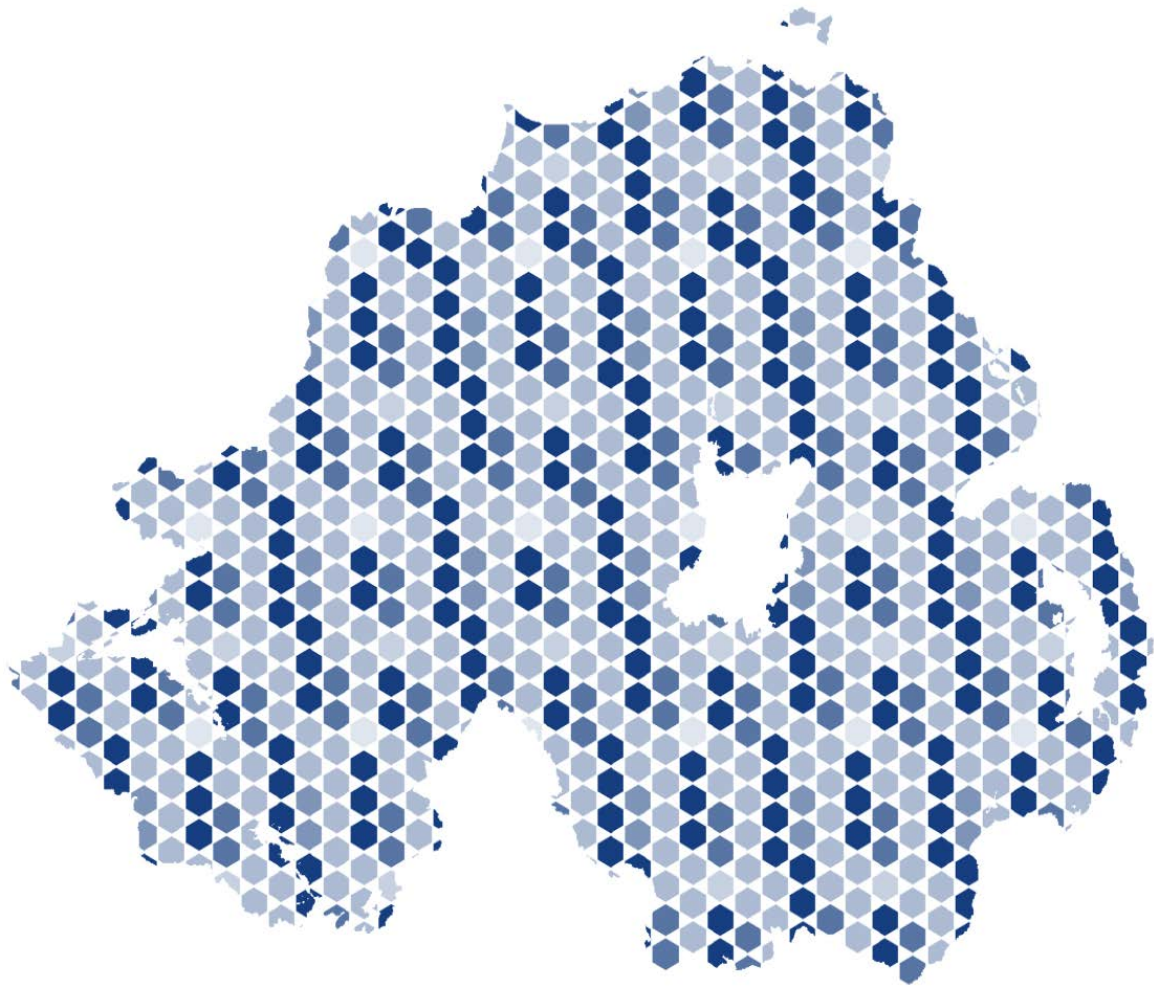


POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

St Michael's Grammar School,
Lurgan

Voluntary, co-educational, 14-18, grammar school

Report of an Inspection
in March 2013



Providing Inspection Services for

Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

CUSTOMER
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EXCELLENCE



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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 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	115	34	30	21
Teachers	38	26	68	8
Support Staff	25	12	48	0

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

St Michael's Grammar School, Lurgan draws its pupils from the town and wider area within the Craigavon system of junior and senior high schools. Most of the pupils transfer at the beginning of key stage (KS) 4 from two local, maintained non-selective schools. The enrolment has remained steady over the last three years, with a slight increase in the past two years. The school has been part of the review of the post-primary provision in Lurgan undertaken by the Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education. The delay in the decision emerging from this review has brought significant uncertainty about the future development of the school. In January 2013, the Minister of Education announced funding for the amalgamation of St Michael's Grammar School with the two maintained non-selective schools.

St Michael's Grammar School	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Year 12 Intake	146	144	149	144
Enrolment	567	566	573	570
% Attendance (NI Average)	95 (95)	94 (95)	96 (95)	-
FSME Percentage ¹	8.11	9.01	10.82	12
No. of pupils on the SEN register	22	24	23	20
No. of pupils with statements of educational needs	*	*	*	*
No. of newcomers	*	*	*	*
Intake				
% of Y10 pupils with L6 and above English	59	67	61	42
% of Y10 pupils with L6 and above mathematics	57	57	58	49

* fewer than 5

1.2 FOCUS AND SCOPE OF THE INSPECTION

The inspection 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 science 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 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 meeting the requirements of 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	Inadequate
Achievements and Standards	Inadequate
Provision for Learning	Satisfactory
Leadership and Management	Inadequate

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 The overall standards achieved by the pupils are inadequate².

KEY FINDINGS

The pupils are well motivated to learn and, in two-thirds of the lessons observed, work effectively in pairs and groups. They have good personal and social skills, including a range of organisational strategies to help them overcome barriers to their learning. A significant minority of the pupils need to learn to speak more clearly and audibly in class and develop more effective presentation skills; the teachers need to model good practice.

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 5 subjects	100	100	100
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects	93.1	86.81	83.89
<i>Comparison with the NI average for similar schools in the same FSM category</i>	<i>In line with average</i>	<i>Below average</i>	<i>Well below average</i>
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics	93.1	86.81	76.51
<i>Comparison with the NI average for similar schools in the same FSM category</i>	<i>In line with average</i>	<i>Below average</i>	<i>Well below average</i>
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	99.31	92.36	97.32
Percentage of FSM entitled school leavers achieving 5 or more GCSEs Grades A*-C or equivalent (including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics)	85.71	84.21	94.44

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

The overall levels of attainment at GCSE level are too low; twelve GCSE subjects at grades A*-B, including English, mathematics and all of the science subjects, are more than 10% points below the NI average. Furthermore, the percentage of pupils attaining seven or more GCSE qualifications grades A*-C, including English and mathematics has declined significantly. This decline is due to the underperformance of a significant minority of subjects that are well below the Northern Ireland (NI) average at A*-C. In contrast, over the past three years, almost all of the pupils achieved grades A*-C in both English and mathematics.

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

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

In order to raise the overall GCSE standards, there is an urgent need to address the lack of effective curricular links with the local schools to ensure better progression in the pupils' learning from KS3. Collectively these schools need to agree reasons for the drop in recent years in the proportion of pupils attaining level 6 or above in English and mathematics at KS3 on entry to St Michael's Grammar School and actions to improve the current downward trend.

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	98.5	99	97.7
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	66.91	58.4	62.32
<i>Comparison with the NI average for similar schools in the same FSM category</i>	<i>Well below average</i>	<i>Significantly below average</i>	<i>Well below average</i>

Overall, the percentage of year 14 pupils obtaining grades C or above in at least three GCE A levels is not high enough. At GCE A level, the pupils attain very good standards in English Literature and good standards in mathematics; with a significant uptake in these subjects over the past three years. The pupils also attain well in the applied subjects on offer. However, significant variation in performance between subjects is evidenced through a majority of the individual subjects, at grades A* to C being below the NI average with only, a significant minority being above, or in line with, the three-year average. In 2011, just 59% of pupils in year 14 progressed into higher education in comparison with an average of 80%; 23% of pupils progressed into further education.

The school's analysis of data indicates that the pupils who require additional support make good progress and achieve well in external examinations. The school identifies appropriately a number of pupils who are underachieving and has put in place literacy and numeracy support sessions; however, the actions are not sufficiently targeted at the pupils' individual needs to be effective.

3. PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 The quality of the provision for learning is satisfactory.

KEY FINDINGS

The quality of the provision in English and mathematics is good and in science, it is inadequate⁴.

While the quality of the planning, learning and teaching is effective in English and mathematics, across the school it is inconsistent and, in a significant minority of the subjects, the planning is inadequate. The pupils' needs are not met adequately due to considerable variation in the teachers' understanding and skilful deployment of differentiated learning strategies. Similarly, there are inconsistencies in the teachers' understanding and use of assessment for learning strategies to provide constructive feedback to the pupils on how to improve their work.

⁴ For detailed findings of the provision in English, mathematics and science see Appendix 2.

The quality of the learning and teaching observed during the inspection ranged from very good to inadequate. In two-thirds of the lessons observed it was good or better; a significant minority of these lessons were in English and mathematics. The less effective practice, in one-third of the lessons observed, was characterised by whole-class teaching, closed questions and low-level activities. In these lessons, the pupils were passive in their learning, their oral responses were limited and they did not attain good standards. In the best practice, the teachers built on the pupils' prior learning; used well-directed questioning to probe and challenge their thinking; and developed their independence through carefully-planned activities which enabled them to apply their learning in real and relevant contexts. Furthermore, these teachers provided opportunities for the pupils to consolidate their knowledge, understanding and skills through effective plenary sessions.

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 friendly, courteous and confident; their behaviour is very good and they give a high level of support to charitable causes. The older pupils are responsible and display leadership in their various roles as peer mentors and members of the school council. The good range of extra-curricular activities are appreciated by the pupils as an opportunity to develop their talents, as well as raising their confidence and self-esteem. There is effective leadership of the pastoral provision and the school has developed an appropriate mentoring programme to help targeted pupils overcome barriers to their learning. The senior leadership team (SLT) now needs to link the pastoral provision in a more coherent and strategic way to learning and teaching, in order to raise the standards attained by the pupils.

In discussions, the pupils talked positively about their experiences in the school, highlighting the good rapport they have with their supportive teachers. They indicated that they feel safe in the school and know to whom they can turn if they have any concerns regarding their work, safety or well-being.

The majority of the parents who completed the confidential questionnaire indicated their satisfaction with the work of the school. ETI reported to the Principal and representatives of the governors the written concerns identified by one-half of the parents who responded to the questionnaire; these included issues about the choice of subjects and communication. Where appropriate, these have been commented on in the report.

The school gives good attention to healthy eating and physical activity through, for example, the health promotion team, and the good range of physical activities offered through the extra-curricular programme which encourage the pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles.

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

The pupils who require additional support with aspects of their learning are identified at an early stage through the appropriate exchange of relevant information from their previous school. In almost all classes, the pupils are motivated and work confidently alongside their peers. These pupils benefit from helpful intervention sessions to meet their learning and pastoral needs. There are appropriate individual education plans to help the teachers plan for targeted support for these pupils; the teachers now need to take greater cognisance of the identified needs in their planning and teaching.

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

The CEIAG programme focuses appropriately on developing the knowledge, understanding and skills which the pupils need to inform their personal career planning. The pupils use up-to-date information to assist them in their decision making and have a good understanding of the range of the available education, training and employment options. Well-planned careers events and a short period of work experience in year 13 contribute effectively to the pupils' understanding of the world of work. The embedding of CEIAG across all subjects requires further development. While the CEIAG accommodation and learning resources are adequate, the pupils have limited access to ICT facilities in the careers suite.

3.1.3 The curricular provision for the pupils is satisfactory.

KEY FINDINGS

The school is meeting the requirements of the Entitlement Framework and, in collaboration with other schools in the Craigavon Area Learning Community, provides the pupils with a wide choice of subjects at both KS4 and post 16, including opportunities to experience shared learning with pupils from differing backgrounds. It is appropriate that the school has extended the range of applied subjects to meet the different needs of the pupils, however, the curriculum at KS4 does not build sufficiently on the pupils' prior learning experiences.

Strategies to evaluate the effect of the continuing curriculum development on the learning experiences provided and the standards achieved by the pupils are underdeveloped.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 The overall quality of the strategic leadership and management to raise standards attained by the pupils is inadequate.

KEY FINDINGS

The lack of clarity in the strategic future of the school has impacted negatively on the development of a clear and shared vision by the SLT. Consequently, this detracts from the clarity of communication with staff, parents and governors.

The school development planning process is not underpinned by a clear baseline from which to set precise and measurable targets and appropriate actions for improvement. The school development plan does not meet the requirements of the School Development Plan Regulations (NI) 2010. Significant development work is required to review all of the working practices of the SLT to ensure that there is a coherent focus on improving the quality of the learning and teaching to meet the increasingly diverse needs of the pupils and to raise the standards they attain.

There are examples of effective middle management across the school, including pastoral care and child protection, the collation of data, the progress towards meeting the Entitlement Framework, special educational needs, CEIAG and the English and mathematics departments. There is, however, insufficient development of the strategic role of middle managers to raise standards consistently across all subjects.

The governors who met with the inspection team are highly supportive of the school. However, scrutiny of the school's documentation indicates that, the governors are not informed sufficiently about the standards attained by the pupils and the school development planning process to enable them to perform an effective challenge function. In planning for the proposed amalgamation, and as a matter of urgency, the governors need to work closely with the employing authority of the other two schools to manage effectively the amalgamation process and secure good quality provision for all pupils both during and after the transition process.

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.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 **In almost all the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school is inadequate;** the areas for improvement outweigh the strengths in the provision. The inspection has identified significant areas for improvement in standards, learning and teaching and leadership and management, which need to be addressed urgently if the school is to meet effectively the needs of all of the pupils.

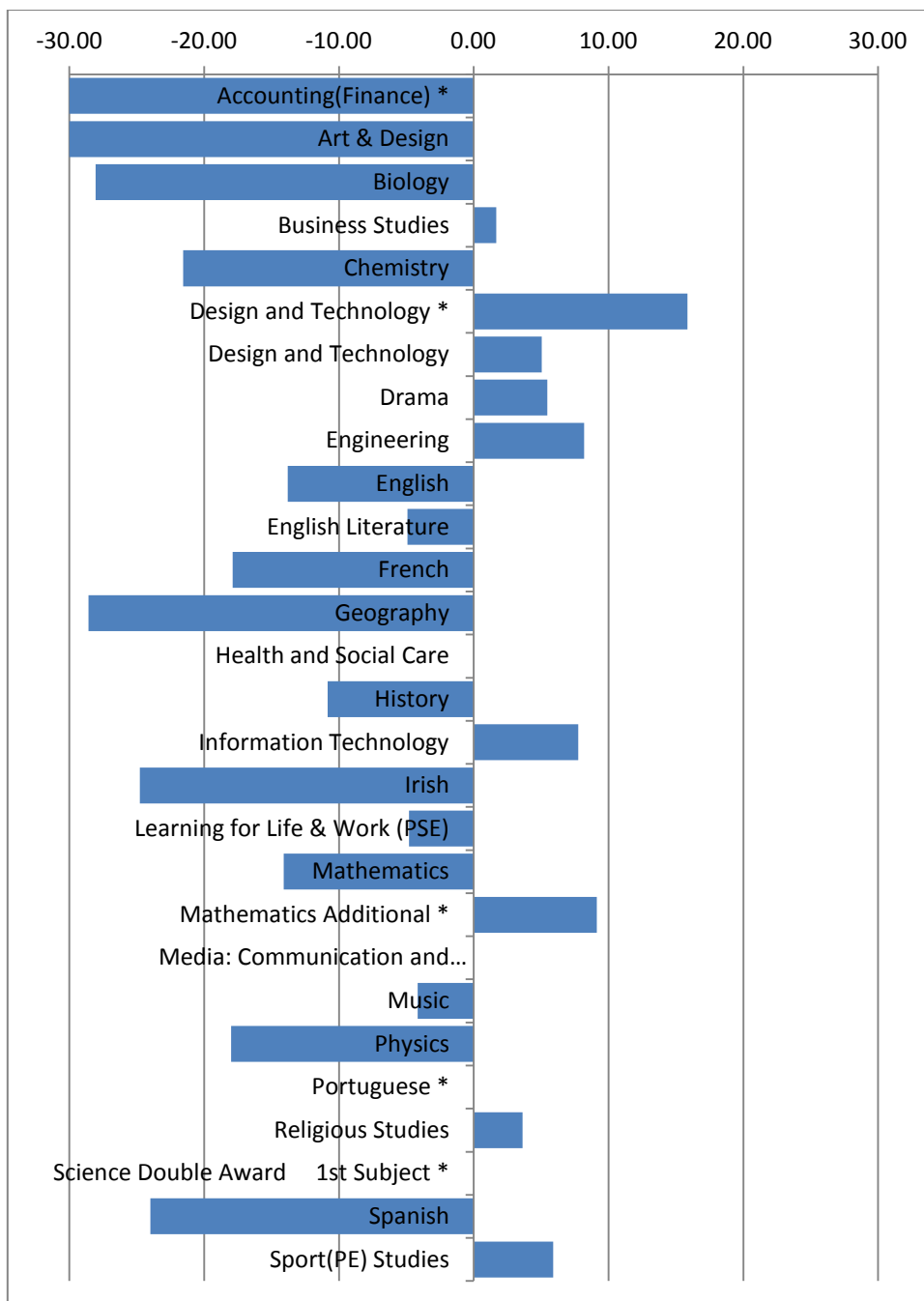
The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement, over a 12-18 month period.

The main areas for improvement include the need to:

- raise the overall inadequate standards at GCSE and A-level;
- improve the quality of the learning, teaching and curriculum in order to meet better the needs of all the pupils; and
- provide effective strategic leadership at all levels to raise standards through a rigorous school development planning process.

1.1 GCSE EXAMINATION RESULTS

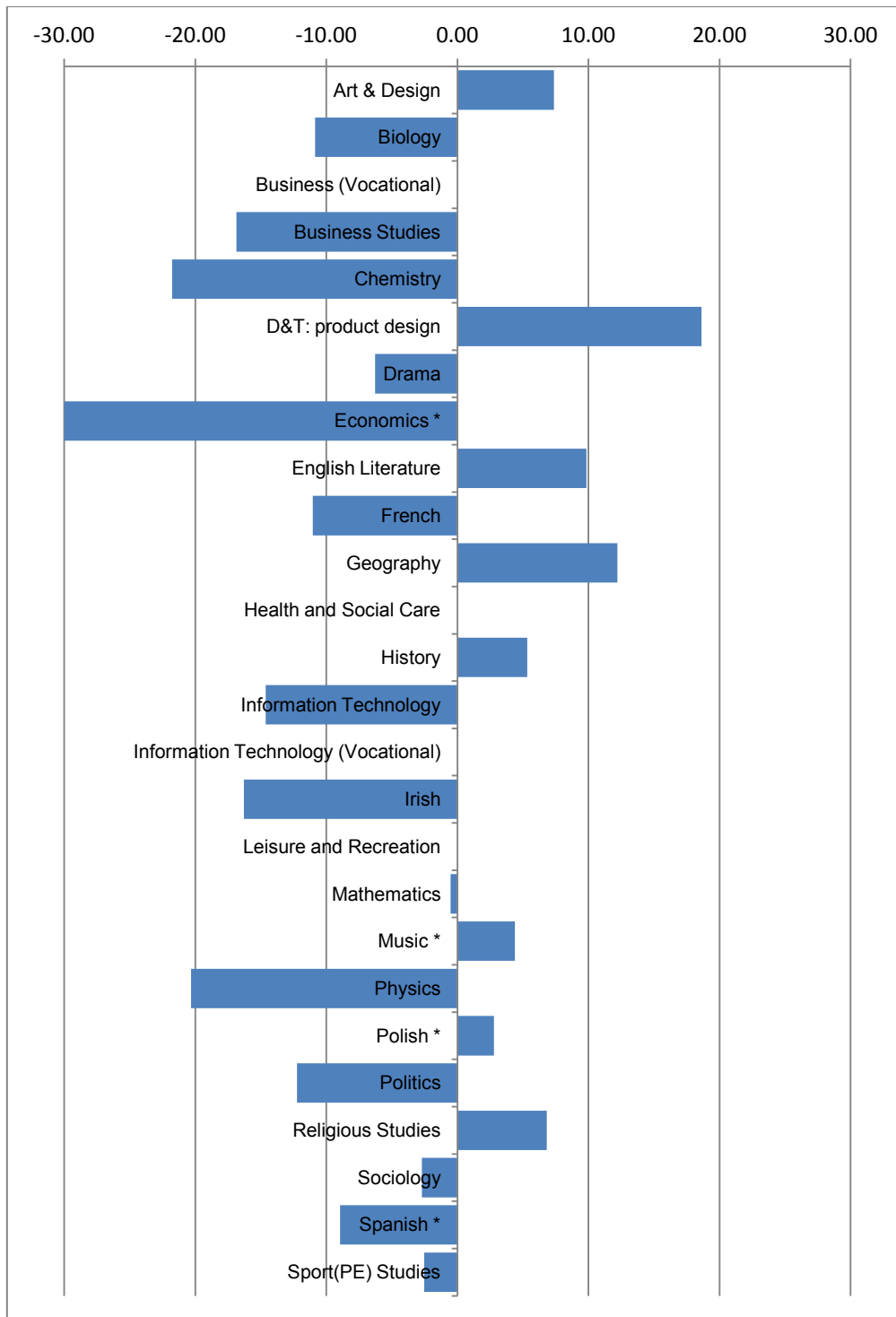
Comparison with the three-year NI average at grades A*- B



* 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 30

OTHER EXAMINATION RESULTS: GCE APPLIED

GCE Subject	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	Total Entry over 3 Years
	% A*-C	% A*-C	% A*-C	
Applied Business	100	81.25	87.5	92
Health and Social Care	100	100	100	93
Applied Information Technology	100	100	92.31	51
Leisure and Recreation	100	93.33	87.5	31

Leavers' Destinations 2010-11

	Year 12	NI %	Yr 13/14	NI%
Total Number of Leavers	17		132	
Another School	29%	32.5	1%	2.1
Employment	12%	2.4	10%	3.6
Full-time Further Education	47%	50.6	23%	10
Full-time Higher Education	N/A	N/A	59%	80.2
Full-time Training	0%	8.4	2%	0.8
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	0%	1.2	1%	1.3
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	12%	4.8	5%	2

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS

English

The overall quality of the provision for English is **good**.

The strengths of the work include:

- the very good standards attained by the pupils in GCE A Level English Literature;
- the very good working relationships within the department and the collegial approach to the promotion of English in the school;
- the quality of the teaching observed which was good or very good;
- the range of learning and teaching activities to engage the pupils actively in their learning and to develop their level of thinking;
- the effective questioning which prompts articulate and confident responses from the pupils; and
- the effective leadership of the head of department including rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the provision.

The area for improvement is to:

- improve the standards in GCSE English, in particular at grades A*-B.

Mathematics

The overall quality of the provision for mathematics is **good**.

The strengths of the work include:

- the good standards achieved by the pupils in GCE A level mathematics;
- the motivated, confident pupils who enjoy learning mathematics and work well independently and in pairs;
- the quality of the teaching observed during the inspection, which was good or very good;
- the wide range of teaching strategies and learning activities which provide appropriate opportunities for the pupils to engage actively in their learning;
- the effective use of data to monitor progress and identify pupils who need additional support; and
- the effective leadership of mathematics and the commitment of the hard-working departmental team to improve the quality of the provision.

The area for improvement is to:

- improve overall standards in GCSE mathematics, in particular at grades A*-B, through building more effectively on the pupils' prior learning from KS3.

Science

The quality of the provision for science is **inadequate**.

The strengths of the work include:

- the good working relationships between the teachers and the pupils in all of the lessons observed;
- the willingness of the pupils to engage in learning and to work collaboratively;
- the effective use of practical activities to complement and consolidate the pupils' knowledge and understanding of scientific theory; and
- the good quality of the resources produced by the teachers to support the teaching, learning and assessment.

The areas for improvement include the need:

- to improve the inadequate standards achieved by the pupils in public examinations;
- for teachers to review planning and teaching to take greater cognisance of the needs, interests and abilities of the pupils and provide greater progression in the learning; and
- for senior leadership to put in place and oversee more effective arrangements for the strategic leadership, management and co-ordination of the science provision to bring about improvements in learning, teaching and pupil outcomes.

ACCOMMODATION

- There are significant shortcomings in the accommodation. The main building does not facilitate readily the flow of large numbers of students; the stairwells and corridors are narrow and restrictive.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- The school has conducted a risk assessment identifying a wide range of health and safety issues as a result of the shortcomings in the accommodation. In particular, pupils have to cross busy traffic areas to access external classrooms and vehicle access to the premises at the start and end of the school day in areas of pedestrian traffic present health and safety concerns.

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