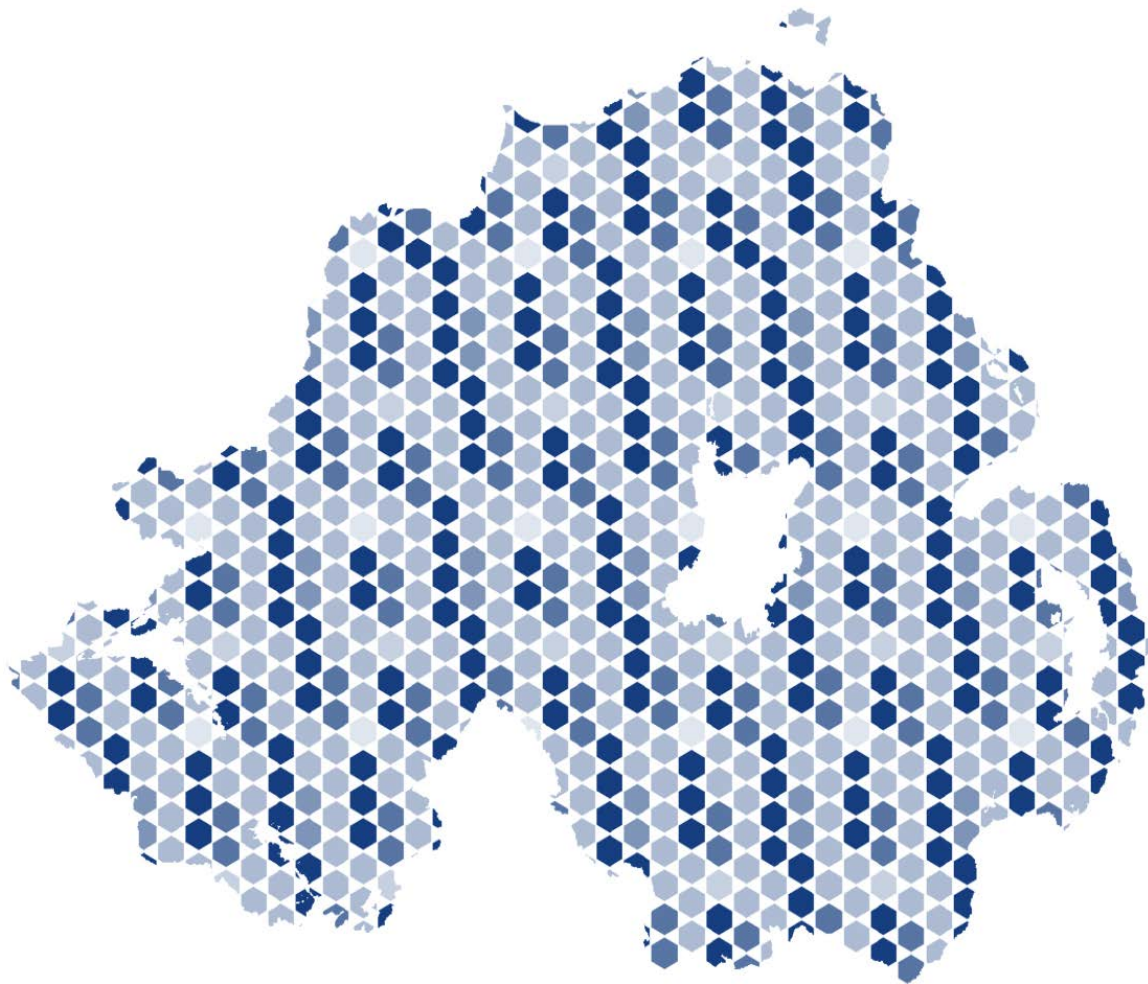


# POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Antrim Grammar School

Co-educational, 11-18, controlled selective school

Report of an Inspection in  
April 2016



The Education and Training Inspectorate  
Promoting Improvement

Providing Inspection Services for:

Department of Education  
Department for the Economy  
Department for Communities



## Quantitative terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

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 when reporting on Achievement and standards, on Provision for learning and on Leadership and management:

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Important area(s) for improvement
Requires significant improvement
Requires urgent improvement

## Overall effectiveness

The ETI use one of the following inspection outcomes when evaluating the overall effectiveness of the school:

The school has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.
The school demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.
The school needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.
The school needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all learners. It requires external support to do so. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.

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## **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 learning and teaching, scrutinised documentation, data and the pupils' written work and held formal and informal discussions with pupils (individually and in groups), teachers and staff with specific responsibilities.

The arrangements for this inspection included a meeting with representatives from the governors and the opportunity for all parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

Around 7% of parents (41), 56% of the teachers (28) and an additional 19 members of the support staff responded to the online questionnaires. There was strong affirmation of the work of the school from all of the staff returns and, in the staff comments there was a common theme which praised the current leadership and positive impact made by the recently appointed principal in putting in place actions to raise standards: similar comments also appeared in the parental responses. The parental responses were similarly affirmative and nearly all of the parents indicated that the school is well thought of in the community and that they are happy with their child's experiences. The ETI reported to the principal and governors a small number of issues that were raised in the questionnaires and written comments.

## **2. Focus of inspection**

In order to promote improvement in the interests of all pupils, the purpose of inspection is, through effective linking of internal and external approaches, to:

- evaluate the quality of the provision and the outcomes for the pupils;
- evaluate the school's leadership and management and its capacity to effect and sustain improvement in its provision and standards; and
- inform the school's planning for improvement.

In addition to the focus on English/literacy and mathematics/numeracy, there was a supplementary subject focus on science in this inspection.

## **3. Context**

Antrim Grammar School is a controlled selective school, which draws its pupils from up to 30 primary schools across Antrim town and the wider rural area. It is co-educational and non-denominational and is oversubscribed at entry into year 8, where nearly all of the pupils achieve at, or above, the expected levels in literacy and numeracy. The school has a sixth form of 192 pupils. Just over fifty of the pupils require additional support with aspects of their learning and a small number of them have statements of educational need. Over the last three years, the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals has risen to just above 7%. The school prides itself on being a welcoming and inclusive school, international in outlook, and which promotes meaningful partnerships with parents and stakeholders.

Antrim Grammar School	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Year 8 Intake	105	107	105	105
Enrolment	749	748	743	736
% Attendance (NI Average)	95% (95.3% )	96% (95.8%)	95.8% (N/A)	N/A (N/A)
FSME Percentage <sup>1</sup>	3.3	2.9	7.3	7.1
% and (Number) of pupils on SEN register	6.8% (51)	7.6% (57)	10.5% (78)	6.9% (51 )
No. of pupils with statements of educational needs in the mainstream school	6	8	6	6
No. of newcomers	0	0	0	0
<i>Intake<sup>2</sup>:</i>				
% of Y8 pupils with L5 English	63	29	#	#
% of Y8 pupils with L5 mathematics	85	56	#	#
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in English	100	88.79	#	#
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in mathematics	100	90.65	#	#

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

N/A not available

# data unavailable due to industrial action in some primary schools

#### 4. Overall findings of the inspection

<b>Overall Effectiveness</b>	Capacity to identify and bring about improvement
<b>Achievements and standards</b>	Important areas for improvement
<b>Provision for learning</b>	Good
<b>Leadership and management</b>	Good

#### 5. Achievements and standards

- The pupils show high levels of maturity and self-assurance in their interactions with their peers, teachers and other adults; they are confident, eloquent and considerate. They demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and their behaviour is exemplary. Across the school, the pupils engage confidently in paired and group activities and show flexibility and creativity in their thinking. The school's motto, "Educating for Life" is exemplified in the wide range of enrichment opportunities that, by year 14, allow the pupils to develop and apply to good effect their critical and analytical skills and their sense of social responsibility.

<sup>1</sup> The term 'FSME Percentage' refers to the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals.

<sup>2</sup> From 2013, KS2 standards in English and mathematics are reported as Levels of Progression in Communication and Using Mathematics and cannot be compared directly with KS2 data from previous years

- The pupils attain very good standards in English language and English literature. The pupils' attainment at grades A\* to B in GCSE English language and at grades A\* to C in GCE A level English literature over the last three years is above the corresponding Northern Ireland (NI) averages and achievement is on a rising trend.
- The pupils attain very good standards in mathematics. The averaged three-year outcomes in GCSE mathematics at grades A\* to B is a significant strength at just over 10 percent above the NI average for similar schools; with just over half of each year group consistently achieving at grades A\* to A. The school's performance in GCSE further mathematics remains consistently in line with the NI average, while at GCE A level, the pupil attainments are almost 5 percentage points above the corresponding NI average.
- The pupils do not attain good enough standards across all the science subjects and raising achievement in science is therefore an important area for improvement. The pupil outcomes in GCE A level at grades A\* to C in biology, chemistry and physics are well below the corresponding NI averages and require significant improvement. At grades A\* to B at GCSE level, there is undue variation across the subjects: there is a steady and improving trend in physics which is above the corresponding NI average, biology is in line with the NI average while chemistry is significantly below.
- Over the last three years, the percentage of pupils attaining seven or more GCSE examinations or equivalent at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics has been broadly in line with the NI average for selective schools in the same free school meals band. The attainment of the small number of pupils entitled to free school meals in five or more GCSE subjects including English and mathematics has improved over the last two years and all these pupils now achieve the standard.
- Around two-thirds of individual subjects are in line with, or above, the corresponding NI average at GCSE grades A\* to B over the last three years. Individual subject performance is affected adversely by too much variation in the outcomes and in some instances they are much too low and need to improve quickly.
- The percentage of pupils attaining three or more GCE A levels at grades A\* to C has been below, or well below, the NI average for selective schools in the same free school meals band in all of the last three years; the improvement of outcomes at A level is therefore an important area for improvement.
- Over the last three years, the performance of most of the individual subjects is in line with, or above, the respective three-year NI averages for all schools at GCE A level at grades A\* to C. There is, however, undue variation across the subjects and outcomes in science and music, in particular, need to improve. In 2014, the attainments by the pupils in A level examinations required significant improvement; it is noteworthy that the new senior leadership team has been swift in tackling these poor outcomes and setting an agenda within the school that is committed to improved pupil attainment. As a result, in 2015 the outcomes attained by the pupils at A level rose sharply, but attainment at post-16, alongside the variation in the performance of individual subjects means that raising pupil outcomes in public examinations remains a priority.

- In 2013/14, while nearly all pupils progress from year 12 to year 13, and from year 13 to year 14, the proportion in both these measures is a little below the corresponding NI average. Significantly, the proportion of pupils who enter higher education, on completion of GCE A2 level study or equivalent, is well below the NI average for selective schools, with just over half of the leavers achieving this progression in 2014.
- The school has already identified the need to raise standards and to address variation across individual subjects through putting in place more discerning and robust monitoring and tracking mechanisms and in taking further action to address underperformance where necessary. The questionnaire returns and the governors' responses reflect strong levels of support for the principal and the leadership team in driving forward a pupil-centred agenda, where achievement and high quality learning are prioritised to ensure that pupils are given suitable opportunities to succeed and progress appropriately. Consequently, achievement and standards require improvement, particularly at post-16 and at grades A\* to B at GCSE level.

## **6. Provision for learning**

- Planning, learning, teaching and assessment are good overall, but with inconsistencies. Teachers' planning is generally sound, but with some variation in quality. Accordingly, most (76%) of the lessons observed were effective (good or better) in promoting and progressing the pupils' learning with a significant minority (35%) of them very good or better. Learning and teaching strengths include: very good use of starters to engage and develop the pupils' thinking skills; purposeful group activities that are matched closely to intended learning and appropriately high levels of challenge set within well structured lessons. In the less effective (important areas for improvement) practice, (24%), there was a need for the teachers to maximise the opportunities for pupils to develop their communication and decision-making skills and provide differentiated tasks to extend the learning for the most able pupils.
- The assessment of, and for, learning is an area where the school is investing in improvement work. There are inconsistencies in marking for improvement and the quality of work in some of the pupils' books observed, and the teachers' challenge of such, is not good enough. All teachers need to monitor and scrutinise pupils' work more meticulously and make demands to ensure all pupils only give of their very best. The variation in the quality of all aspects of learning and teaching is reflected in the associated variation in the pupils' attainment in public examinations. Consequently, the pupils would benefit from more consistent learning and teaching experiences.
- The provision for learning in English is very good. All of the lessons observed during the inspection were effective (good or better), with the majority of them being very good. The detailed planning, notably at key stage (KS) 3, ensures balanced coverage of talking, listening, reading and writing through an age-appropriate and challenging programme of language, literature and media texts.

- The development of literacy across the departments is an appropriate whole-school priority. The literacy action plan is informed well by recent pupil and staff audits and the pupils benefit from the active 'Scribbles and Scribes' literacy groups and other support programmes. The monitoring and evaluating, however, of the impact of these initiatives, with a view to informing future actions, is underdeveloped and the literacy co-ordinator's role in leading this work is key to developing and embedding the literacy provision further across the school.
- The provision for learning in mathematics is very good. The mathematics lessons observed have a robust structure with engaging starter activities to promote pupils' thinking and there is an appropriate balance of active learning strategies and consolidation of learning. The department has identified that more could be done to provide further opportunities for skills development and challenge at all key stages and inspection findings support this self-evaluation.
- The provision for numeracy is sound and is promoted effectively through a variety of clubs and appealing competitions, challenge of the month questions and displays. The pupils use and apply their numeracy skills accurately and appropriately during well planned and meaningful tasks, which are mapped across the curriculum.
- The provision for learning in science is an important area for improvement. While science lessons have well organised practical investigations and effective group work activities, there is insufficient planning for differentiation, particularly in practical work; as a result, the pupils' thinking skills and personal capabilities in science, across the ability range, are not developed in a consistent enough manner.
- The whole-school approach to care and support supports effectively the pupils' personal, social and academic development. The pastoral care is underpinned by good quality working relationships between staff and pupils and there is a strong sense of community spirit, which is inclusive. The taught pastoral provision is tailored well to address contemporary issues; it is pupil informed and well supported by appropriate external agencies. Consequently, the provision develops well the pupils' confidence, resilience and independence. A key strength of the pastoral provision is the strategic promotion of the pupil voice that is backed up by meaningful staff to pupil interactions. Through a wide range of purposeful leadership opportunities, such as class councils and the learning and teaching committee, the pupils are empowered, at all stages, to contribute in an increasingly meaningful way to school improvement.
- The pupils who require additional support with their learning are integrated fully into all aspects of school life. The pupils benefit from regular opportunities to develop effective inter-personal skills, which enables them to learn securely alongside their peers and attain well, particularly at GCE A level. However, the individual education plans (IEPs) lack specific enough targets and the pupil, subject teacher and parental contribution is underdeveloped. The provision would benefit from a review of the IEP planning process with all staff to ensure that the targets match appropriately the individual pupils' needs and ensure strategies are focused on guiding more effectively the learning and teaching for the pupils.



- The curriculum offer at KS 3 is broad and balanced. Curriculum planning is given a high priority by the school and recent well-considered developments have led to a more flexible curriculum, aligned to the aspirations and interests of the pupils and important labour market information. Consequently, at KS 4 there is now an appropriate range of subjects that meets the entitlement framework, including single and double award science that meets better the full range of abilities. At post-16, the curriculum offer remains overly narrow and collaborative links with other schools and providers are not sufficiently well developed or used. The continued implementation, however, of the curriculum review, particularly for post-16, will provide a broader range of curriculum pathways to raise the pupils' attainments and meet fully the entitlement framework at this level. Embedding collaborative links with other schools and further education to expand further the range of vocational and applied subjects remains a key priority for the school.
- The pupils benefit from an effective careers education, information, advice and guidance provision. It is underpinned with a clear vision and well informed strategies to adapt and align a comprehensive careers programme with curriculum planning. The taught careers provision is well planned and effective, at all key stages, which develops well the pupils' understanding of the world of work. A significant agenda of careers events, including careers fairs, guest speakers and subject-specific information complements to good effect the taught programme, enabling the pupils to make well-informed decisions at key transition points. While all of the post-16 pupils avail of a well-targeted work-experience itinerary, pupils in KS 4 would benefit also from similar work-related learning opportunities to support their personal career planning. Notably, ongoing capacity building at senior leadership level and across the school is strengthening the whole-school approach to supporting the pupils' career planning.

## **7. Leadership and management**

- The relatively new senior leadership is dealing well with significant legacy issues, including an inflexible academic curriculum offer, some poor examination results and insufficiently high expectations of what the pupils can achieve. The current leadership team, at the highest level, is cohesive and ambitious for improvement. The leadership is re-focusing the school on being more pupil-centred and delivering higher quality learning and teaching that leads to outcomes more commensurate for an intake that is selected on higher academic ability. The various groups that engaged with the inspectors, including parents, pupils and middle leaders, revealed strong support and appreciation for the changes the new principal, supported by the two vice-principals, is making.
- The senior management team functions cohesively through an excellent complement of finely fused academic and pastoral leadership; it provides clear and strategic direction for the school, based upon raising standards and improving transitional pathways for pupils. A key strength of the leadership is the on-going development of a distributive leadership model, which is reflected in the importance given to staff development, which focuses sharply and appropriately on capacity building. The leadership attends well to staff welfare, while being pro-active in challenging any underperformance issues that cause concern.

- Appropriate priorities for school improvement are identified through effective self-evaluation, underpinned by on-going and widespread data analysis. The school development plan<sup>[1]</sup>, and associated action plans, guide well the work of the school in a clear and measurable way. The planning processes are supported by meaningful consultation with pupils, parents, staff and governors. Baselines are accurate and the priorities are rightly focused on raising standards through ensuring that high quality learning and teaching is the core business of the school.
- There is variation in the effectiveness of the work of middle managers and developing their capacity further remains an appropriate whole-school priority. The middle leaders are receptive to, and appreciative of, the senior leadership's investment in their professional development; they are supported and challenged to perform their roles more effectively. More needs to be done, however, by middle leaders to monitor the impact of teaching on learning, including monitoring the pupils' work more scrupulously, in order to challenge swiftly and remedy any poor teaching practice or learning behaviours, or identifying pupils who are at risk of underachieving. Consequently, their role is crucial in raising expectations for teachers and pupils, in order to make the necessary improvements in outcomes at grades A\* to B at GCSE level and at grades A\* to C at GCE A level.
- The governors are very supportive and knowledgeable of the life and work of the school. They are well informed about the standards attained by the pupils and are consulted with appropriately. Working alongside the principal, they are developing more pro-active governance processes and methods of engagement, including a more systematic and thorough challenge function. On the basis of the evidence presented at the time of inspection, the ETI evaluation is that the school and wider community can have confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated.
- On the basis of the evidence available at the time of inspection, the school's arrangements for safeguarding young people are comprehensive. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education. The pupils reported that they feel safe in school and know what to do if they are concerned about their safety or well-being.

## **8. Overall effectiveness**

The school demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement in:

- improving the standards achieved by pupils in public examinations, particularly at post-16 and in GCSE at grades A\* to B, through improving the consistency in the quality of all aspects of learning and teaching, in order to ensure all pupils receive high quality lessons and attentive, on-going teacher support.

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<sup>[1]</sup> The school development plan meets the requirements of the School Development Planning Regulations (NI) 2010

## Trends in examination performance and other statistical data

### GCSE and equivalent examination results from 2012-13 to 2014-15

Based on data held by the school in SIMS<sup>3</sup> and verified with ETI, the table below compares the percentage of year 12 pupils in Antrim Grammar School achieving seven or more GCSEs at grades A\* to C and equivalent subjects and the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals, with the NI average for selective schools in the same free school meals category<sup>4</sup>.

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

<b>GCSE and GCSE equivalent subjects - *following permitted exclusions</b>	2013	2014	2015
*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	93.8	90.1	94.6
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	93.7	92.7	N/A
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics	93.8	90.1	94.6
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	91.3	91.5	N/A
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	98.2	94.6	98.2
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)	85.7	100	100

#### Other examination results: key stage 4

Based on data held by the school in SIMS and verified with ETI, the table below shows the percentage of year 12 pupils in Antrim Grammar School achieving grades A\* to C in vocational/applied courses equivalent to GCSE level. No average is available from the examining boards for the subjects in this table to facilitate comparison.

#### Other level 2 courses taken in at least two of the last three years.

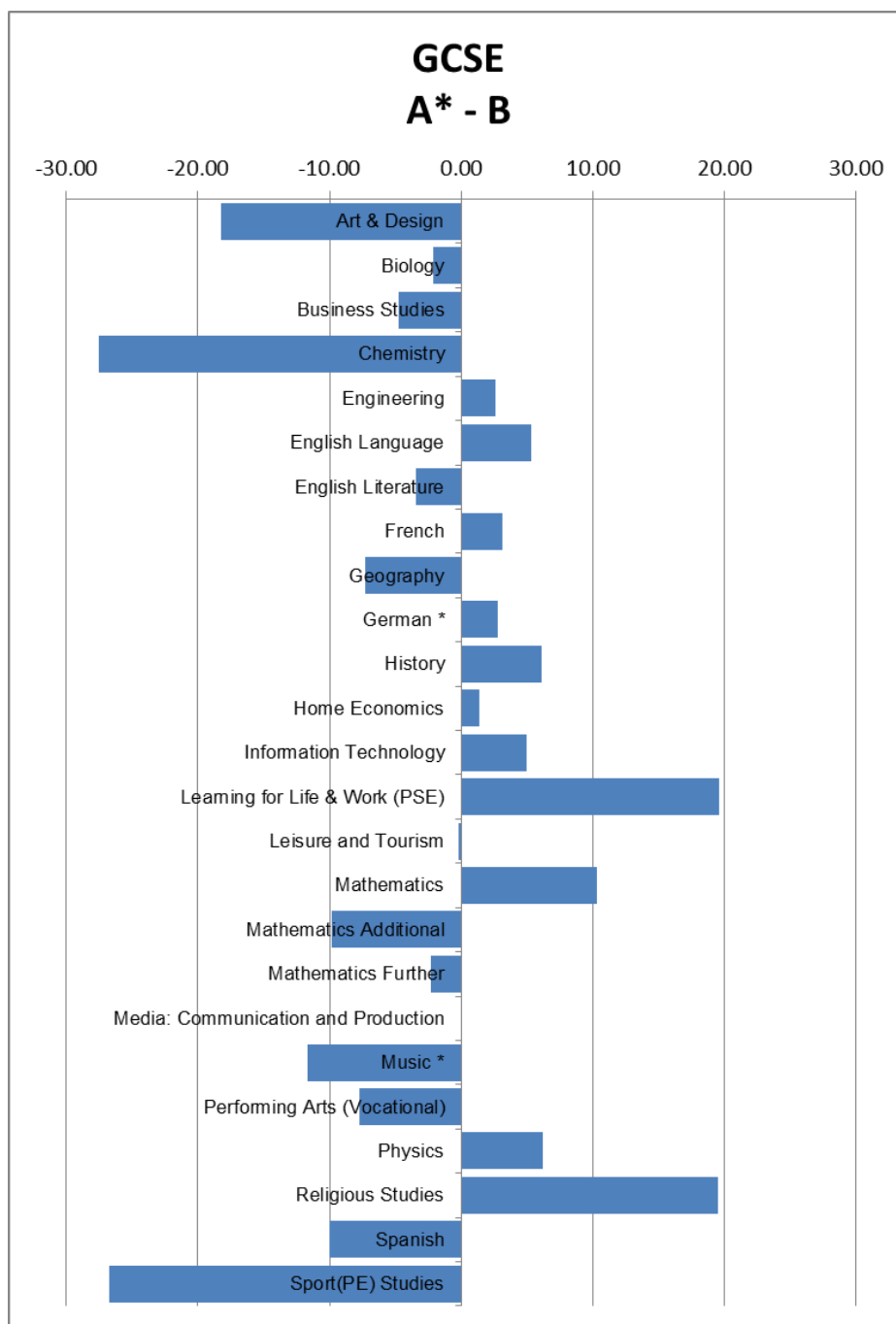
Level 2	2013	2014	2015	Total entry over 3 years
	% pass	% pass	% pass	
BTEC Equine/ Horse care	100	100	100	19
BTEC Horticulture	100	100	100	18

<sup>3</sup> SIMS: School Information Management System

<sup>4</sup> See benchmarking data and guidance contained in the annual DE Circulars on: 'School Development Planning and Target-Setting'.

## Attainment of pupils in individual subjects at GCSE level at grades A\* to B from 2012-13 to 2014-15

Based on data held by the school in SIMS and verified with ETI, the average over three years of the percentage of year 12 pupils achieving at GCSE level at grades A\* to B in individual subjects in Antrim Grammar School is compared with the three-year NI average for similar selective schools. A positive value (to the right) shows that the average individual subject performance is above the NI average. The number of entries to each subject will vary considerably and therefore comparisons between subjects should be treated with caution.



\*Indicates fewer than 30 entries over 3 years.

## GCE A level examination results at grades A\* to C from 2012-13 to 2014-15

Based on data held by the school in SIMS and verified with ETI, the table below shows the percentage of year 14 pupils in Antrim Grammar School achieving three or more GCE A levels at grades A\* to C. The table compares the percentage of pupils achieving three or more GCEs at grades A\* to C with the NI average for non-selective schools in the same free school meals category<sup>5</sup>.

### Year 14 (A2) performance

GCE A Level or equivalent	2013	2014	2015
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels & equivalents in at least 3 subjects	97	94	97
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	68.6	61.1	71
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	81	75.3	72.3

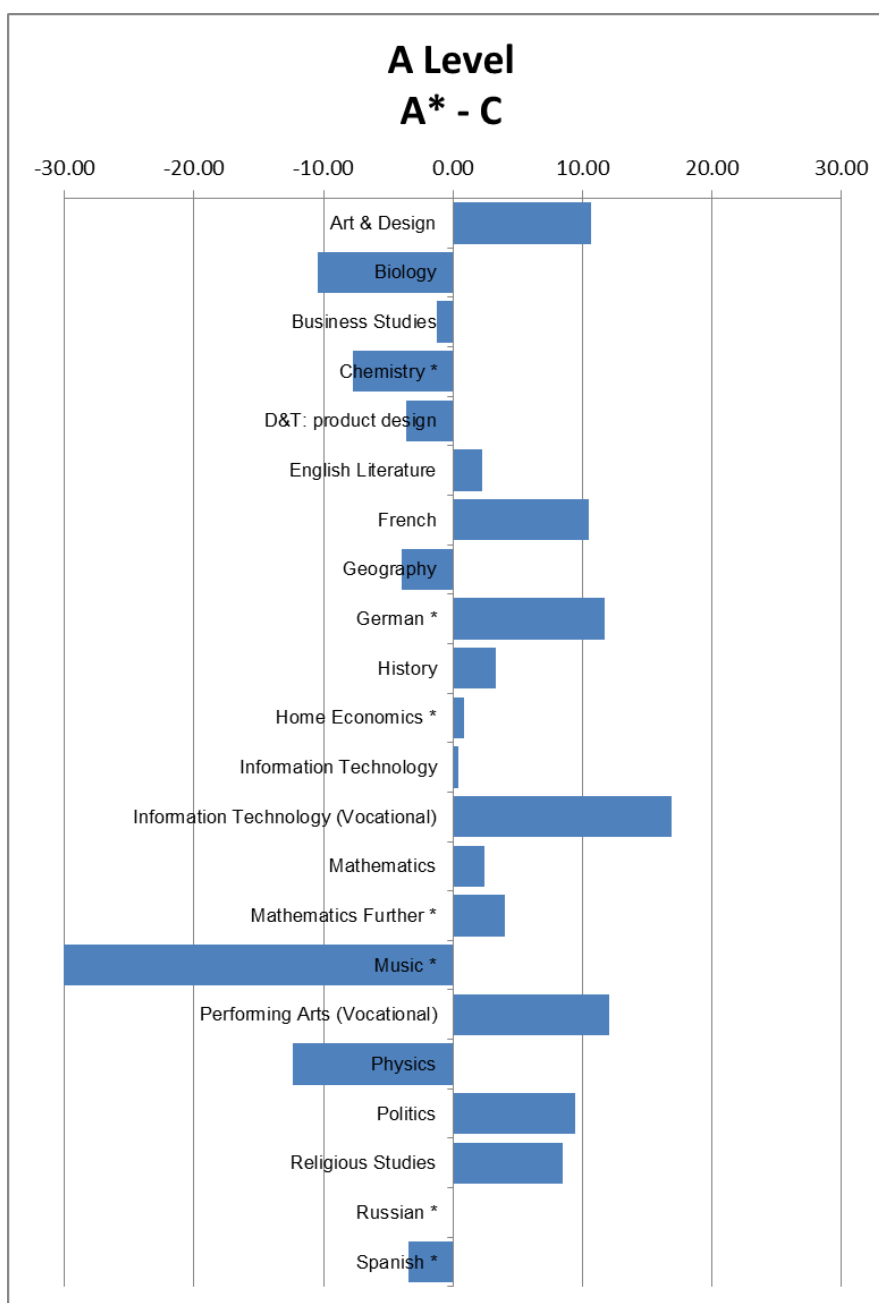
Source: Data as held and verified by the school, with DE benchmarks.

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<sup>5</sup> See benchmarking data and guidance contained in the annual DE Circulars on: 'School Development Planning and Target-Setting'.

## Attainment of pupils in individual subjects at GCE A level at grades A\* to C from 2012-13 to 2014-15

Based on data held by the school in SIMS and verified with ETI, the average over three years of the percentage of year 14 pupils achieving at GCE A level at grades A\* to C in individual subjects in Antrim Grammar School is compared with the three-year NI average. A positive value (to the right) shows that the average individual subject performance is above the NI average. The number of entries to each subject will vary considerably and therefore comparisons between subjects should be treated with caution.



\*indicates fewer than 20 entries over 3 years

### Other examination results from 2013-14 to 2014-15: post 16: POST-16

Based on data held by the school in SIMS and verified with ETI, the table below shows the percentage of year 14 pupils in this school achieving grades A\* to C and A\* to E in vocational/applied courses equivalent to GCE level. No average is available from the examining boards for the subjects in this table to facilitate comparison.

### Other level 3 courses taken in at least two of the last three years.

Level 3	2013	2014	2015	Total entry over 3 years
	% pass	% pass	% pass	
BTEC Travel and Tourism	100	100	100	21
BTEC Sports Studies	100	100	100	36
BTEC Health and Social Care	N/A	100	100	21

### Staying on rate

Based on data held in SIMS by the school and verified with ETI, the table below shows the percentage of the pupils who stay on at Antrim Grammar School from year 12 to year 13 and then from year 13 to year 14, compared with the NI average for selective schools. This data is from school census returns to the Department of Education for the most recent year for which data is available.

	NI Average	School
% Yr 12 staying on to Yr 13	95.6	91.0
% Yr 13 staying on to Yr 14	94.1	93.2

### Leavers' destinations

Based on data held by the school and verified with ETI, the table below shows the percentage of all of the pupils from Antrim Grammar School who leave school to enter further education, higher education or employment, or are seeking employment, compared with the average for selective schools.

	School	NI	Level 2 (No.)	Level 3 (No.)	Level 4 (No.)
Total Number of Leavers	118	9449			
Employment	5.9%	4.2%			
Further Education	33.9%	20.6%	24	4	12
Higher Education	52.5%	70.6%			62
Work-based Learning (Training)	2.5%	1.4%			
Unemployed	4.2%	1.1%			
Unknown	0.8%	2.1%			

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