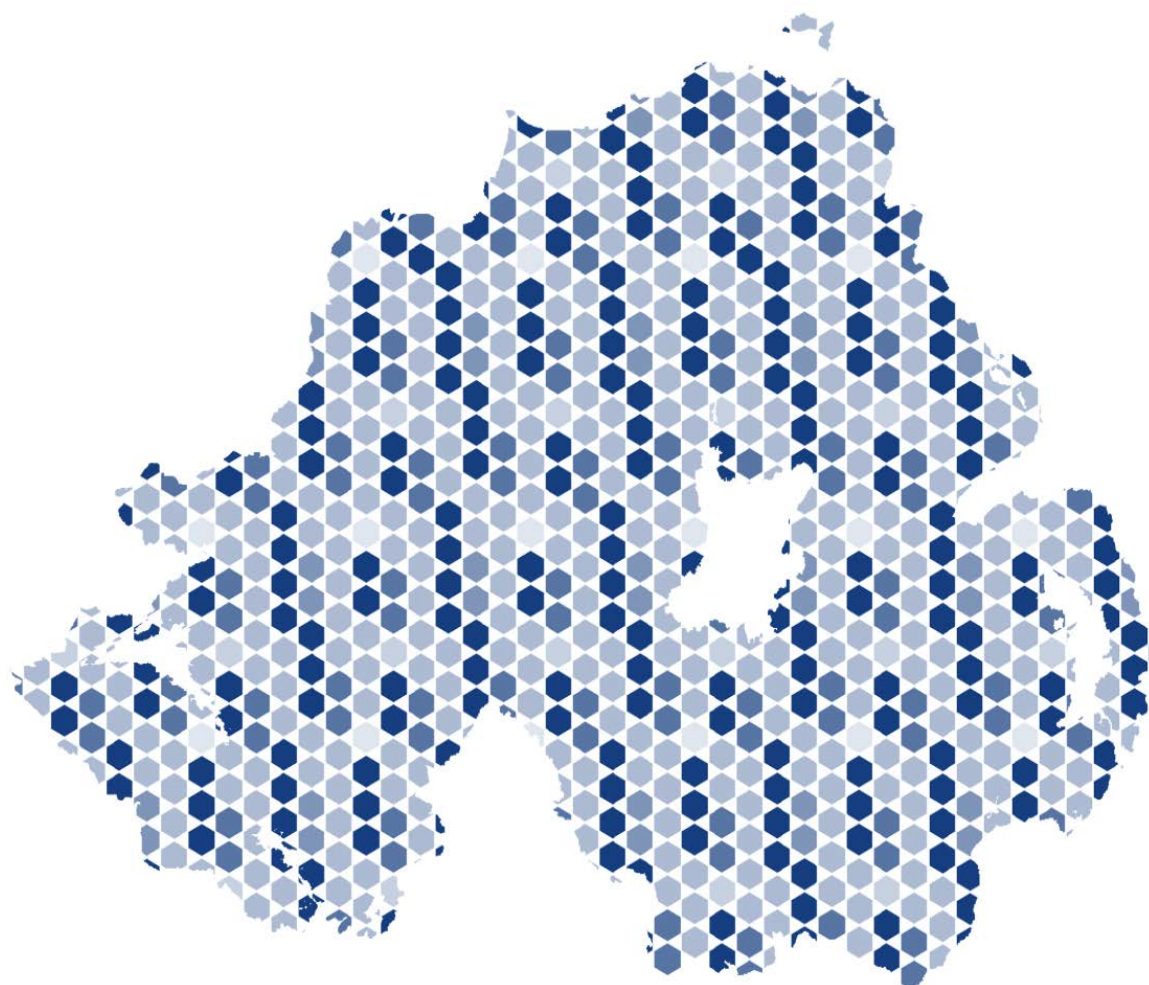


POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

St Louis Grammar School,
Ballymena

11-18, Co-educational, Voluntary Grammar School

Report of an Inspection in
February 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.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.

Six percent of parents (54) responded to the online questionnaire, with 29 of them providing additional written comments. Most of the parents commented positively on: the high quality of the pastoral care provided by staff; the effective transition of their children from primary school into year 8; the opportunities for the pupils to develop personal and social skills through their participation in a wide range of extra-curricular activities; and the effective leadership in the school. Thirty-seven percent of staff (33) responded to the questionnaires, with four providing written comments. The staff commented positively on the friendly, welcoming environment within the school and the pupil-centred ethos. A small number of concerns raised about aspects of the provision were discussed (maintaining the confidentiality of the respondents) with the governors and senior leaders.

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 modern languages in this inspection.

3. Context

St Louis Grammar School is a co-educational voluntary grammar school situated in Ballymena. It is regularly oversubscribed at entry to year 8; around one-third of the pupils come from the town and the rest from the surrounding rural areas. Almost all of the year 8 pupils enter at the expected levels in literacy and numeracy. The enrolment in sixth form has increased significantly over the last three years. Over the same period, the small proportion of pupils who require additional support with aspects of their learning has remained steady and the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals has risen significantly to just over 11%.

In the last year, the school has been awarded accredited ICT status. The Inclusion Quality Mark recognises the positive, inclusive ethos that underpins all aspects of school life and reinforces the St Louis core values as articulated in the school's motto "Ut Sint Unum", that all may be one.

There have been significant changes to the structure of the senior leadership team (SLT) in the last two years with a new vice-principal and two new members of the SLT taking up post.

St Louis Grammar School	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Year 8 Intake	141	144	142	146
Enrolment	985	1021	1036	1034
% Attendance (NI Average)	95.3% 95.3%	96.4% 95.8%	96.0% (N/A)	(N/A)
FSME Percentage ¹	6.09%	7.15%	10.14%	11.61%
% and (Number) of pupils on SEN register	3.65% (36)	4.02% (41)	4.34% (45)	3.86% (40)
No. of pupils with statements of educational needs in the mainstream school	5	*	*	*
No. of pupils with statements of educational needs in the Learning Support Centre (if appropriate)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
No. of newcomers	7	*	5	*
<i>Intake²:</i>				
% of Y8 pupils with L5 English	61.7%	32.64%	#	#
% of Y8 pupils with L5 mathematics	82.27%	43.06%	#	#
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in English	98.58%	93.06%	#	#
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in mathematics	99.29%	94.44%	#	#

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	The school has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement
Achievements and standards	Outstanding
Provision for learning	Very good
Leadership and management	Very good

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

5. Achievements and standards

- The pupils are highly motivated, confident, polite and articulate. They display high levels of mutual respect and engage readily in their learning. Their behaviour, both in and out of the classroom, is exemplary. Through meaningful individual, paired and group activities, the pupils work well to research, use and evaluate information. They think critically and creatively, review their own learning and assess maturely each other's work.
- The pupils benefit from a broad range of learning and enrichment experiences, including academic, sporting, spiritual and charitable activities. As they progress through the school, the pupils have increasing opportunities to develop their leadership skills, for example, through the mentoring programme, clearly defined prefect roles, community outreach and charitable work.
- The standards attained by the pupils in English are outstanding. Over the past three years the outcomes in GCSE English and English literature at grades A* to B and in GCE A level English literature at grades A* to C are well above the corresponding Northern Ireland (NI) averages for similar schools. The pupils read and write with ease and to a generally high standard; they listen responsively to the teachers and to each other, developing their oral language skills as they progress through the school. They understand clearly how to improve further their competence in written and oral communication.
- The standards attained by the pupils in mathematics are very good. In both GCE A level mathematics and GCSE further mathematics the attainments by the pupils are well above the NI average for selective schools. Whilst the three-year average for GCSE mathematics is above the NI average for similar schools, there was a significant drop in the standards attained by the 2015 cohort of pupils to below the NI average. There is a need for the school to monitor this downward trend and evaluate more robustly the impact of the actions to raise standards. Across the year groups, the standard of work in the pupils' books is of a high quality. The pupils are motivated and engaged in their mathematics lessons, and work well with their peers.
- The standards attained by the pupils in modern languages are very good. As the pupils progress through the key stages, they demonstrate well-honed comprehension skills. They speak and write their chosen languages with an increasingly high degree of fluency and accuracy. Over the past three years, the standards attained at GCSE grades A* to B in both Irish and French have been well above the NI average for similar schools. Although small numbers of pupils undertake GCE A levels in modern languages, almost all of them attain at grades A* to C.
- In the past three years, almost all of the pupils attained seven or more GCSE examinations or equivalent at grades A* to C. This standard is above or in line with the NI average for similar selective schools in the same free school meals band. Over the same period, the percentage of pupils attaining seven or more GCSEs, including English and mathematics, is also above or in line with the NI average for similar schools.

- The outcomes in approximately three-quarters of the GCSE subjects are above the respective three-year NI averages, with just over two-fifths of the subjects performing at more than ten percentage points above the corresponding averages. The school has rightly identified the subjects where the standards attained by the pupils are lower and put effective strategies in place, informed by regular monitoring, to raise the standards attained by them.
- The standards attained by the pupils in public examinations at post-16 are outstanding. Over the past three years, the percentage of pupils attaining three or more A levels at grades A* to C has been well above the NI average for similar selective schools. Almost all of the individual subjects at GCE A level are above the respective three-year NI averages for similar selective schools at grades A* to C. A significant strength is that around two-thirds of the subjects are performing at more than ten percentage points above, with a few of these subjects performing at more than twenty percentage points above, the corresponding averages.
- As the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals has increased, there has been a slight reduction in the proportion attaining five or more GCSE qualifications at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics. However, the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals attaining at this level has been above the NI average in two out of the last three years.
- Over the past three years, almost all of the pupils who require additional support with their learning achieved seven or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics.
- It is noteworthy, over the past three years, that pupils from St Louis have been among the top candidates in GCSE business studies, drama, further mathematics and Irish; and in A level applied business studies.
- The proportion of year 12 pupils who progress to year 13 is broadly in line with the NI average, as is the proportion of year 13 pupils who progress to year 14. The proportion of pupils who enter higher education, on completion of post-16 study, is well above the NI average.

6. Provision for learning

- More than four-fifths of the lessons observed during the inspection were effective (good or better) at promoting and extending the pupils' learning. Over two-fifths of the lessons were highly effective (very good or outstanding) and founded on coherent planning which is evaluated rigorously to inform the next stage of the pupils' learning. In these lessons, the teachers set the learning in relevant and up-to-date contexts, provide well-structured activities for the pupils to develop specific skills and use plenary sessions well to deepen the pupils' understanding of key concepts. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used appropriately and, at times, innovatively to enhance the pupils' learning.
- In the less effective practice (important areas for improvement), in just under one-fifth of the lessons observed, the work is not differentiated sufficiently to meet the needs of all the pupils, the lessons are over-directed by the teachers and there are missed opportunities to develop further the pupils' thinking and oral skills.

- The comprehensive processes for assessment of the pupils' learning are highly effective in identifying underachievement and informing the interventions required by individual pupils. In the majority of subjects there are very good examples of assessment for learning strategies, including sharply focused marking for improvement, but this good practice is not consistently applied across all of the subjects.
- The very good provision for learning in English and English literature is planned, developed and evaluated robustly. Lesson planning and associated teaching strategies are highly effective, in most instances, in developing the ability of the pupils to attain high standards and improve further the quality of their work. The teachers work well collegially to review, modify and develop innovative approaches to teaching and assessment, based on professional reflection and sharing of practice. There are too many separate policies and plans. They would benefit from being rationalised and integrated so that they focus more sharply on supporting learning in English and on clearly identified, measurable actions.
- The pupils use and develop further their literacy skills through well-planned opportunities across the school, through the well-used library and extra-curricular activities such as workshops, the production of a school magazine and visiting speakers. Those pupils identified with language development needs are provided with support which helps them to improve. While implementation of the literacy policy is supported by regular staff development, the annual reports on whole-school literacy could be enhanced by departmental leaders more effectively monitoring and reporting on progress within their own subjects.
- The quality of provision for mathematics is good. In the effective practice (good or better), in four-fifths of the lessons observed, there is a clear focus on the intended learning; the teachers use a range of assessment for learning strategies to measure and deepen the pupils' learning, including skilful questioning to extend their thinking and active use of mathematical terminology. In the less effective practice, in one-fifth of the lessons observed, the pupils are passive for too long and there is a lack of formative assessment to inform the planning for the next stage in the learning. The department has appropriately recognised the need to disseminate the better practice in order to ensure greater consistency in approach and to develop further strategies and activities to challenge and meet the needs of all the pupils.
- Numeracy is promoted through a variety of competitions, events and displays throughout the school. While the pupils are benefiting from practising their numeracy skills through well-planned tasks in other subjects, this is inconsistent and the school has identified appropriately the need to develop further the co-ordination of numeracy and using mathematics across the school.

- The quality of provision for modern languages is very good; the recent introduction of Spanish has increased the range of languages on offer to the pupils. In the highly effective practice, in a majority (55%) of the lessons observed, thorough planning supports engaging and well-paced activities where the high-quality resources developed by the teachers ensure coherence and progression in learning. ICT, including interactive learning programmes, is deployed well by the teachers and pupils in order to promote engagement and independence in language learning and to support the further development of the pupils' thinking skills. The taught provision is enhanced by a range of extra-curricular programmes, including educational visits and residentials, competitions and debates, which provide the pupils with purposeful contexts where they develop and apply their confidence and fluency.
- Overall, the care and support of the pupils in the school is very effective. The school has a highly inclusive ethos which promotes well excellence, endeavour and empowerment among the pupils. Helpful, effective induction programmes have been established for all year groups at key transition points and for pupils joining the school at other stages. In addition to an established student council, the school gives a high priority to developing further the pupil voice, with a particular focus on teaching and learning. The school seeks regularly, and acts on, the views of the pupils when evaluating key aspects of the pastoral provision and the quality of their learning experiences.
- The pupils who require additional support with learning or who are among the most able are identified appropriately using quantitative and qualitative data. A well-conceived school policy is in place for identifying and supporting pupils who are 'gifted and talented', and teachers are involved closely in reviewing the progress of those pupils who require additional support. The targets in the individual education plans, however, are not specific enough or sufficiently measurable, and the associated strategies are overly generic. In addition, the outworking of the special educational needs provision in the classroom is not monitored closely enough.
- The provision for careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) is very effective. Careers prefects, pupil focus groups and all departments play a key role in the implementation of the coherent CEIAG programme which develops to good effect the pupils' career planning skills. The provision of an extensive, relevant work-related learning programme for all pupils, matched well to their development stage, is effectively enhanced by well-developed partnerships with industry and business and, for senior pupils, an accredited leadership scheme. As a result, the pupils are confident, articulate and display a very good understanding of the world of work, and the progression opportunities that are available to them. A particular strength of the provision is the bespoke career-planning support programme in place for those pupils in year 12 interested in following alternative curriculum pathways post-16.
- The curriculum at key stage (KS) 3 is suitably broad and balanced; at KS 4 and post-16, it fulfils the requirements of the Entitlement Framework. The school keeps its curriculum offer appropriately under review; at post-16 the recent curriculum expansion has been informed comprehensively by labour market information and is responsive to, and meets well, the needs, abilities and career aspirations of the pupils. To extend these opportunities to KS 4 pupils, it is timely to review and develop the breadth and flexibility of the curriculum further at this level, providing structured progression routes for the newly introduced subjects.

7. Leadership and management

- The school development plan³, which is informed to good effect by meaningful consultation and extensive self-evaluation, details a range of appropriate priorities for school improvement. The associated whole-school action plans guide well the development work; there are effective processes for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the improvement plans. The school has recognised the need to review the action planning process to ensure that the improvement work is sustainable. The professional development of staff is afforded a high priority in the school, notably through a recently developed programme, which supports well the specific training needs of the staff and is linked closely to the whole-school priorities for improvement.
- The senior leadership team (SLT) has been re-structured with the team members taking on clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The outstanding leadership of the SLT is characterised by the establishment of a collegial ethos and a clearly articulated strategic vision for school improvement. A significant element in the SLT's strategic approach is the establishment of working parties to carry on the improvement work. A culture of auditing underpins rigorous self-evaluation and leads to well-planned action, the impact of which is evident across the school.
- The middle leaders provide highly effective leadership in most aspects of their curricular and pastoral responsibilities. The departmental and pastoral teams work collegially to support the pupils' well-being and holistic development, and enable them to attain high standards. A particular strength of their work is the linking of pastoral information with the tracking of the pupils' academic progress to identify any under-achievement at an early stage and provide the most appropriate strategies to support individuals and groups. In order to ensure greater consistency in the pupils' learning experiences, the staff development programme needs to include opportunities to build further the capacity of subject leaders to monitor the impact of learning and teaching within their own areas of responsibility.
- The governors are highly supportive of the life and work of the school. They are well informed about the school's finances, priorities for improvement, pupil attainment and the effectiveness of the provision. 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 confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated. The governors have rightly identified the need to be informed by first-hand evidence from a wider range of post-holders in order to monitor more closely and more regularly the progress being made against the targets in the school development plan.
- 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.

³ 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.

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 SIMS⁴ and verified with ETI, the table below compares the percentage of year 12 pupils in St Louis 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 category⁵.

Data on Year 12 (Key Stage 4) performance:

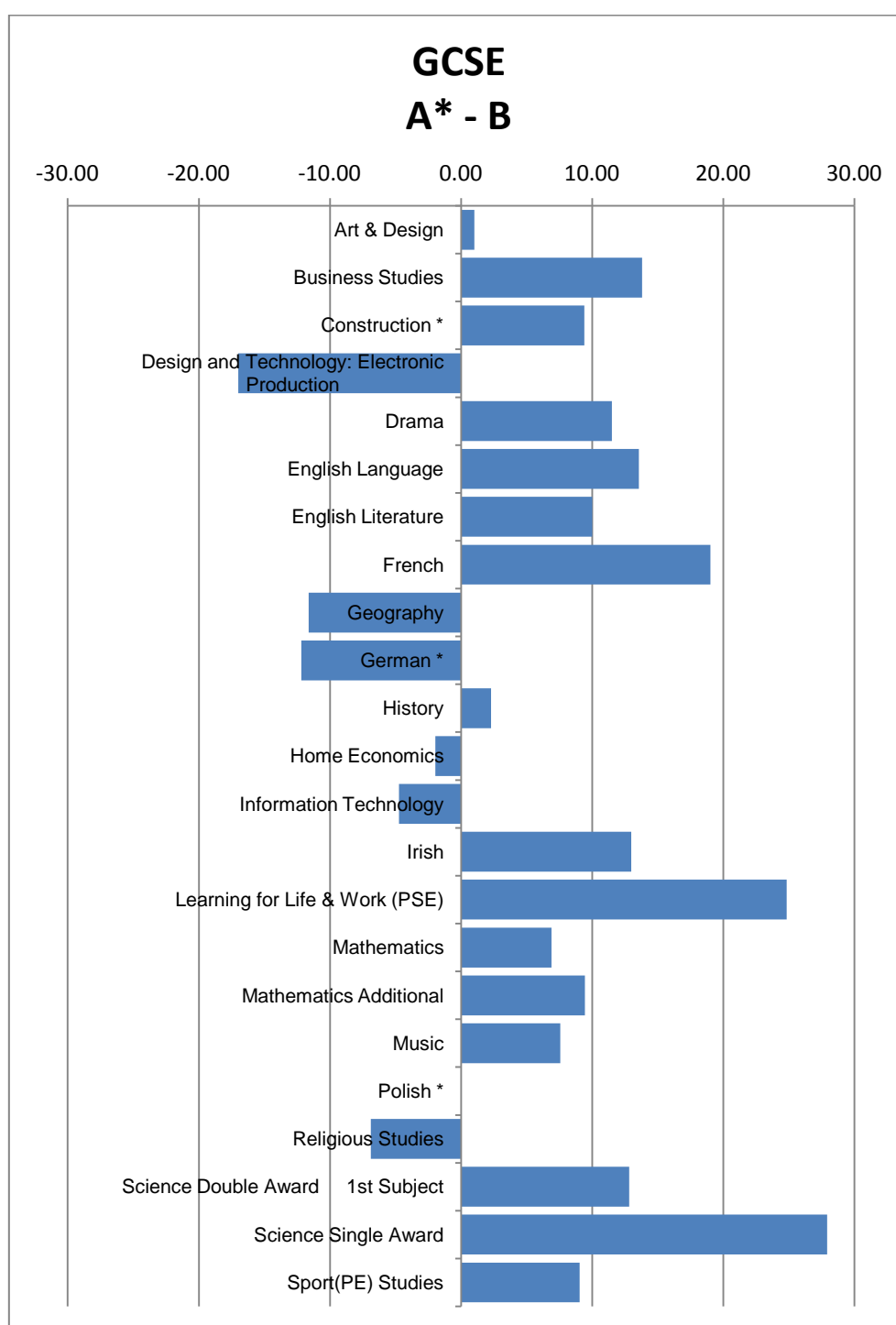
GCSE and GCSE equivalent subjects - *following three permitted exclusions	2013	2014	2015
*Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE & Equivalents in at least 7 subjects	100%	100%	100%
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects	98.7%	96.4%	92.9%
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	<i>96.3%</i>	<i>93.1%</i>	<i>N/A</i>
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics	98.7%	96.4%	92.1%
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	<i>92.8%</i>	<i>92.2%</i>	<i>N/A</i>
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	100%	100%	99.3%
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%	100%	77%

⁴ SIMS: School Information Management System

⁵ 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 pupils achieving at GCSE level at grades A* to B in individual subjects in St Louis 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 St Louis Grammar School 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 GCE A levels at grades A* to C with the NI average for selective schools in the same free school meals category⁶.

Data on 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	100%	100%	100%
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	90%	85%	93%
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	<i>72.9%</i>	<i>74.3%</i>	<i>N/A</i>

Other examination results: key stage 5

Based on data held by the school in SIMS and verified with ETI, the table below shows the percentage of year 14 pupils in St Louis Grammar School achieving grades A* to C 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.

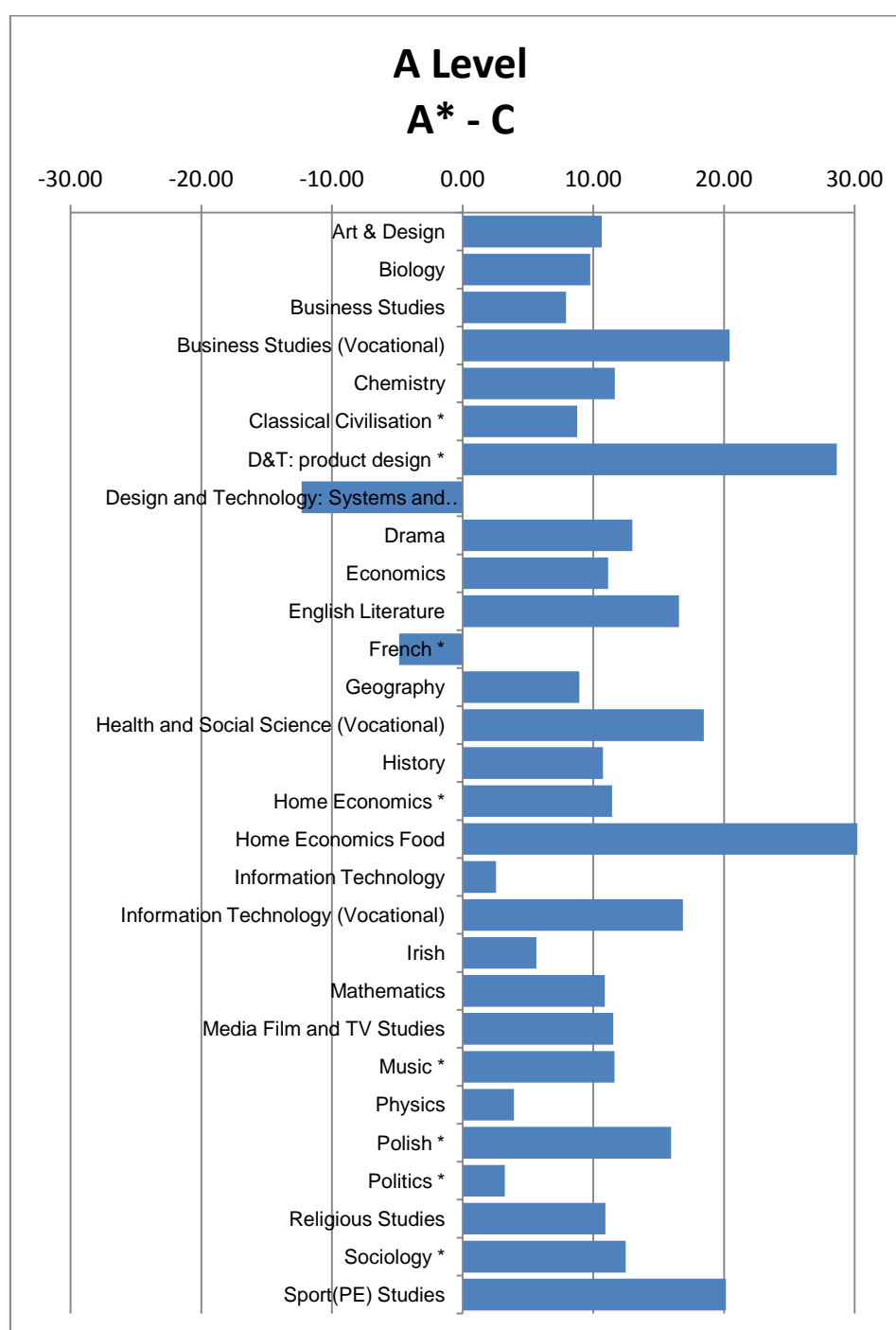
Other [level 3] courses taken in at least two of the last three years.

Level 3	2013	2014	2015	Total entry over 3 years
	% pass	% pass	% pass	
<i>BTEC Agriculture</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>BTEC Sport Advanced Subsidiary</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>6</i>

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 level at grades A* to C in individual subjects in St Louis 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 20 entries over 3 years.

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 St Louis 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	95.6	94.0
% Yr 13 staying on to Yr 14	94.1	95.2

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 St Louis 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	155	9449			
Employment	1.9%	4.2%			
Further Education	6.5%	20.6%		10	
Higher Education	86.5%	70.6%			134
Work-based Learning (Training)	1.3%	1.4%			
Unemployed	1.9%	1.1%			
Unknown	1.9%	2.1%			

Health and safety

1. Access arrangements into the school building needs to be reviewed to ensure the health and safety of the pupils at all times.

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