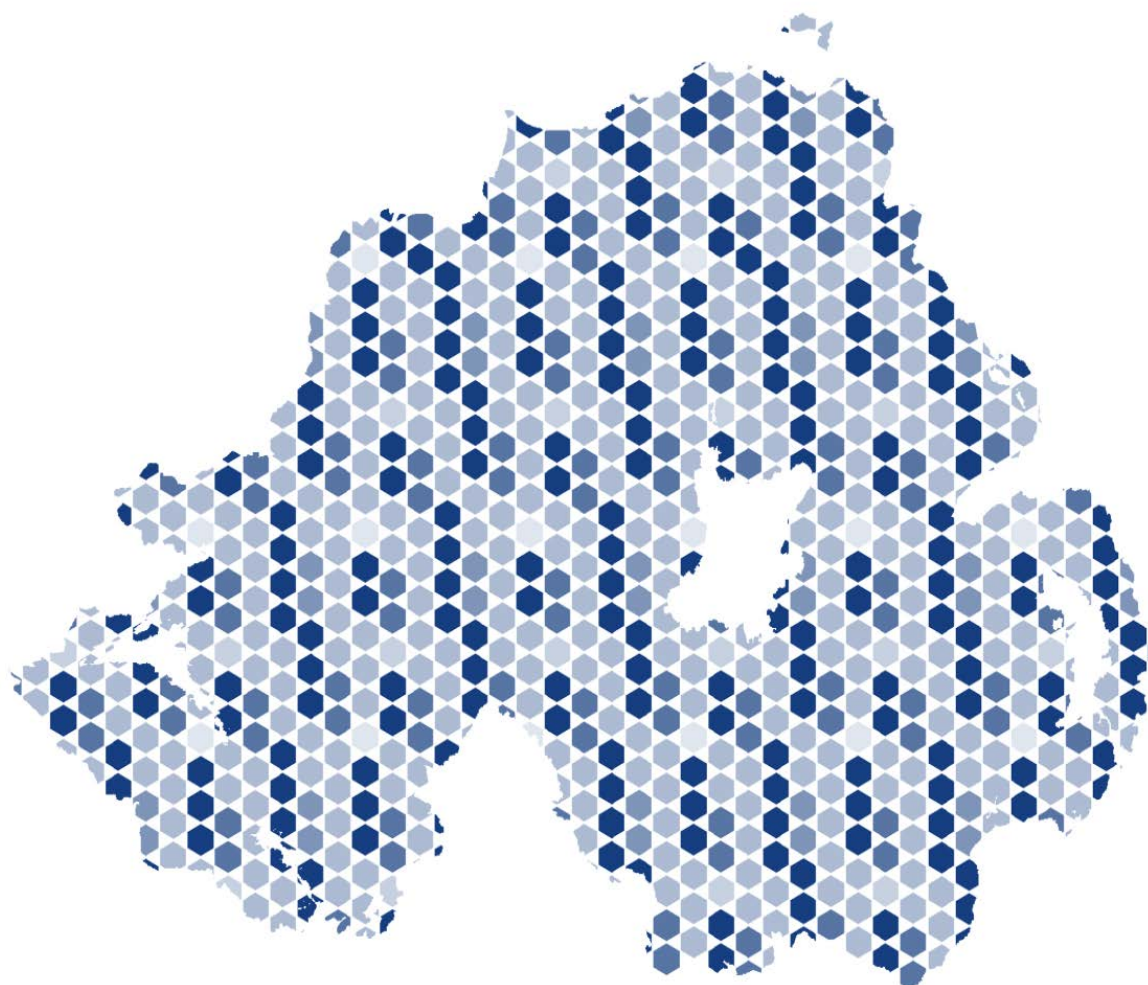


POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Slemish College, Ballymena,
County Antrim

Grant-maintained, co-educational, all-ability Integrated School

Report of an Inspection in
January 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 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.eti.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 8% of parents (37), most of the teachers (46) and an additional 13 members of the support staff responded to the online questionnaire. Nearly all the staff who responded affirmed well the work of the school and praised the leadership's commitment to promote improvement through high quality teaching and pastoral care which puts the pupils first. Most of the parents concurred with the staff 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. A number of parents who provided written responses commented favourably on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care and commended the inclusive ethos of the school and approachability of staff. 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 a post-primary 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 physical education in this inspection.

3. Context

Slemish College is a co-educational, grant-maintained all all-ability school, which draws its pupils from around 40 primary schools across a large catchment area in County Antrim, spanning Cushendall, Larne and Templepatrick. It is oversubscribed at entry into year 8, where around 75% of pupils achieve at, or above, the expected level in literacy and numeracy. The school has a sixth form of 120 pupils, which is capped on entry.

Around one-fifth of the pupils require additional support with aspects of their learning; a significant number of pupils (52) have statements of educational need. Over the last three years, the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals has risen to 22%. The school prides itself on being a welcoming and inclusive school that promotes meaningful partnerships with parents and stakeholders, all within its Christian ethos.

Slemish College	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Year 8 Intake	137	139	125	131
Enrolment	796	797	772	750
% Attendance (NI Average)	92.8% (91.3%)	93% (92%)	92.5% (n/a)	N/A (n/a)
FSME Percentage ¹	13.1%	14.3%	22.4%	22.4%
% and (Number) of pupils on SEN register	17.34% (138)	20.7% (165)	21.63% (167)	19.33% (145)
No. of pupils with statements of educational needs in the mainstream school	45	46	47	52
No. of newcomers	11	*	8	11
<i>Intake²:</i>				
% of Y8 pupils with L5 English	26.28	12.23	#	#
% of Y8 pupils with L5 mathematics	40.15	13.67	#	#
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in English	79.56	66.91	#	#
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in mathematics	80.29	68.35	#	#
<i>Source: data as held by the school.</i>				

Source: data as held by the school.

* fewer than 5

N/A not available

Data unavailable due to industrial action in some primary schools

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall Effectiveness	High level of capacity for sustained improvement
Achievements and standards	Very Good
Provision for learning	Very Good
Leadership and management	Outstanding

5. Achievements and standards

- Most of the pupils are confident, courteous and well-motivated. They engage purposefully in the learning process, demonstrate high levels of engagement and enjoyment in their learning and are able to reflect on and improve their work and that of their peers. By the time they reach sixth form, the pupils display high levels of maturity and independence; they are sensitive and supportive of one another and are very well prepared for the next stage of their learning.

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

² 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 benefit well from an excellent range of sporting, cultural and community activities which develop very well their inter-personal and wider life skills. They acquire a growing sense of personal and social responsibility and the significant contributions they make to building homes for the under-privileged in Zambia is making a significant difference to the lives of others.
- The standards in English and in English literature at both GCSE and GCE A level are outstanding, with the pupils attaining outcomes consistently above the Northern Ireland (NI) average at both grades A* to C and at A* to B. Pupils of all abilities make significant progress in English and the quality of their writing, reading, information handling, listening and oral language skills is a significant strength.
- The pupils attain good standards in mathematics and their GCSE outcomes at grades A* to C are consistently above the NI average. There is an improving trend in the pupils' performance in GCE A level mathematics, which is due, in part, to the department's review of the framework and allocation of curriculum time for delivering mathematics in order to raise standards.
- In physical education, the pupils achieve very good standards. Over the last three years, the standards attained by the pupils in GCSE physical education at grades A* to C are consistently well above the NI average for non-selective schools. The percentage of pupils attaining at GCSE grades A* to B is also well above the NI average. At post-16, a small number of pupils follow a vocational pathway in physical education and attain highly.
- In two out of the last three years, the percentage of pupils attaining five or more GCSE examinations or equivalent at grades A* to C has been in line with, or well above, the NI average for non-selective schools in the same free school meals band. In 2015, the school was extremely disappointed by the outcomes in one particular GCSE, which caused the headline figures of five GCSEs at grades A* to C to dip uncharacteristically; the senior leaders of the school, however, acted swiftly and decisively to remedy this.
- The percentage of pupils attaining five or more GCSEs or equivalent, including English and mathematics, fluctuates, but always remains above the NI averages for non-selective schools in the same free school meals band.
- There is good consistency in the standards attained by the pupils in individual subjects at GCSE grades A* to C. Most of the subjects are in line with or above their respective three-year NI averages; just under one-half of the subjects are more than ten percentage above the average
- The percentage of pupils attaining three or more GCE A levels at grades A* to C has been in line with, or above, the NI average for non-selective schools in the same free school meals band in two of the last three years. The performance of the majority of the individual subjects at GCE A level is below the respective three-year NI averages for all schools at grades A* to C. Just under one-half of the thirteen subjects which fall below the average had a low uptake over the last three years. The school is committed to improving post-16 pupil outcomes further and the inspection findings concur with the school's ongoing work to improve pedagogy and widen the curriculum offer further.

- The attainment of the pupils entitled to free school meals has fluctuated over the last three years, with a three year average of around 43% of pupils achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics, which is above the NI average for non-selective schools. In the same period, over one-half of the pupils who have special educational needs achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, with just under one-third achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics.
- In 2014/15, the proportion of year 12 pupils who progressed to year 13 is below the corresponding NI average due to admission limitations on sixth form entry, but nearly all the year 13 pupils progress to year 14, which is well above the corresponding NI average. Significantly, the proportion of pupils who enter higher education, on completion of GCE A2 level study or equivalent, is well above the NI average for non-selective schools and nearly all the pupils who progress to further and higher education enrol for a level 4 qualification.

6. Provision for learning

- The quality of the learning and teaching observed was nearly always effective, or highly effective; around 90% of the lessons were evaluated as being good or better with 60% of them very good or outstanding. This strong teaching profile reflects a consistency in practice, where lessons follow the 'Slemish learning cycle'. This approach provides pupils with familiarity of the lesson structure, embeds high expectation and ensures new learning is supported through challenging collaborative activities and purposeful talk for learning.
- This most effective practice is characterised by: well planned, innovative and engaging teaching strategies; high levels of enquiry-based pupil challenge; learning activities that allow pupils to access higher order thinking; and responsive and dialogic teaching where teachers pick up and respond to pupil learning through effective questioning, meaningful discussion and strong consolidation of learning.
- In a small number of the lessons observed, there were important areas for improvement. This less effective practice had insufficient challenge or failed to consolidate the learning fully due to an overly brisk pace.
- Teachers' planning and assessment methods are highly effective. Planning is appropriately detailed, coherent and guides learning very effectively. There is very good quality oral and written assessment of learning and pupil tracking, which initiate meaningful learning and improvement conversations between teachers and pupils.
- The provision for learning in English is very good. Energetic, highly innovative teaching which is matched closely to ability and need, together with very effective assessment practices, help the pupils improve their learning and their work. The pupils with identified learning needs benefit well from the attentive help provided by learning support assistants.

- The school literacy policy guides effectively the development of literacy skills across the curriculum; this is supported by a regularly reviewed action plan relating to assessment data, specific reading programmes, use of the library and digital technology, guidance for parents and engaging extra-curricular literacy-related events.
- The good quality provision in mathematics is reflected in lessons where the pupils' responses are challenged and their understanding is extended through skilful questioning and judicious use of information and communication technology (ICT). In a minority of the lessons observed, the teachers failed to match the work appropriately to the pupils' abilities and interests and over-directed their thinking.
- There is a well-informed approach to the development of the pupils' numeracy skills through meaningful tasks across the curriculum; in addition, the pupils benefit from well-planned opportunities to apply these skills during numeracy week, mathematics fun days and competitions.
- The very good provision in physical education is characterised by excellent levels of pupil motivation and enthused engagement. A key feature of the provision is the effective use of a wide range of quality resources and teaching strategies to stimulate the pupils' active participation in physical activities and enable very good progress across all aspects of the subject.
- The quality of the arrangements for care and support is highly effective. The school credo, 'learning together for individual success', is underpinned by a clear and shared understanding of how pupils learn and is reflected to good effect in the collegial, child-centred approach to the pastoral care of, and learning support for, all pupils. The sensitive, respectful relationships across the school set a highly appropriate tone for learning and developing within the school community, which enables the pupils to learn and grow in understanding and confidence. A key strength of the care and support is the staff's comprehensive knowledge of the individual needs of the pupils, which enables well-tailored learning and pastoral support.
- Those pupils who require additional support with aspects of their learning benefit well from the supportive, nurturing and suitably challenging learning environment; they respond positively to the high expectations of their teachers, interact confidently with peers and engage well in their learning. The high quality individual education plans are used effectively by the teachers to guide the pupils' learning and to develop their personal, social and cognitive skills and abilities. There are well developed links with external agencies through the Care Support Team and consequently the pupils are well-equipped with the necessary life skills to progress to the next stages of their learning and development.
- The curriculum offer at key stage (KS) 3 is broad and balanced and meets well the needs, interests and abilities of the pupils. The school meets the requirements of the Entitlement Framework and the curriculum at KS 4 offers a range of vocational and academic qualifications and is suitably flexible. At post-16, for just under one-third of subjects at GCE A level, class numbers are overly low; in the interests having a more sustainable and enabling curriculum provision, there is a need to review the arrangements for collaborative classes with partnership schools and the local further education college.

- Careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) is given a high priority and the very effective internal provision is complemented well by advice and support from well established business and industry links, which are valued by the school. The pupils develop well their knowledge, understanding and skills through a coherent programme of self-awareness, career exploration and career management; in addition, they benefit from the good opportunities for appropriate work experience placements.

7. Leadership and management

- Leadership is a key strength and extends from a skilled senior team to a highly effective middle leadership tier, all of whom are secure, confident and effective in fulfilling their roles as teacher-leaders. Senior leadership is highly strategic and led by an energised forward-looking team who ensure that the school's core business is providing high quality learning, teaching and pupil care. Consequently, the leadership fosters well a culture of developing leadership through action research, innovation and professional development, which builds expertise and capacity, all of which is reflected in the well-embedded distributive leadership model that focuses to good effect on continuous improvement.
- Appropriate priorities for school improvement are identified through effective self-evaluation, which is underpinned by rigorous and extensive data collation and analysis. Wide ranging consultation is valued and influential in bringing about change. The school development plan^[1], and associated action plans, guide well the work of the school in a clear, coherent and measurable way.
- All of the middle managers who engaged directly with inspectors demonstrated clear and strategic curricular and pastoral leadership within their areas of responsibility. They are receptive to, and very appreciative of, the opportunities to develop as emerging leaders and the extent to which the senior leadership has invested significantly in their ongoing professional development.
- The governors are exceptionally well informed about, and have a very clear understanding of, all aspects of the work and life of the school. They take great pride in the inclusive nature of the school and in the standards and wider achievements of the pupils; in particular, the governors are proud of the values the pupils acquire and the skills they develop as they progress through the school. The governors play an integral and crucial role in the school improvement process; they are appropriately supportive and challenging in all aspects of school life. On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the ETI evaluation is that the school and wider community can have a high degree of 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.

^[1] The school development plan meets the requirements of the School Development Planning Regulations (NI) 2010

8. Overall effectiveness

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.

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 SIMS³ and verified with ETI, the table below compares the percentage of year 12 pupils in Slemish College achieving five 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 non-selective schools in the same free school meals category⁴.

Data on Year 12 (Key Stage 4) performance:

GCSE and GCSE equivalent subjects - *following permitted exclusions	2013	2014	2015
*Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE & Equivalents in at least five subjects	100	100	100
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least five subjects	82.35	73.7	64.23
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category⁵</i>	71.3	73.5	N/A
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least five subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics	63.03	51.8	57.72
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	44.4	46.8	N/A
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades E or above in at least five subjects	99.16	95.6	91.06
Percentage of Year 12 entitled to free school meals achieving five or more GCSEs Grades A* to C or equivalent (including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics)	60.0	28.57	41.67

³ SIMS: School Information Management System

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

⁵ See benchmarking data and guidance contained in the DE Circular 2011/03: 'School Development Planning and Target-Setting'.

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 Slemish College 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.

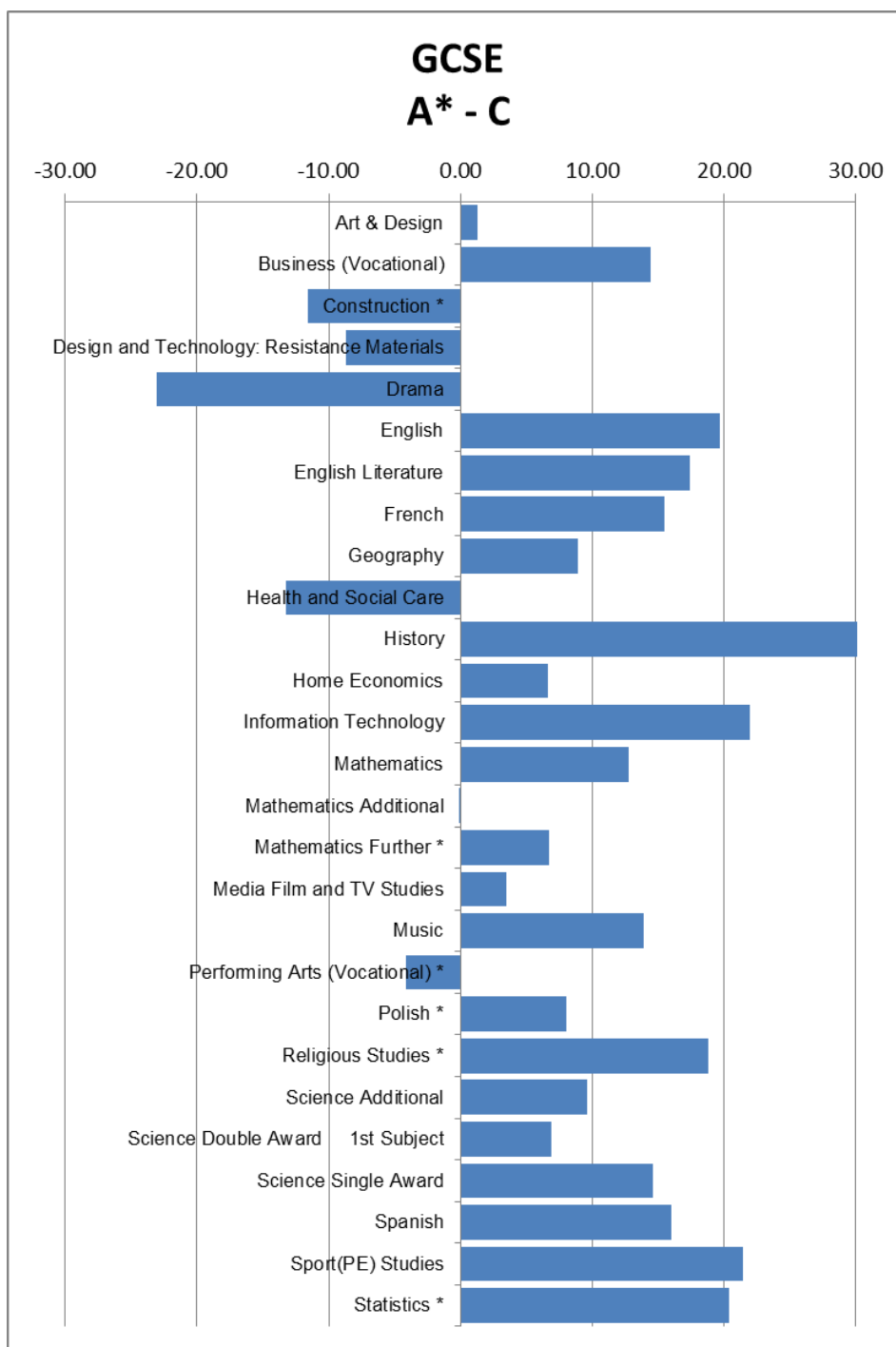
Other level 2 courses taken in at least two of the last three years.

Level 2	2013	2014	2015	Total entry over 3 years
	% pass	% pass	% pass	
<i>OCR National ICT</i>	100	100	<i>Replaced with course below</i>	141
<i>Cambridge Nationals ICT</i>	<i>Previous course above</i>	<i>Previous course above</i>	12.3	81
<i>Occupational Studies</i>	100	100	82	30
<i>Prince's Trust Excel award</i>	100	100	100	29

GCSE Subject	2013		2014		2015		Total entry over 3 years
	% A*-C	% A*-E	% A*-C	% A*-E	% A*-C	% A*-E	
CCEA short course in Religious Studies	50	86	50	73	63	82	346

Attainment of pupils in individual subjects at GCSE 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 pupils achieving at GCSE level at grades A* to C in individual subjects in Slemish College is compared with the three-year NI average for similar non-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 Slemish College achieving three or more GCE A levels 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 GCEs at grades A* to C with the NI average for non-selective schools in the same free school meals category⁶.

Year 14 (A2) performance:

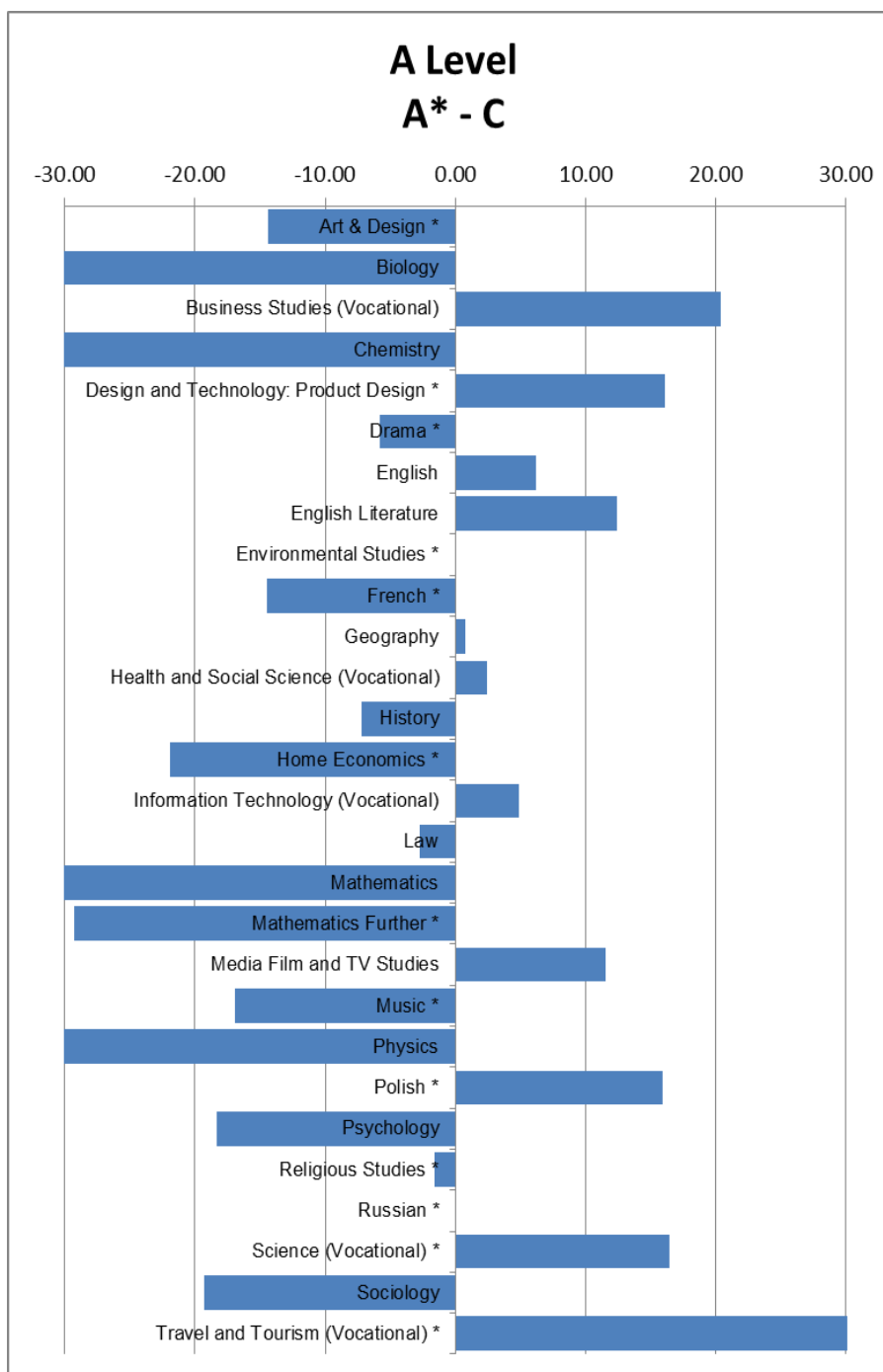
GCE A Level or equivalent	2013	2014	2015
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels & Equivalents in at least three subjects	100	95.31	98.4
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least three A2 levels	43.6	61.9	45.9
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	46.4	45.2	N/A
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least two A2 levels	100	98.4	98.36

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

⁶ 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 pupils achieving at GCE A level at grades A* to C in individual subjects in Slemish College is compared with the three-year NI average for similar non-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 20 entries over 3 years

OTHER EXAMINATION RESULTS: POST-16

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	
Sports studies	N/A	100	100	*

* = fewer than 5 entries

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 Slemish College from year 12 to year 13 and then from year 13 to year 14, compared with the NI average for non-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	69.8	41.5
% Yr 13 staying on to Yr 14	87.3	95.6

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 Slemish College who leave school to enter further education, higher education or employment, or are seeking employment, compared with the average for non-selective schools.

	School	NI	Level 2 (No.)	Level 3 (No.)	Level 4 (No.)
Total Number of Leavers	131	13187			
Employment	7.6%	8.8%			
Further Education	53.4%	46.0%		2	12
Higher Education	33.6%	21.2%			44
Work-based Learning (Training)	4.6%	16.9%			
Unemployed	0.8%	3.6%			
Unknown	0.0%	3.6%			

Accommodation

1. The accommodation for physical education is inadequate.

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