, all of whom are committed to achieving the best possible outcomes for the pupils in their care;
- the effectiveness of the distributed leadership within the school in identifying appropriate actions to promote further improvement and to achieving the key priorities set out in the school development plan;
- the commitment and perseverance of the teachers who have developed exceptionally good working relationships with the pupils; and
- the quality of the teaching observed which was good in nine-tenths of the lessons, very good in just over half and outstanding in a small number.

A summary of the main findings for the specialist subject areas under focus can be found in Appendix 1.

### **3. THE VIEWS OF PUPILS, PARENTS, TEACHERS, SUPPORT STAFF AND GOVERNORS OF THE SCHOOL**

The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire prior to the inspection, as well as meetings with representatives from the governors and groups of pupils from years 8, 10, 12, 13 and 14.

One hundred and seventy-four questionnaires were issued to parents; 34% were returned to Inspection Services Branch and 20 contained additional written comments.

The responses from the questionnaires, and the comments from the parents, were highly affirmative, indicating very strong support for the work and life of the school. In particular, the parents highlighted the caring and welcoming atmosphere within the school, the inclusive and positive ethos, the friendly, enthusiastic and dedicated teachers, and the highly effective leadership of the Principal. In addition, they commented on the poor accommodation and the need for a new school building.

Forty teachers and 11 support staff completed confidential questionnaires with 16 teachers and three support staff providing additional written comments. Nearly all of the teaching and support staff expressed their strong satisfaction with the work and life of the school. In particular, they highlighted the effective leadership provided by the Principal, the excellent working relationships between the staff, pupils and the wider community, the caring atmosphere in the school in which pupils are made to feel welcome and treated as equals, and the adverse impact of the poor accommodation and resources on the pupils' learning.

The governors expressed their strong commitment to the school, highlighting their supportive, active and insightful involvement in all aspects of school life. They expressed their highest regard for the work of the Principal, the Vice-principal, the leadership teams and the teaching and non-teaching staff. The governors commented favourably on the positive rates of teacher attendance within the school.

The pupils talked enthusiastically of the support and encouragement they receive to achieve their very best in school. They are well motivated and value highly the mutually respectful relationships that they have with their teachers and with the Principal. The senior pupils spoke positively of the academic mentoring programme, which helps them to set targets and to understand how they are progressing and improving. They demonstrated confidence, maturity and a strong sense of pride in their school. In the discussions with pupils, all are well aware of what to do if they have any worries about their safety and well-being.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) has reported to the Principal, and representatives of the governors, the very few areas of concern emerging from the questionnaires.

#### **4. KEY FINDINGS OF THE INSPECTION**

##### **4.1 ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS**

During the course of the inspection most of the pupils were well-behaved, motivated and keen to learn; on the few occasions when pupils presented with challenging behaviour the teachers dealt with the situations skilfully and sensitively to ensure the pupils settled quickly and focused on their learning.

The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) ensures the effective assessment of pupils' needs and early identification of the type of support required for each individual pupil. Approximately two-thirds of the pupils have a wide range of challenging special educational needs (SEN) and additional needs and they make very good progress in their learning. For example, all pupils identified with significant literacy and/or numeracy difficulties in year eight make positive progress, and by the end of key stage (KS) 4 they achieve good success in public examinations. In addition, the school has notable success in addressing the needs of pupils with significant social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD).

All of the pupils in year 12 are entered for nine subjects at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level. Over the past three years, the percentage of pupils obtaining five or more GCSEs or equivalent at grades A\* to C has increased significantly and is well above the Northern Ireland (NI) average for similar non-selective schools. Almost one-third of the results in subjects at grades A\* to C remain more than five percentage points above the NI average for non-selective schools.

Over the same period the percentage of pupils obtaining five or more GCSEs or equivalent at grades A\* to C including English and mathematics has fluctuated slightly, but remains well-above the NI average for similar non-selective schools. At General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) level the percentage of pupils achieving two or more GCE A level or equivalent at grades at A-E has increased from 90% in 2009 to 100% in 2010 which is well above the NI average for similar non selective-schools.

Overall, standards of pupil achievement are very good and reflect the value-added support provided by the staff in response to the very demanding range of abilities in the school. More information about the results achieved in public examinations is given in Appendix 3.

## 4.2 PROVISION FOR LEARNING

### 4.2.1 LEARNING AND TEACHING

The learning, teaching and assessment in the provision observed are very good. There are effective and well-embedded inclusive systems to integrate the pastoral and curricular provision within the school. A key strength of the provision is the commitment and perseverance of the teachers and support staff who have developed exceptionally good working relationships with the pupils.

The SENCO provides detailed guidance, information and advice for all teachers. The teachers' planning is informed by their professional knowledge of individual pupils and a clear assessment of the pupils' additional needs. All teachers take note of, and make provision for, the very significant numbers of pupils with additional needs in all classes. In recent years, key staff with responsibility for SEN have worked very hard to support and work with families whose children are on the autistic spectrum. Overall the provision for SEN is outstanding.

The quality of the teaching observed in nine-tenths of the lessons was good; in just over one half of these lessons it was very good, and a small number were outstanding.

In the most effective practice, the work built effectively on previous learning and was well matched to the interests, needs and everyday experiences of the pupils, including those identified with needing additional support with their work. The teachers used a wide range of strategies to engage all of the pupils in their learning, there was good pace and challenge, learning intentions were shared at the beginning of lessons and useful plenary sessions summarised the knowledge and understanding gained by the pupils. Assessment for learning strategies, including effective questioning, were used to develop thinking skills and to extend the pupils' oral responses.

In addition, those pupils who received further support in literacy and numeracy benefited greatly from the carefully structured additional classes which integrated a range of well-chosen strategies and short, sharp motivating activities, to address gaps in learning, and to enable the pupils to develop personal confidence in their work. This is a very effective model of classroom teaching and support in literacy and numeracy.

In the less effective practice, in one-tenth of the lessons observed, the outcomes were unclear, there was over exposition by the teacher and fewer opportunities for the pupils to develop confidently as independent learners.

The inspection highlights the need to continue to share and to develop the existing very good teaching and learning strategies with all classes and to continue to develop the ICT provision.

### 4.2.2 CURRICULUM PROVISION

The school provides a suitably broad and balanced curriculum for all of the pupils, which is relevant to their interests, abilities and career aspirations. The Principal leads the Lisburn Area Learning Community (LALC) and is supported energetically in her role by members of the school's senior and extended leadership teams, and by a developing range of other educational providers. The school is making a very good contribution to the developing work of the LALC and has established clear, concise arrangements for the evaluation of progress in curriculum development, as outlined within the school development plan.

#### 4.2.3 PASTORAL CARE

The quality of the arrangements for pastoral care in the school is outstanding; there is a distinctive inclusive ethos and unique culture within the school. The pastoral programme supports effectively and is integrated thoroughly into all aspects of learning and teaching. Pupils presenting with SEBD are nurtured within a highly positive and supportive ethos; others experiencing significant additional challenges, benefit from the close links with parents and the well-embedded systems in place, to link pastoral and curricular provision within the school.

An excellent reward system operates to ensure that the pupils feel valued, encouraged and motivated to learn and to participate in all aspects of school life. The staff have high expectations that all of the pupils will reach their full potential, and the pupils value the dedication and enthusiasm demonstrated by their teachers. There is an extensive range of extra-curricular activities and links to external agencies, which the staff use well to promote and enhance the pupils' learning, health and emotional well-being.

#### 4.2.4 CHILD PROTECTION/SAFEGUARDING

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

#### 4.2.5 HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, through for example, the connected learning and thematic approach to health and nutrition across the curriculum and the school's Gardening Club which encourage the pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles.

#### 4.2.6 CAREERS EDUCATION, INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE (CEIAG)

The overall quality of the CEIAG is very good. The Principal, supported by the head of faculty and the head of careers and learning for life and work (LLW) has a strategic vision for the provision of high quality CEIAG. The school is an active member of the LALC; as a result of this effective collaboration, a common policy has been developed to guide consistently the future development of CEIAG in each of the participating schools.

The well-integrated, pupil centred curricular programmes for CEIAG and LLW provide very good opportunities at KS3 and 4, for the pupils to learn about the world of work and to make informed career choices. The school, through the commitment, diligence and enthusiasm of the careers staff, has established wide-ranging links with a range of business and industry partners as well as with further and higher education providers. In addition, all pupils have access to careers officers and to individual careers advice and guidance interviews, particularly at key transition stages. At post-16 classes are well planned, co-ordinated and delivered effectively by the designated teaching staff.

As a consequence of a recent whole school CEIAG staff development session, all subject departments have audited schemes of work and identified appropriate opportunities for the further development of careers, including increasing the emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). This very good practice is impacting positively on the pupils' wider educational experiences.



## **5. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

The Principal provides outstanding leadership. She has a clear strategic vision for the school and has established effective lines of communication between herself, the leadership teams, the staff, parents and governors. She has developed a dynamic, and energetic distributed leadership structure to manage the varied and challenging needs of the school. She is supported closely by an outstanding leadership team which includes the Vice-principal, the senior leadership team (SLT), the extended leadership team (ELT) of faculty heads and heads of year, all of whom lead, with notable success, on identified key curricular and pastoral priorities.

The culture of self-evaluation is well-embedded throughout the school, and there are consistent and manageable strategies in place for monitoring and evaluation, and informing whole-school improvement. Management at all levels makes rigorous and effective use of a wide range of internal and external performance data to demonstrate sustained value-added improvement in the pupils' learning.

The school development plan sets out clearly how whole school aims and targets are translated into four key priorities which remain unchanged from year to year and are used effectively to focus and drive the pastoral and academic work of the school, for the benefit of the pupils, staff and the wider community. The approaches and processes which underpin the development planning are evaluated and adapted systematically to ensure there is continual progress towards meeting the school development plan's priorities. The school development plan meets fully the requirements of the School Development Plan Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

The leadership and management of SEN provision is outstanding. It is characterised by the shared ownership and understanding shown across the school of the special educational and additional needs of the pupils. The Principal and the Vice-principal provide a strong vision for an inclusive school and are well informed about the range of complex issues and challenges facing the pupils. Their work is strongly complemented by the meticulous approach of the SENCO and the very effective assessment and tracking of pupil progress, led by the heads of English and mathematics and the heads of literacy and numeracy support. Within the school, lines of staff accountability for SEN are clear and effective.

The school deploys its financial resources appropriately, providing pupils with a suitable curriculum, making effective use of all available resources.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school is outstanding; the quality of pastoral care is also outstanding. The school has demonstrated its capacity for self improvement over a sustained period of time.

**SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE AREAS UNDER FOCUS**

**English**

The quality of provision in English is good.

The strengths of the work include:

- the quality of the teaching observed, most of which was good or very good;
- the impressive support for all of the pupils to enable them to learn;
- the effective use of data, setting targets for individual pupils and the close monitoring of their progress;
- the evident benefits to English of the support for literacy;
- the consistent improvement being made in the standards achieved in English in public examinations;
- the quality of the organisation, management and leadership of the English department, including through the faculty arrangement.

The area for improvement is the need to:

- continue to develop and implement specific action plans to raise standards further.

**Modern Languages**

The quality of provision in Modern Languages is good.

The strengths of the work include:

- the positive ethos and excellent relationships;
- the sound planning which reflects the revised curriculum;
- the good use of ICT by the teachers to present new language visually to the pupils;
- the high standard of presentation of the pupils' work and the effective promotion of extended writing;
- the good standards of attainment; and
- the very good leadership.

The areas for improvement include the need:

- for the teachers to use a wider range of approaches, including increased use of the target language, in order to make language learning more relevant for all of the pupils.

### **Technology and design**

The quality of the provision for technology and design is good.

The strengths of the work include:

- the excellent results attained by the pupils in GCSE technology and design;
- the quality of the teaching observed, most of which was good or better;
- the positive ethos established within the department underpinned by the good rapport between the teachers and the pupils in most of the lessons observed;
- the teachers' commitment to supporting the needs of all the pupils, particularly the pupils requiring additional support with their learning;
- the good use of qualitative and quantitative data to inform learning and teaching;  
and
- the commitment and dedication of the recently appointed head of department and his departmental team to improve further the attainments of the pupils.

The area for improvement is:

- to develop further the collaborative links with other subject areas within the school (including science and art and design) in order to reinforce the curricular connections and the pupils' understanding of common scientific principles and the development of design and communication skills.

## STATISTICAL INFORMATION

- 1.1 i. School: St Colm's High  
 ii. School Reference Number: 423-0223  
 iii. Age Range: 11-18  
 iv. Status: Catholic Maintained  
 v. Date of Inspection: W/C 18/11/10  
 vi. Area of Study: Standard Inspection

1.2 Intake/Enrolment

School Year	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Year 8 Intake	123	109	131	131	93
Total enrolment	701	692	701	710	702

1.3 Attendance

Year 2009/10	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average 2009/10	NI Average 2008/09
% Attendance	94	93	92	94	92	95	93	93	91

- 1.4 i. Total Number of Teachers: 53      iii. Contact ratio (percentage of timetabled time in direct class contact): 0.844
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 14.37

Year 2010/11	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTAL
Enrolment: Boys	58	82	76	73	71	42	22	424
Enrolment: Girls	35	50	50	29	55	46	13	278
Enrolment: Total	93	132	126	102	126	88	35	702
PTR								

1.5 Leavers' Destinations

2008/09	Year 12	NI%	Year 12/13	NI%
Total Number of Leavers	72		46	
Another School	21%	12.8	2%	2.2
Employment	57%	5.7	7%	11.6
Full-time Further Education	18%	46.6	48%	27.6
Full-time Higher Education	N/a	N/A	22%	45.5
Full-time Training	1%	27.5	13%	5.2
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	0%	3.8	4%	4.5
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	3%	3.5	4%	3.3

1.7 NAME OF SCHOOL: St Colm's High School, Belfast

SCHOOL YEAR: 2010/2011

<b>GCSE</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>
Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE in at least 5 subjects	100	100	100
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	56	59	69
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects including English and Mathematics	27	17	26
<b>GCE A2 Level or equivalent</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	0	14	23
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 2 A2 levels	54	90	100

## EXAMINATION RESULTS

**Table 1** showing GCSE subject results, over the three years ending in June 2010, in comparison with the respective Northern Ireland (NI) averages

	More than 10 percentage points above	Between 5 and 10 percentage points above	Within 5 percentage points	Between 5 and 10 percentage points below	More than 10 percentage points below
GCSE A* - C	Business Studies Design and Technology Home Economics Child Development Hospitality Learning for Life and Work (PSE) Single Award Science	French Journalism	Art & Design Drama Motor Vehicle Studies	History Irish	Business and Communication Systems English Geography Information Technology Mathematics Music* Religious Studies Sport (PE) Studies Statistics Year 10 only
GCSE A*-E	Design and Technology Motor Vehicle Studies Hospitality	Business Studies Home Economics Child Development Learning for Life and Work (PSE) Single Award Science	Art & Design Business and Communication Systems Drama English French Irish Journalism Statistics	Geography History Mathematics Music Sport (PE) Studies	Information Technology Religious Studies

\* denotes subjects which had a total entry of less than 30 pupils over 3 years

**Table 2** showing the spread of the NI subject averages which have been used in the determination of Table 1.

	<b>100% - 96%</b>	<b>95% - 86%</b>	<b>85% - 76%</b>	<b>75% - 66%</b>	<b>65% - 0%</b>
GCSE A*-C			Art & Design Drama Information Technology Music	Irish Statistics	Business and Communication Systems Business Studies Design and Technology English French Geography History Home Economics Learning for Life and Work (PSE) Mathematics Motor Vehicle Studies Religious Studies Single Award Science Sport (PE) Studies
GCSE A* - E	Drama Sport (PE) Studies	Art & Design Business and Communication Systems English French History Home Economics Information Technology Irish Learning for Life and Work (PSE) Music Religious Studies Single Award Science Statistics	Business Studies Design and Technology Geography Mathematics Motor Vehicle Studies		

**Table 3** showing GCE subject results, over the three years ending in June 2010, in comparison with the respective Northern Ireland (NI) averages

	More than 10 percentage points above	Between 5 and 10 percentage points above	Within 5 percentage points	Between 5 and 10 percentage points below	More than 10 percentage points below
GCE A - C	English Literature*				Art & Design* Design and Technology: Product Design* Politics* Sociology*
GCE A*-E			Art & Design* English Literature* Sociology*		Design and Technology: Product Design* Politics*

\* denotes subjects which had a total entry of less than 30 pupils over 3 years

**Table 4** showing the spread of the NI subject averages which have been used in the determination of Table 3.

	100% - 96%	95% - 86%	85% - 76%	75% - 66%	65% - 0%
GCE A - C		Art & Design English Literature Politics	Sociology	Design and Technology: Product Design	
GCE A - E	Art & Design Design and Technology: Product Design English Literature Politics Sociology				



**Table 5** showing the results for Occupational Studies over the three years ending in June 2010

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Entries</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>Entries</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>Entries</b>	<b>2010</b>
Double Award Office Administration Level (5 5) Equivalent to GCSE grade band A*-C	33	82%	37	95%	41	83%
Double Award Office Administration Level (4 4) Equivalent to GCSE grade band D-G		18%		2%		10%
Double Award Office Administration Level (3 3) or less is equivalent to First Skills		0		2%		7%

Pupils awarded a level (5 5), achieve a double award occupational studies qualification equivalent to two GCSE in grades A\* to C.

Pupils awarded a level (4 4), achieve a double award occupational studies qualification equivalent to two GCSE in grades C to G

Pupils awarded a levels (1 1) to(3 3) achieve a First Skills qualification.

**Table 6** showing the results for Level 3 courses, over the three years ending in June 2010

Subject	Entries	2008			Entries	2009			Entries	2010		
		Pass	Merit	Distinction		Pass	Merit	Distinction		Pass	Merit	Distinction
BTEC National Award in Business	NA	—	—	—	6	67%	17%	17%	21	24%	14%	57%
BTEC National Award in Construction	NA	—	—	—	6	17%	33%	50%	7	29%	14%	57%
BTEC National Award in Performing Arts	NA	—	—	—	NA	—	—	—	6	0%	100%	0%
OCR National Certificate in Sport	5	40%	40%	20%	3	0%	33%	67%	7	14%	86%	0%

A Pass in any of these qualifications is equivalent to GCE Advanced level at Grade E.

A Merit is equivalent to GCE Advanced level at Grade C.

A Distinction is equivalent to GCE Advanced level at Grade A.

**Table 7** showing the results for Level 2 Application of Number in 2010

Entries	Percentage achieving Level 2
54	54% - (29 pupils)

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