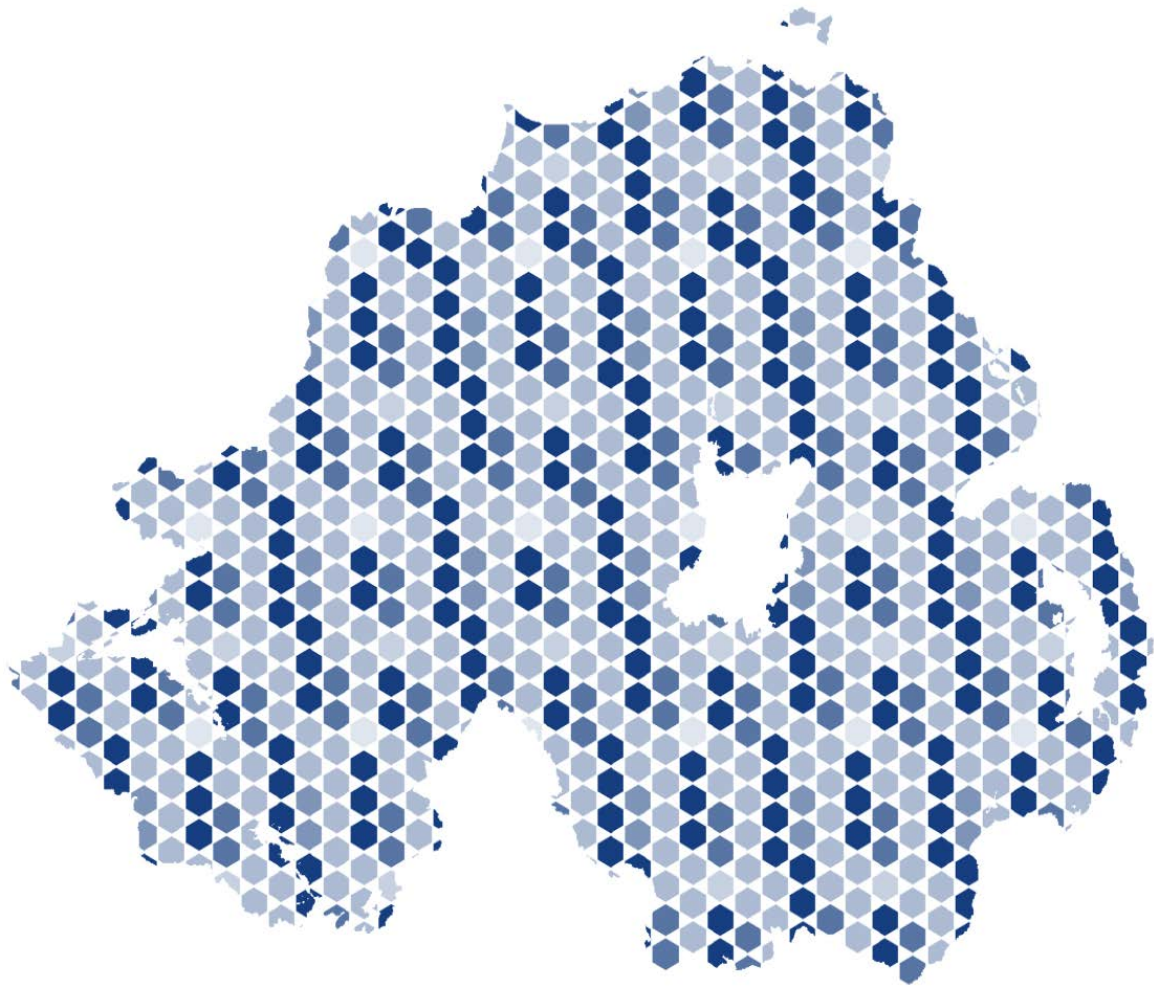# POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION

Education and Training Inspectorate

St Mary's High School, Downpatrick

Maintained, all-girls, 11-18, non-selective school

Report of an Inspection in May 2013

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

Contents

1.   Inspection method and evidence base

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 ETI 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 observed teaching and learning, 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; and

- the opportunity for the parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

Data on the returns on questionnaires sent in advance of the inspection to parents and school staff is shown in the table below.

Questionnaire	Number issued	Number returned	Percentage returned	Number with comments
Parents	131	38	29%	19
Teachers	29	19	66%	*
Support Staff	28	6	21%	*

* = fewer than 5

2.   Context

St Mary's High School serves the community in Downpatrick and the surrounding rural area. Between 2009 and 2011, the enrolment had fallen by approximately 17%, but is now stable. In the last year, the intake to year 8 has increased.

On entry to the school, over the past four years, approximately four-fifths of the intake have achieved at the expected level in English and mathematics. Approximately one-fifth of the pupils are registered with special educational needs. The pupils' attendance has been consistently above the NI average over the same period.

The school has a small sixth form of 83 pupils, with increasing numbers enrolling in year 13.

St Mary's High School	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Year 8 Intake	77	67	61	75
Enrolment	503	462	425	426
% Attendance (NI Average)	92.3 (92)	92.3 (92)	92.6 (93)	N/A
FSME Percentage[1]	23.7	27.9	29.9	38.5
% (No.) of pupils on the SEN register	21.9 (110)	22.3 (129)	20.5 (87)	21.8 (93)
No. of pupils with statements of educational needs in the mainstream school	44	38	31	26
No. of newcomers	5	8	*	*

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

Intake				
% of Y8 pupils with L5 English	18.2	9	14.8	13.3
% of Y8 pupils with L5 mathematics	19.5	11.9	14.8	17.3
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in English	79.2	67.2	85.3	84
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in mathematics	75.3	65.7	80.3	81.3

Source: data as held by the school.

* fewer than 5

3. Focus of inspection

In order to promote improvement in the interests of all learners, the purpose of the post-primary inspection is, through an effective linking of internal and external approaches, to:

- evaluate the quality of the provision and the outcomes for the learners;

- evaluate the school's leadership and management and its capacity to effect and sustain improvement in its provision and standards; and

- to inform the school's planning for improvement.

4. Overall findings

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

5. Achievements and standards

Almost all of the pupils are well motivated and approach their work positively; they are developing well as independent learners, make presentations with confidence and enjoy working in pairs and in groups. Most develop good verbal and written communication skills through their work in the majority of the subjects, including in English, and can apply a range of mathematical strategies in mathematics, as well as in a range of other subject contexts. By the end of year 14, the pupils' skills for independent living and their sense of personal and social responsibility are well developed.

In each of the previous three years, the proportion of pupils achieving five or more GCSE[2] examinations at grades A*-C, including English and mathematics, has been above the average[3] and the high standards attained at GCSE have been sustained over the last five years. In the same period, the majority of the individual GCSE subjects, at grades A*-C, have been more than 10% above the average.

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[2] General Certificate of Secondary Education
[3] See Appendix: note that when averages are compared, they are with selective or non-selective schools (as appropriate) having a similar proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals.

Over the last three years, the attainment of the pupils in three GCE A level qualifications at grades A*-C has remained consistently below the average; all of the pupils taking A levels have attained at least two grades A*-E. Due to the small number of entries for approximately one-half of the A level subjects, the standards attained at this level have been variable.

The majority of the pupils who require additional support for learning fulfil their potential and achieve qualifications that enable them to progress. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals achieving five or more GCSEs at A*-C in 2012 has risen to above average.

6. Provision

Planning, teaching and learning in three-quarters of the lessons observed was good or very good in equal measure; there are examples of effective marking for improvement across the subjects, including self-assessment and peer assessment. A recent pupil pursuit exercise and the innovative PRSD[4] programme have enabled the teachers to observe lessons outside their specialist areas and to share good practice. In order to develop greater consistency across all subjects, and to improve practice in the one-quarter of the less effective lessons observed, the teachers need to focus on, for example, better behaviour management and planning to meet the needs of the wide range of abilities within the classes.

The pupils in key stage (KS) 3 who have statements of educational need benefit from the well-targeted support within the learning support unit and integration with mainstream classes; the well-conceived individual education plans include practical and effective strategies to meet the needs of all of the pupils who require additional support in their learning. There is very good support from counsellors, a local outreach centre and a range of external agencies and professionals for those pupils experiencing emotional or social difficulties.

The strengths of the very good pastoral provision include effective pastoral structures which are well integrated with the curriculum, and the well-structured personal development programme which fosters the holistic development of the pupils. There is an inclusive and welcoming ethos within the classrooms, characterised by the very good working relationships between the pupils and their teachers. The pupils have good opportunities to contribute to the life and work of the school through an active School Council. Senior pupils provide effective peer mentoring to other pupils throughout the school.

The pupils report that they feel safe in school and that their concerns are dealt with promptly. They are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being. On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding children and young people which reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education.

The pupils make informed planning decisions about future career pathways, including vocational opportunities, through, for example, self-reflection on their personal skills, attributes and capabilities. At KS 4 and post-16, pupils benefit from a good range of enterprise activities, training in interview skills, guest speakers, and work experience to develop their employability skills.

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[4] Professional Review: Staff Development

While careers education, information, advice and guidance, including the taught provision, is effective, the head of careers has identified, through effective monitoring and evaluation of the provision, appropriate areas for development including further integration of careers education into subject planning and into the LLW[5] programme.

At KS 3, the curriculum is appropriately broad and balanced and includes a comprehensive range of enhancement opportunities through, for example, the introduction of the entrepreneurial skills programme which raises the aspirations and self-confidence of the pupils. At KS 4 the senior leadership has identified the need to broaden choice by improving the coherence and relevance of the curriculum offered and to enable more pupils to progress to post-16 provision, further education, training or employment.

At post-16, a range of appropriate, and often accredited, enrichment activity enhances the programme. However, there is more work to be done to develop further collaboration with other education providers in order to extend the range of vocational courses which meet the needs and career aspirations of all of the pupils.

There is a need for the senior leadership to progress the school development plan in order to broaden further the curriculum pathways available.

7.   **Leadership and management**

Senior leadership, in consultation with the staff, has identified appropriate priorities for improvement in the school development plan (SDP)[6]. The most effective action plans have clear targets, measurable success criteria and robust processes for monitoring and evaluation, but the quality of action planning across the school is variable.

The senior leadership structure is in a period of transition; the inspection confirms that it is timely that roles and responsibilities within the senior leadership team (SLT) are being reviewed. The need to distribute leadership is appropriately prioritised within the SDP; the addition of middle managers to the senior leadership team has supported action across the whole-school and helped them to develop as leaders. For example, good progress has been made at this level in the collation, analysis and use of data to inform the improvement planning process.

While the middle managers provide effective curricular leadership and plan well for improvement within their areas of responsibility, the capacity of staff at all levels to extend the effective use of data to support improvement needs further development.

The parents, staff and school community can have a high degree of confidence in the effectiveness of all the aspects of governance evaluated. The governors are very well informed about the life and work of the school, they play an active role in the school's development and exercise well both a support and a challenge function. They are highly supportive of senior leadership and appreciate the commitment of the whole staff to the well-being of the pupils.

The senior leaders need to establish a more cohesive leadership structure with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, to ensure more effective monitoring and evaluation of the quality of the provision, and to establish more effective communication with staff and parents.

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[5] Learning for Life and Work
[6] The school development plan meets the requirements of the School Development Planning Regulations (NI) 2010.

8.   **Conclusion**

In the areas inspected the quality of education provided in this school is good.

The school has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement in curriculum planning and in leadership and management which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address.

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

It will be important that the employing authority, school governors and the staff plan for, and manage, issues related to the sustainability of the school provision, in order to assess the current and future needs of the pupils and the staff.

Performance and statistical data

GCSE EXAMINATION RESULTS

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 5 subjects	98.7	94.9	98.5
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	67.1	66.1	76.9
The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category[7]	*59.3*	*60*	*57.8*
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics	49.4	39	44.6
The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category	*31*	*33.6*	*31.8*
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 5 subjects	88.6	94.9	98.5
Percentage of Year 12 entitled to free school meals achieving 5 or more GCSEs Grades A* to C or equivalent (including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics)	33.3	25	40.9

OTHER EXAMINATION RESULTS: KEY STAGE 4

Other courses taken in at least two of the last three years.

Level 2	2010 % pass	2011 % pass	2012 % pass	Total entry over 3 years
Wider Key Skills Working With Others		*100*	*81.8*	*22*
Wider Key Skills Improving Own Learning		*100*		*10*
Wider Key Skills Problem Solving		*90*	*81.8*	*21*
DA Occupational Studies	*17*	*57*		*13*
SA Occupational Studies: Business & Services			*83*	*6*
SA Occupational Studies: Environment & Society			*100*	*6*

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[7] See benchmarking data and guidance contained in the DE Circulars on 'School Development Planning and Target-Setting'.

Comparison with the three-year NI average GCSE A* to C from 2009-10 to 2011-12
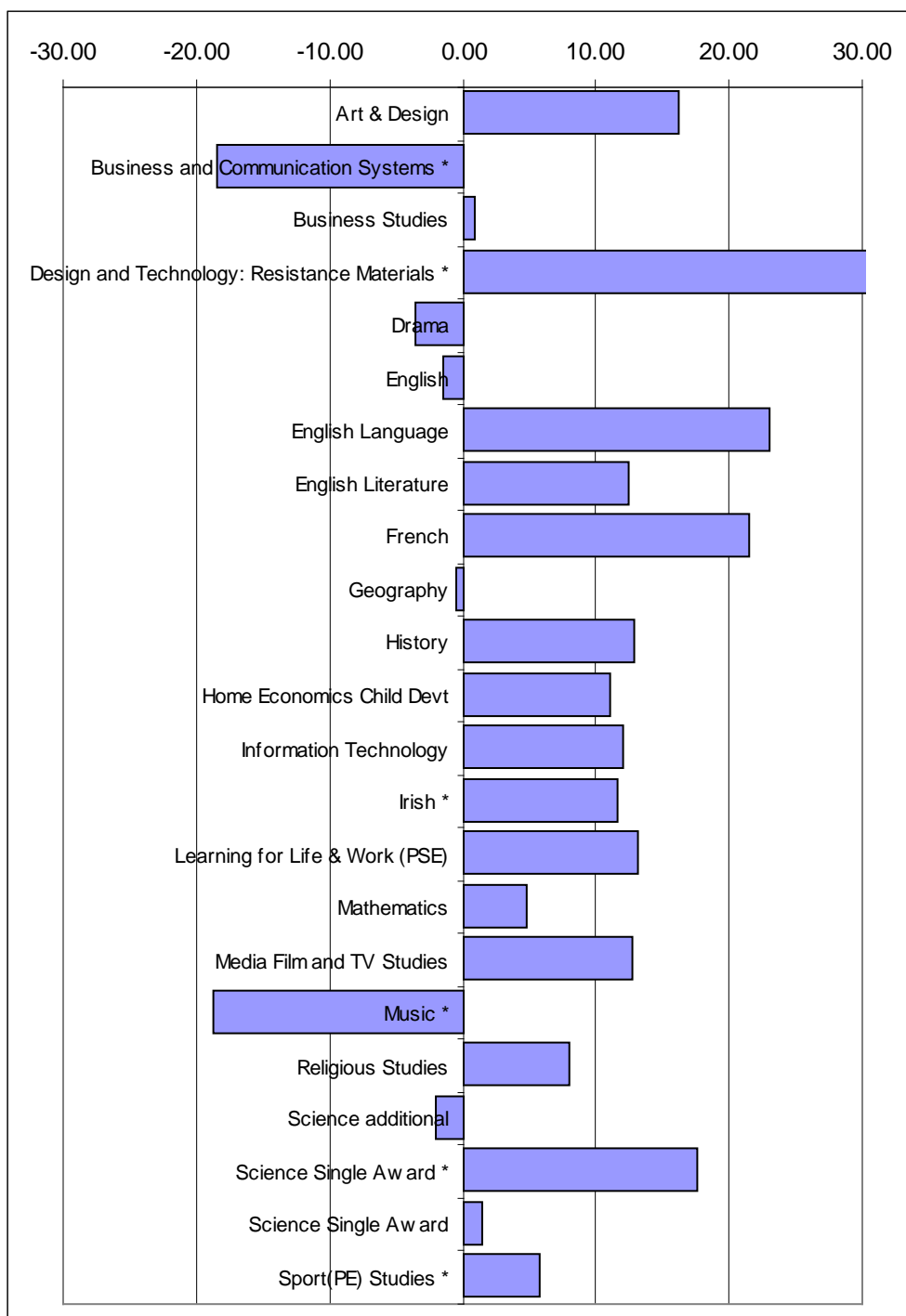
* indicates fewer than 30 entries over three years

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	66.7	60	72.7
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	30	41.2	21.2
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 2 A2 levels	100	100	100

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

OTHER EXAMINATION RESULTS: KEY STAGE 5

Other 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	
Applied Business	38.5	92.3	60	100	40	80	28
Health & Social Care	73.9	100	77.3	100	60	100	70
Moving Image Art	80	100	80	100	100	100	30

GCE EXAMINATION RESULTS

Comparison with the three-year NI average at grades A* to C from 2009-10 to 2011-12
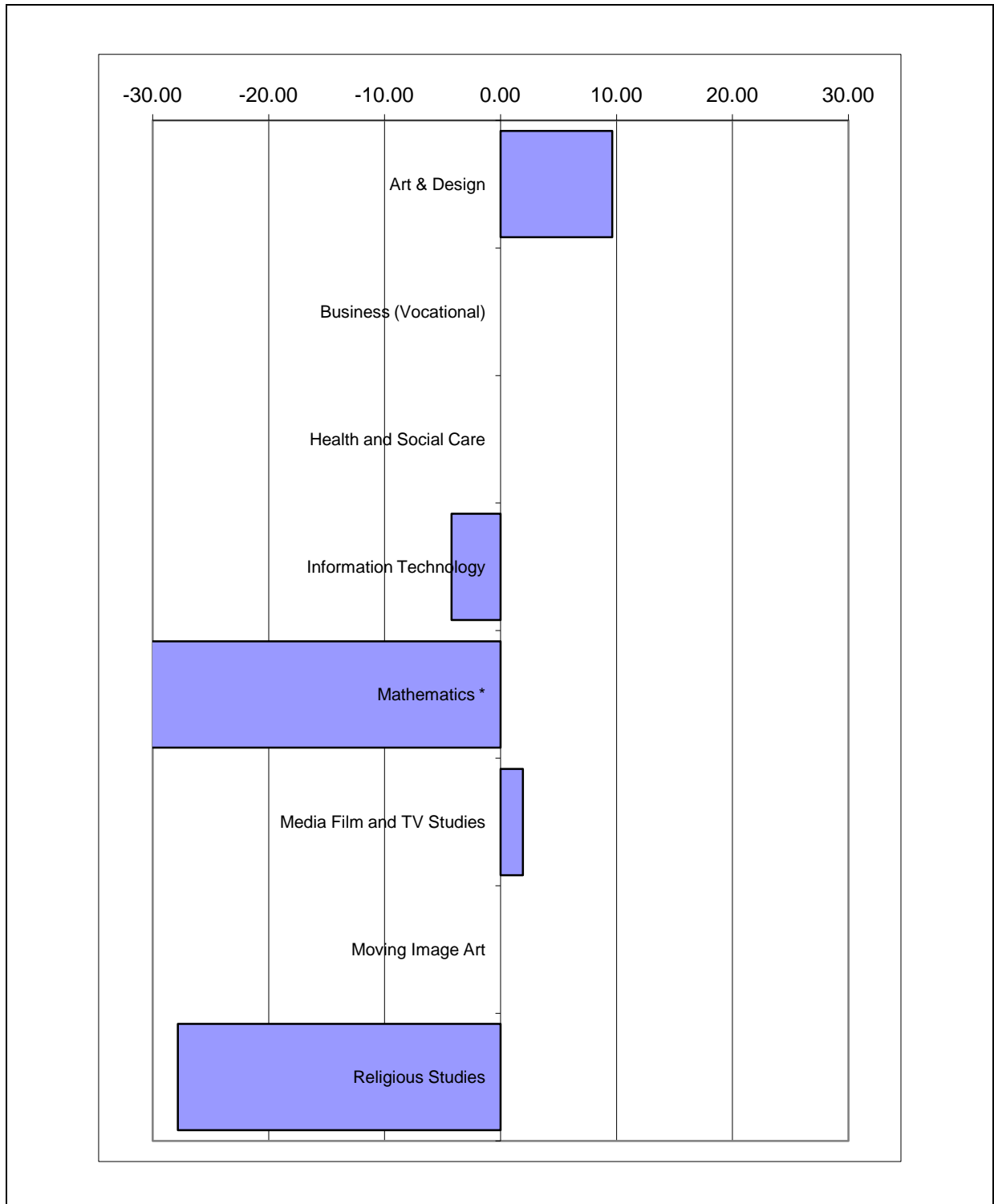
* indicates fewer than 30 entries over three years.

STAYING ON RATE (Current year 13/14 as proportion of year 12 from 1/2 years previously)

Year 13	62.5	NI Av. Year 13	47.9
Year 14	41.9	NI Av. Year 14	36.5

LEAVERS' DESTINATIONS

* = fewer than 5

	Year 12	Percent.	NI %	Year 13/14	Percent.	NI%
TOTAL	31			63		
Another School	10	29	15.8	*	*	2.5
Employment	0	0	4.4	7	13	11.7
Full-time Further Education	11	32	45	31	49	31.1
Full-time Higher Education	N/A	N/A	N/A	7	11	38.5
Full-time Training	5	19	28	5	8	6.5
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	5	19	3.5	11	17	6.6
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	0	0	3.3	0	0	3.1

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE