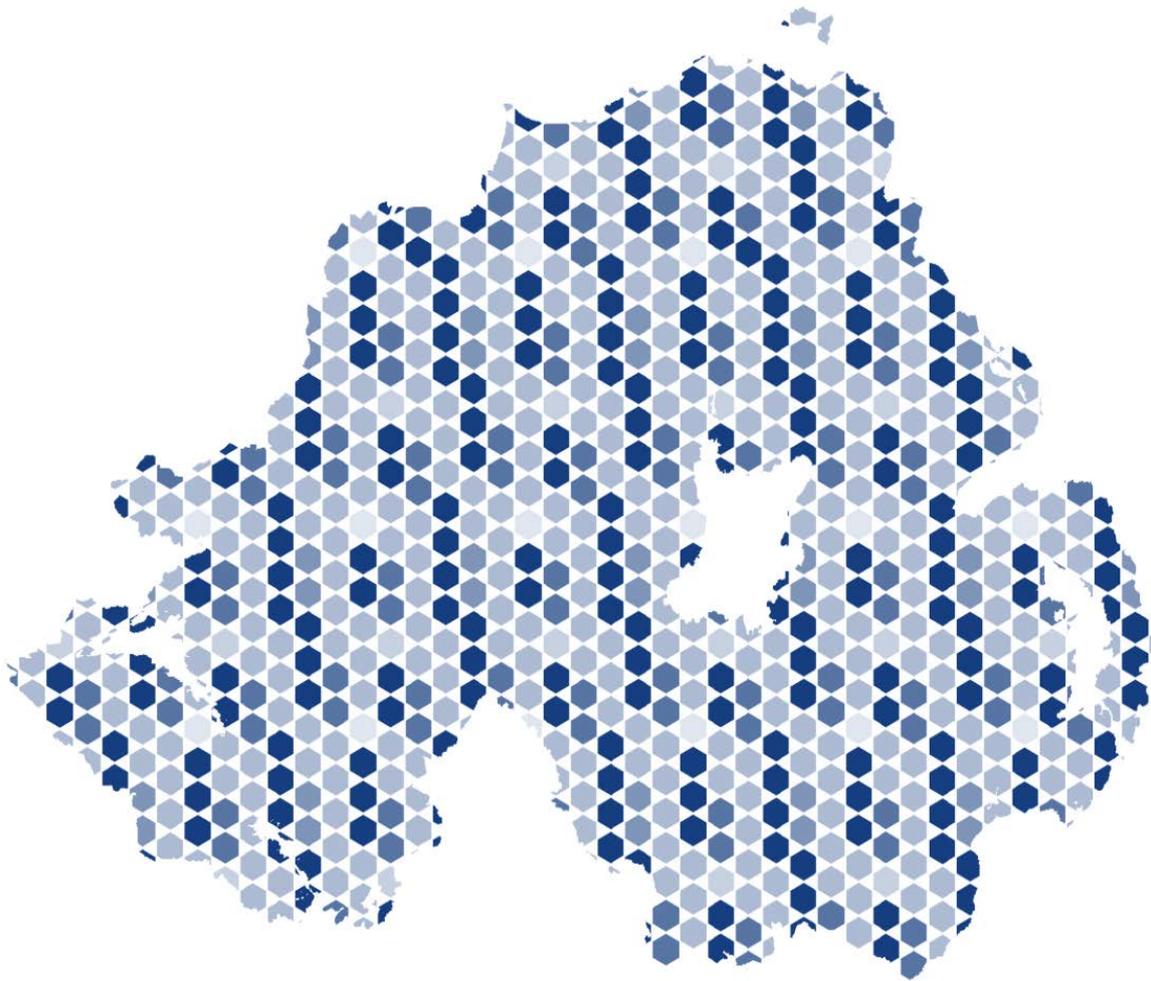


# POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

Carrickfergus Grammar School,  
Carrickfergus, County Antrim

Controlled co-educational 11-18 Grammar School

Report of an Inspection  
in October 2016

## 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 the 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: <https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/together-towards-improvement-post-primary>.

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.

Sixteen percent of parents (97) responded to the questionnaires, with 35 of them providing written comments. Almost all of the parents commented positively on: the nurturing ethos of the school; the care and commitment of the staff; and the sensitive and supportive leadership of the principal. Thirty-three percent of staff (17) responded to the questionnaires, with five providing written comments; the returns highlighted positively the work of the senior leaders and the changing role of middle leaders. The small number of issues raised in the questionnaires were discussed (maintaining the confidentiality of the respondents) with the governors and the principal.

## **2. Focus of the 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 art and design in this inspection.

## **3. Context**

Carrickfergus Grammar School is a controlled co-educational grammar school for pupils aged 11-18 years. It draws most of its pupils from the town and the surrounding area. Over the past four years, the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals and the percentage of pupils identified with additional learning needs have almost doubled.

<b>Carrickfergus Grammar School</b>	<b>2013-14</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>
Year 8 Intake	117	117	119	118
Enrolment	800	799	806	813
% Attendance (NI Average)	94.5% (95.8%)	92.8% (95.6%)	94.7% (N/A)	N/A (N/A)
FSME Percentage <sup>1</sup>	5.3%	8.4%	10.4%	11.9%
% and (Number) of pupils on SEN register	4.8% (39 )	5.5% (44 )	6.7% (54 )	8.7% (52)
No. of pupils with statements of educational need in the mainstream school	*	5	5	7
No. of newcomers	0	0	0	0

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

\* fewer than 5

N/A not available

#### **4. Overall findings of the inspection**

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

#### **5. Achievements and standards**

- Overall, the standards attained by the pupils at post-16 are an important area for improvement. In the past three years, the proportion of pupils attaining three or more grades A\* to C at GCE A level including equivalences has been well below the NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category; this is due, in part, to the underperformance of a small number of individual A level subjects that are more than five percentage points below the three-year NI average. The proportion of pupils who stay on from year 13 to 14 is well below the NI average. The proportion of pupils who progress to higher education is also lower than the respective NI average.
- In contrast, the proportion of pupils attaining seven or more GCSE examinations, including English and mathematics, at grades A\* to C, has been above the NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category in two of the last three years. The majority (60%) of the individual subjects at GCSE grades A\* to B are above the corresponding NI average over the last three years.

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

- The standards attained by the pupils in English are very good. Most of the pupils play an active role in paired and small group activities where they listen respectfully to others and articulate clearly their own views. The pupils' reading and comprehension skills are developed well through their engagement with an appropriately wide range of challenging fiction, non-fiction and media texts. Over the past three years, the proportion of pupils attaining at grades A\* to B in GCSE English and GCSE English literature is consistently above the Northern Ireland (NI) average for similar schools. Over the same period, the proportion of pupils attaining at grades A\* to C at GCE A level over the same period has also been well above the NI average.
- The pupils attain very good standards in mathematics. They enjoy learning mathematics and the standard of their written work is of a high quality. Over the past three years, the proportion of pupils attaining at grades A\* to B in GCSE mathematics and GCSE further mathematics is consistently well above or in line with the respective NI averages for similar schools. The standards attained by the pupils at GCE A level at grades A\* to C are also consistently above the NI average for similar schools over the same period.
- The standards attained by the pupils in GCSE art and design are an important area for improvement. Over the past three years, the proportion of pupils attaining at grades A\* to B has been well below the NI average for similar schools. Over the same period, almost all of the pupils entered for photography or fine art at GCE A level attained at grades A\* to C.
- The small number of pupils who require additional support with aspects of their learning achieve either in line with or above the standards attained by their peers.
- The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals attaining at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics at GCSE level or equivalent has been in line with or above the NI average in the past three years.
- Importantly, throughout the school, the quietly confident pupils are very motivated with high levels of maturity and well-developed personal and social skills. They respond enthusiastically to a wide range of active learning opportunities and engage purposefully in their learning. Through a range of leadership roles, for example, peer mentoring, the pupils have opportunities to develop further their wider skills and dispositions and to make a positive contribution to their school.

## **6. Provision for learning**

- Planning, teaching and assessment are good or better at promoting and progressing the pupils' learning in almost all of the lessons observed; it is noteworthy that almost one-half (49%) of the lessons were very good or better, reflecting the school's recent focus on improvements in learning and teaching. Characteristics of the most effective practice include: well-paced lessons that stretch and challenge the more able; planned and incidental opportunities to develop the pupils' high-level thinking skills in relevant contexts; and meaningful plenaries to consolidate and assess the learning, and inform future planning.

- The provision for learning in English is very good. There were strengths in most of the lessons observed, with almost one-half of them being very good. Through purposeful questioning and helpful verbal prompts, the teachers enable the pupils to make extended oral responses and develop their thinking skills. Marking for improvement is applied well across the department; the teachers' comments identify clearly the strengths and the practical ways in which the pupils can raise the standard of their work. While the teachers use performance data skilfully to identify individual pupils who require additional support in literacy, it is not used effectively enough to set departmental targets for the pupils' attainment in public examinations.
- The pupils' skills in literacy are developed effectively through their work in English and in a range of subjects across the curriculum. Pupils who have additional needs in literacy are identified early, encouraged with individualised literacy targets and appropriate levels of support. Consequently, their progress is tracked and monitored closely through the teachers' observations, standardised testing and the regular cycle of assessment tasks.
- The provision for learning in mathematics is very good. Most of the teaching observed in mathematics was good or better, with just over one-half of it being very good. In the more effective lessons, there is a wide range of teaching strategies which underpin good, purposeful learning experiences, complemented by high levels of active participation by the pupils in their learning. The work and tasks are matched well to the ability of the pupils and the level of challenge for the more able is appropriately high. The use of performance data to identify underachievement and to put effective intervention strategies in place, however, is underdeveloped and it is timely that this is being reviewed.
- While numeracy is promoted across the school through displays and the pupils' participation in mathematical competitions and numeracy events, overall the pupils do not benefit sufficiently from a consistent whole-school approach to the development of their numeracy skills.
- The overall provision for learning in art and design is good. A majority of the lessons observed were very good or better. A highlight in the provision is the GCSE art and design fashion unit which culminates in a whole school fashion show event. It incorporates collaboration with GCE A level photography pupils, contextualises the learning and develops to good effect the pupils' wider skills. The scheme of work at key stage (KS) 3 is not fit-for-purpose; it needs to be reviewed to ensure broader artistic learning experiences for pupils, which allow for personalised investigation, contextualised learning, and wider understanding of the nature of art and design.
- Most of the pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the career options and pathways available to them. The pupils in KS 4 and post-16 access relevant work experience placements which are matched to their career aspirations. They benefit from a range of external speakers and partnerships with industry, further education and the universities which informs well their knowledge of educational opportunities and the available pathways, including employment. While the school has invested appropriately in resourcing the taught careers provision, there is undue variation in the quality of the learning experiences for the pupils, which needs to be addressed.

- The curriculum at key stages 3 and 4 has appropriate breadth and balance. In contrast, the post-16 curriculum offer is an important area for improvement. The school provides a number of academic and applied subject options that are offered in collaboration within the partner schools in the Carrickfergus Area Learning Community. The types and combinations of subjects offered, particularly at post-16 level, and the specific entry requirements onto courses do not meet the needs of all of the pupils, which contributes to the lower than average progression of pupils from year 13 into year 14.
- The provision for care and support of the pupils is very good. A particular strength of the provision is the extensive extra-curricular programme, which provides the pupils with numerous opportunities in sport, music, technology and beyond, to improve their competence and to compete in their areas of interest. The pupil voice is valued, and regular pupil surveys and evaluations inform improvements in aspects of school life, for example, in the taught pastoral curriculum.
- The needs of those pupils who require additional support with aspects of their learning are identified at an early stage and appropriate interventions are put in place. There is a clear and inclusive ethos; the pupils are very well integrated into school life and they are supported well and sensitively by the teachers, classroom assistants and their peers. The school does not involve sufficiently, however, the pupils, their parents/carers and subject teachers in setting and reviewing specific, measurable targets in the pupils' education plans.
- The school has well-established external partnerships, including close links with other providers, higher education, employers, charities, and local schools. These partnerships are skilfully harnessed to develop innovative and relevant programmes for the pupils' personal development and provide them with valuable experiences to further develop and apply their interpersonal skills, resilience and empathy for others.

## **7. Leadership and management**

- The senior leadership articulate a sound strategic vision for the direction of the school. The senior leaders have identified key priorities and implemented appropriate actions that they can demonstrate have resulted already in improvements in the pupils' learning experiences and the upward trend in GCSE results.
- The school development plan is informed appropriately by a thorough analysis of the school's performance data, ongoing monitoring and evaluation of provision and standards by the middle managers and ample consultation with the whole school community.
- Most of the middle leaders effectively undertake their responsibilities. They are increasingly adept at using the school's internal and external performance data to inform their action planning and to set purposeful, coherent targets in order to monitor and track the impact of actions on the pupils' learning and standards. The senior leaders, however, need to provide further and more incisive feedback to the middle leaders on the quality of the action planning and to facilitate better dissemination of the good practice that exists.

- The governors are largely well-informed about the work of the school and have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement. They have identified an area of governance to review, namely to monitor more closely the effectiveness of departmental action plans in effecting sustained improvement. Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the ETI's evaluation is that there can be 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 satisfactory. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education, but the following area needs to be addressed: to review the access arrangements to the school site and the school buildings. The pupils reported that they feel safe in school; they know what to do and who to talk to if they are concerned about their safety or well-being.

## **8. Overall effectiveness**

Carrickfergus Grammar School demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interests of all learners. There is an area for improvement that the school has demonstrated the capacity to address. The area for improvement is to:

- broaden the school's curriculum offer in order to improve the overall standards attained by pupils in public examinations, particularly at post-sixteen and in a significant minority of individual subjects at GCSE level.

The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.

## Examination performance and other statistical data

### GCSE and equivalent examination results from 2013-14 to 2015-16

Based on data held by the school in SIMS<sup>2</sup> and verified with the ETI, the table below compares the percentage of year 12 pupils in Carrickfergus 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>3</sup>.

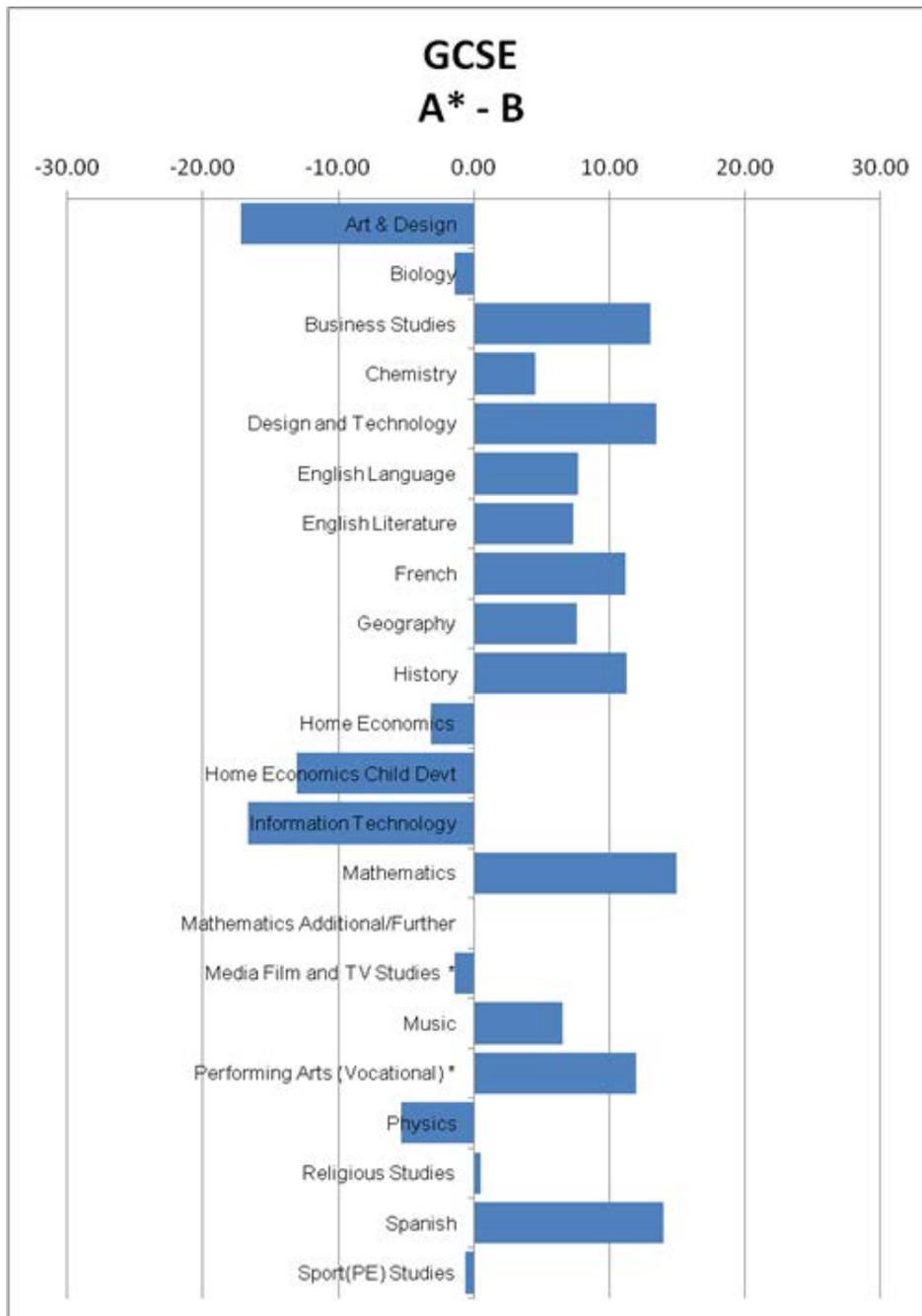
<b>GCSE and GCSE equivalent subjects - *following permitted exclusions</b>	<b>2013-14</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>
<i>*Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE &amp; Equivalents in at least 7 subjects</i>	90.8	95.8	99.2
<i>*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects</i>	83.33	95.80	93.44
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	93.1	95	N/A
<i>*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics</i>	83.33	95.80	93.44
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	91.5	94.8	N/A
<i>*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects</i>	92.50	97.48	97.54
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)	100	88	91

<sup>2</sup> SIMS: School Information Management System

<sup>3</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 2013-14 to 2015-16**

Based on data held by the school in SIMS and verified with the ETI, the average over three years of the percentage of pupils achieving at GCSE level at grades A\* to B in individual subjects in Carrickfergus Grammar School is compared with the three-year NI average for similar 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 2013-14 to 2015-16

Based on data held by the school in SIMS and verified with the ETI, the table below shows the percentage of year 14 pupils in Carrickfergus Grammar School achieving three or more GCE A levels or equivalent at grades A\* to C, and two or more GCE A levels at grades A\* to E. The table compares the percentage of pupils achieving three or more GCE A levels or equivalent with the NI average for selective schools in the same free school meals category<sup>4</sup>.

GCE A Level or equivalent	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels & Equivalentents in at least 3 subjects	100	100	100
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	71	71	65.5
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	<i>73.9</i>	<i>76.4</i>	N/A

## Other examination results: post-16

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

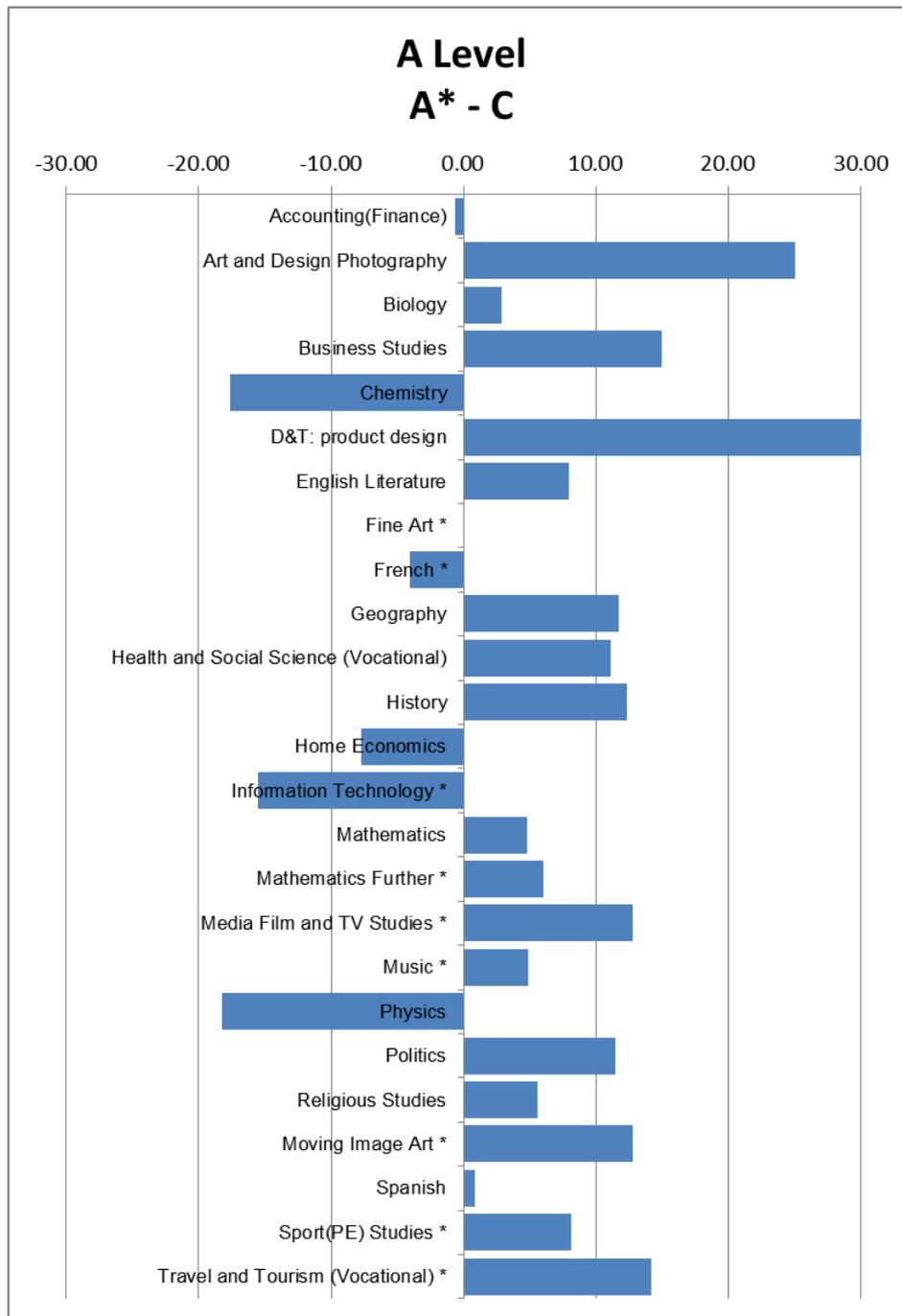
Level 3	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	Total entry over 3 years
	% A* - C	% A* - C	% A* - C	
<i>Performing Arts</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>100</i>	*
<i>Sports Studies</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	*

\* Fewer than 5 pupils

<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 GCE A level at grades A\* to C from 2013-14 to 2015-16

Based on data held by the school in SIMS and verified with the ETI, the average over three years of the percentage of year 14 pupils achieving at GCE level at grades A\* to C in individual subjects in Carrickfergus Grammar School is compared with the three-year NI average for similar 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 20 entries over 3 years

### Staying on rate

Based on data held in SIMS by the school and verified with the ETI, the table below shows the percentage of the pupils who stay on at Carrickfergus Grammar School from year 12 to year 13 and then from year 13 to year 14, compared with the NI average for selective schools, 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	88.5	91.7
% Yr 13 staying on to Yr 14	91.3	74.1

### Leavers' destinations

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

	NI	School	Level 2 (No.)	Level 3 (No.)	Level 4 (No.)
Total Number of Leavers	4548	116			
Employment	5.7%	4			
Institute of Further Education	25.9%	33		29	4
Institute of Higher Education	62.7%	72			72
Work-based Learning (Training)	2.9%	5			
Unemployed	1.1%	2			
Unknown	1.7%	-			

### Health and safety

The senior leaders need to carry out a risk assessments that take full account of the health and safety issues in relation to the:

- dog mess on the rugby pitches, endangering the health and safety of the pupils who use the pitches;
- integrity of the mobile classroom infrastructure;
- timber treads on the staircases and ramps of the mobile classrooms;
- operation and reliability of the emergency exits;
- condition of the toilet facilities; and
- traffic management to, and within, the school grounds.

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