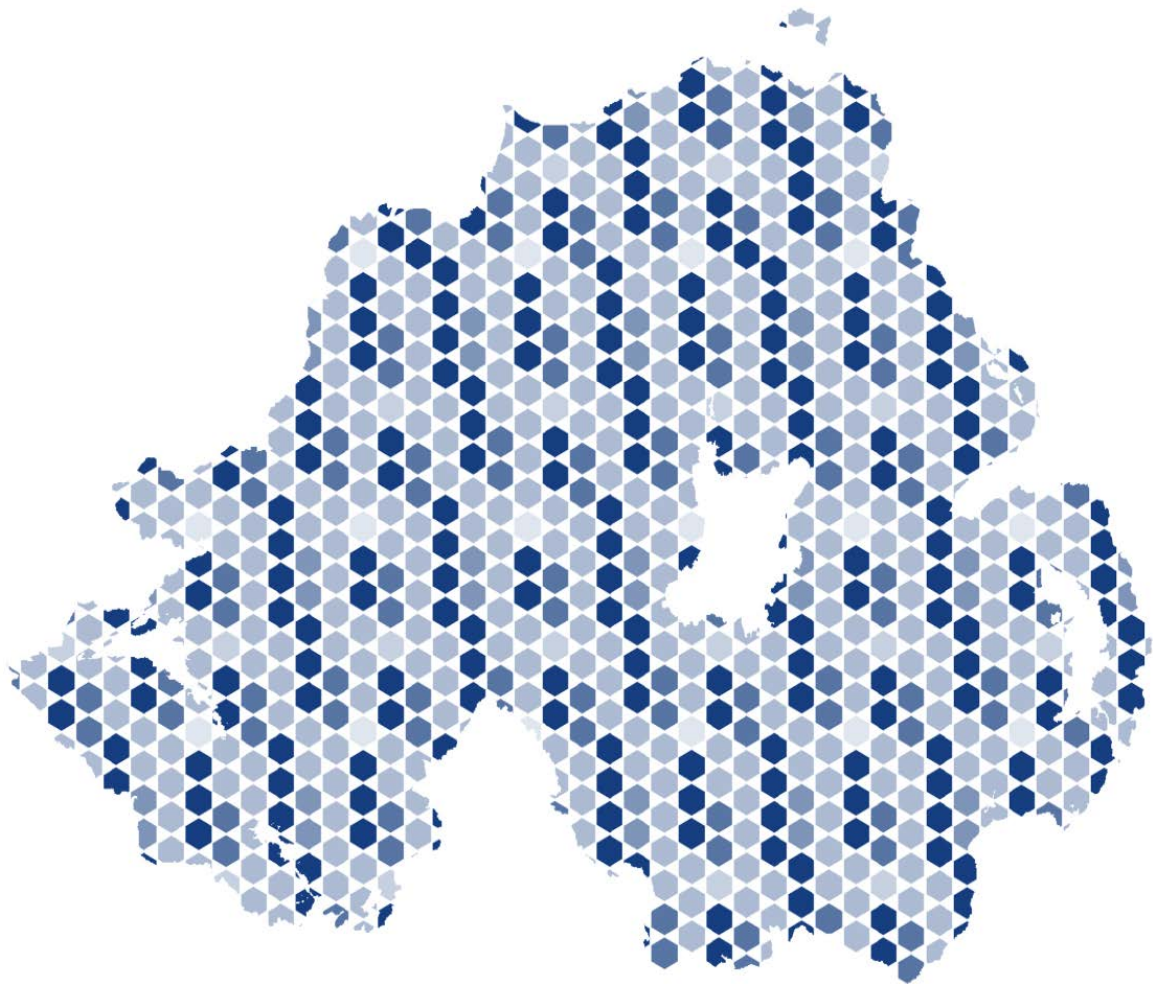# POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION

Education and Training Inspectorate

St Ronan's College, Lurgan, County Armagh

Co-educational, non-selective, 11-19 school

Report of an Inspection in November 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 Achievements 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.

Contents

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.

A small number of parents (30) and 40% of staff (88) responded to the questionnaires. The parental responses were generally positive and affirmative of the work of the school. The parents who responded reported different perspectives, based on their experience over the period of the establishment of the new school. A majority of the comments were positive and commended the work of the staff in support of the pupils. Some parents, however, reported that the process of the amalgamation had a negative effect on their child's learning. A small number of the staff provided additional comments; they reported positively on the commitment of their colleagues to building positive relationships at all levels within the new school. All of the issues raised in the questionnaires were reported to the principal and the representatives of the governors.

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 focus on the provision for information and communication technology (ICT) in this inspection.

3.   Context

St Ronan's College opened in September 2015 following the closure of three post-primary schools; currently the school is situated on three sites in the town of Lurgan, County Armagh. Before, and since, the school opened in September 2015, the governors, leaders, teachers and pupils have worked effectively together to minimise disruption to learning. At the beginning of the second academic year, the year eight intake has increased from 211 to 239. The school has identified 15% of its pupils as being in need of additional support with some aspects of their learning. The school is involved in two Shared Education Partnerships with other schools in the area; these important links enhance the pupils' learning and development. The school is situated in an area of high socio-economic need.

St Ronan's College, Lurgan	2015-16	2016-17
Year 8 Intake	211	239
Enrolment	1423	1397
% Attendance (NI Average)	93.4% (N/A)	% (N/A)
FSME Percentage	26.4	26.6
% and (Number) of pupils on SEN register	14.5 % (206)	15.5% (217)
No. of pupils with statements of educational need in the mainstream school	50	49
No. of newcomers	52	64

Source: data as held by the school.
N/A not available

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	Capacity to identify and bring about improvement
Achievements and standards	Good
Provision for learning	Good
Leadership and management	Very Good

5. Achievements and standards

- The pupils are courteous, well-mannered and display a positive disposition to learning; within an inclusive learning environment, they engage collaboratively with one another and with the staff in an ethos of mutual respect. At all key stages, student leaders are confident, articulate school ambassadors and are well-motivated role models for their peers; older pupils have attained accreditation for their mentoring work. Through engagement in individual target-setting, pupils show a good self-awareness of their personal strengths and areas for further development. There are too few opportunities, however, for the pupils to further develop their self-confidence and speaking in front of others; consequently, the teachers, in the classroom setting, need to provide opportunities for more effective group work, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, to support all pupils in developing and applying these important skills.

- The school enriches the pupils' learning experiences to good effect through an extended curriculum programme in music and drama, along with the establishment of a range of clubs and its engagement with local sporting and cultural organisations. With the support and commitment of their teachers, the pupils have opportunities to: improve and apply their skills; experience success; and develop a social awareness and social conscience.

- With its opening in September 2015, the school has public examination data for one year only. The evaluations on levels of attainment in public examinations that follow are set within this context.

- The standards attained by the pupils in English are good. Last year, the percentage of pupils attaining at grades A* to C in English at GCSE level was above the Northern Ireland (NI) average for non-selective schools. For the same period, the standards attained by the very small number of pupils entered for GCSE English literature were also above the corresponding NI average at A* to C. The percentage of pupils attaining at grades A* to C at GCE A level English literature was below the NI average for non-selective schools.

- The standards attained by the pupils in mathematics are also good. Last year, the pupils achieved above the NI average for non-selective schools at grades A* to C, but also A* to B, in GCSE mathematics. Just over three-quarters of the small number of pupils studying GCSE further mathematics attained at grades A* to C. The standards attained in GCE A level mathematics last year are almost in line with the NI average.

- The standards of most of the pupils' written work and assessments in ICT are good. Most of them engage well in their learning, are developing good ICT skills and competences, and they make good progress in their learning. Outcomes in public examinations are high; in both GCSE and Applied A-level IT, the standards attained are significantly above the three-year NI average for non-selective schools at grades A* to C. The outcomes in GCE A level software systems development at grades A* to C are in line with the NI average for similar.

- In 2015-16, the percentage of year 12 pupils attaining five or more GCSE qualifications or equivalent at grades A* to C is slightly above the corresponding NI average for non-selective schools in the same free school meals band.

- In 2015-16, the percentage of year 12 pupils attaining five or more GCSE qualifications or equivalent at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, is well above the corresponding NI average for non-selective schools in the same free school meals band. The percentage of year 12 pupils, entitled to free school meals, attaining five or more GCSE qualifications or equivalent at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, is slightly above than the NI average for non-selective schools.

- Most of the subjects at GCSE are above the three-year NI averages for non-selective schools at grades A* to C; a minority of the subjects are below the corresponding average at grades A* to C, which needs to be addressed by the school.

- In 2015-16, almost all pupils attained two or more GCE A levels or equivalent at grades A* to E and this was slightly above the NI average for non-selective schools in the same free school meals band. While most of the subjects are below the corresponding three-year NI averages at grades A* to C, the percentage of pupils attaining three or more GCE A levels or equivalent at grades A* to C is almost in line with the average for non-selective schools in the same free school meals band.

- The pupils who require additional support with aspects of their learning make very good progress and attain good standards. In 2015-16, almost all of them attained five or more GCSE qualifications or equivalent at grades A* to C and over one-half attained five or more GCSE qualifications or equivalent at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics. At GCE level, all of them achieved at grades A* to E and over one-half achieved at grades A* to C.

- In 2015-16, the staying on rate from year 12 to 13 is significantly above the corresponding NI average, but from year 13 to year 14 it is slightly below the corresponding average.

6. **Provision for learning**

- Most of the lessons observed (81%) during the inspection were effective (good or better) in promoting the pupils' learning; a significant minority of the lessons observed (37%) were highly effective (very good or better). The school has prioritised a well-structured and consistent whole school approach to planning for learning and this is impacting positively on the learning experiences of the pupils. The most effective practice observed is characterised by: high expectations; engaging and well-differentiated learning activities, set in meaningful contexts, which build on the pupils' previous learning and cater well for the range of abilities within the class; purposeful technology enhanced learning and appropriate opportunities to develop the pupils' oracy and thinking skills. Across the school, however, there is variation in the use of assessment for learning strategies and marking for improvement; in the best practice, the pupils receive meaningful feedback which helps them to progress.

- The less effective practice (important areas for improvement or below), in a minority (19%) of the lessons observed, is characterised by: over-direction by the teachers; and the planned learning not being pitched at an appropriate level to meet the needs of all of the pupils.

- The learning partnership between pupils, teachers, parents and the wider school community is being developed well, with clear priority given to establishing a shared understanding of effective learning. Important links have been established with feeder primary schools; for example, work is progressing on developing a shared mark scheme. Assessment of, and for, learning is focused significantly on everyone developing an increasing and shared understanding of the range of data and information being used to: inform planning for future learning; track individual pupil progress; identify appropriate curriculum progression pathways; and secure appropriate outcomes.

- The good provision for learning in English is infused with a supportive spirit of team-work and collaboration in the department. While a majority (62%) of the lessons observed were effective (good or better) in promoting the pupils' learning, a significant minority (38%) had important or significant areas for improvement. Characteristics of the effective practice included well-planned and paced lessons and adept questioning which encouraged extended pupil responses and promoted their thinking skills. In the less effective lessons, there were missed opportunities to promote reading and speaking skills, over-direction by the teacher and too many low-level tasks. The effective practice needs to be disseminated more consistently across the department.

- While the whole-school development of literacy is still at an early stage, there is growing evidence of cross curricular attention being given to this key area. The two recently appointed literacy co-ordinators have a good strategic vision for the further promotion of the pupils' literacy skills involving all subject departments. The pupils' oral communication skills are overly variable in their development and this needs to be addressed in a more consistent way by all teachers.

- The quality of provision in mathematics is good. The collegial focus on lesson planning in mathematics is creating an effective structure which is based on a shared understanding of effective learning. The characteristics of the most effective mathematics practice observed, in just over two-fifths of the lessons, were: a well-planned structure with high quality reviews of prior learning; a wide range of learning and teaching strategies and assessment for learning opportunities used; skilful questioning and engaging activities to develop and deepen understanding; and pupils developing sound problem-solving and thinking skills. To improve further the provision in the mathematics lessons, the teachers need to enrich the pupils' mathematical understanding by placing a greater emphasis on challenging thinking, through, for example, the further development of problem-solving and open-ended activities at all key stages.

- Numeracy is promoted well through mathematics competitions and clubs. Appropriate numeracy intervention programmes are effective in supporting and improving achievement for key groups of pupils. During the inspection, the teachers approached the numeracy elements of the learning in their subject with confidence and competence and the pupils used their mathematical skills and knowledge accurately and capably.

- The quality of the provision for learning in ICT is good. A relevant curriculum is offered at key stage (KS) 3 and planning is in place to revise the curriculum offer at key stages 4 and 5. The quality of learning and teaching is effective (good or better) with just under one-third of the lessons observed being highly effective (very good). In the best practice observed, the lessons were well planned, the pupils were enthusiastic and well engaged in their learning, and effective use was made of an on-line learning environment to enhance the learning.

- Across the school, the use of ICT to support learning and teaching is good overall. There is evidence, in the lessons observed, of the effective use of a range of ICT strategies and technologies to: enhance and consolidate learning; and facilitate the better management of learning by both pupils and staff. The designation of a number of pupils as digital leaders in KS 3 and KS 4 is an innovative way of supporting the delivery and development of ICT for pupils and staff across the school.

- The high quality provision for pastoral care within the school is supporting very well the holistic development of the pupils. The provision is underpinned robustly by the strong and collective commitment of the school community to their shared values, which include mutual respect, equality, integrity and inclusion. The staff work collaboratively and positively to realise the school's mission statement of achieving excellence in all aspects of the school's work and life, thereby enabling the pupils to be the best they can be. A key strength of the pastoral provision is the work of all staff in promoting the well-being of the pupils, through close monitoring of their progress, identifying any barriers to learning and addressing

these swiftly and appropriately. The school's work in promoting the pupil voice through ongoing and meaningful consultation and the creation and development of the pupil leadership teams to encourage the pupils' involvement in, and leadership of, key aspects of school provision, is exemplary.

- The provision for pupils with special educational needs is very effective in helping these pupils address the challenges they experience; all staff work collegially and with great dedication to support them. The pupils' needs are identified at a very early stage, appropriate targets are set and a range of suitable support strategies are put in place, including availing of the expertise of external agencies. A particular strength is the work of the key personnel in this area, including the classroom assistants, who work very effectively together to support, monitor and review appropriately the impact of the provision on the pupils' learning.

- The school has introduced a well-conceived strategy to support the pupils' transition from their primary school. The innovative 'primary eight' programme builds on the pupils' learning at KS 2 and ensures a smooth transition at this important stage of the pupils' development. A review of the curriculum for the new all-ability school has been undertaken over the last 15 months and the curriculum is evolving well to meet the diverse needs of the pupils. The expansion of the curriculum is appropriately pupil-centred and includes a good range of general and applied subjects and vocational options, accessible from years 11 to 14. The school is meeting the requirements of the Entitlement Framework through partnerships with the Area Learning Community. These relationships could be extended and strengthened further to provide learning experiences that are appropriate to the learning needs of all the pupils. At post-16, pupils have a wide choice of subjects to meet their career aspirations and abilities and a fast-track pathway is available to facilitate changing career goals; post-16 pupils have good opportunities to participate in enrichment activities to support the development of their personal, social, study and employability skills.

- The provision for careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) is underpinned by a discrete taught programme of employability delivered across all key stages. The pupils and their parents have access to impartial careers advice and guidance. The school has strong links with a wide range of employers which are used to very good effect to provide relevant work-experience placements for the year 11 and 13 pupils to support them in making informed decisions about their career pathway. There are effective links with the universities, further education colleges and other education establishments to provide advice and information on their courses. Consequently, the pupils have a good understanding of the subject choices and the careers pathways available to them. The school is appropriately keeping its CEIAG provision under review through a working party, which includes student leaders from all key stages.

7. **Leadership and management**

- A distinctive learning community has been established by the governors and the leaders, at all levels, in the school. The school development plan and associated action plans guide well the work of the school in a clear, coherent and strategic way. Appropriate priorities for the ongoing school improvement are clearly identified through comprehensive consultation with the school community and other stakeholders, including community development and youth services. Crucially, the collective focus on improving the experiences of all pupils, and the outcomes they attain, is increasingly underpinned by a shared understanding of what constitutes high quality learning and teaching.

- The senior leadership team (SLT) has an appropriately clear, strategic and challenging vision for the school; their well-defined leadership roles and responsibilities are a strength and they contribute effectively to whole-school improvement. With an important emphasis on a collaborative approach to professional learning, the SLT, through well targeted staff development, has developed, to good effect, arrangements for monitoring, evaluating and supporting the learning and teaching. As a result, robust arrangements are in place for measuring the impact of the innovative strategies designed to support the pupils in their learning; it is clear that the professional learning of the staff is linked directly to school improvement. Already, in a relatively short period of time, there is evidence of the impact of these arrangements on the quality of the pupils' learning and the standards they achieve.

- Although the school is an early stage in its development, the work of the middle leaders is impacting positively on the quality and growing consistency of the pupils' learning experiences. The middle leaders are committed to the collegial whole-school vision for improvement, within a culture of respect, consultation, support and challenge. Working closely with the SLT's 'Link Leaders' they have planned innovative opportunities to share with other colleagues aspects of effective practice. This important continuing professional development work helps to improve the quality of the provision in their subjects and to raise standards further. While the processes for self-evaluation, in an increasing number of departments, are of a good quality, the impact of the agreed actions on pupil outcomes will need to be evaluated and monitored robustly going forward to ensure consistently high standards across all of the subjects.

- Based on the evidence presented at the time of inspection, the ETI's evaluation is that there can be a high degree of confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated. The governors are actively involved in making key decisions for continuing school improvement, are highly supportive of the senior leaders and are focused on building the school community. In this work they are guided by the agreed values which underpin their decisions and which are focused on enabling the pupils and staff to fulfil their potential. A key feature of the effective governance is the drive to raise pupil aspirations and improve their life chances as well-rounded citizens who make a positive contribution to their local community and wider society. The student governor, on behalf of the pupils, makes an important contribution to this process.

- On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding young people. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education. The pupils report that they feel safe and secure in school; they are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being and are confident that their views are respected and any concerns are dealt with promptly and appropriately. The governors and the principal, however, need to carry out a risk assessment in relation to access points to the school buildings on all three sites.

8.   Overall effectiveness

St Ronan's College demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners.

The area which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address is to:

- continue the process of embedding its most effective practice, and build further the capacity of all staff in delivering high quality and appropriately differentiated learning experiences to meet the needs, aspirations and abilities of all pupils.

The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.

Examination performance and other statistical data

GCSE and equivalent examination results from 2015-16

Based on data held by the school in SIMS[1] and verified with the ETI, the table below compares the percentage of year 12 pupils in St. Ronan's College achieving five or more GCSE examinations at grades A* to C and A* to E and equivalent subjects in 2015-16, and the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals with the NI average for non-selective schools in the same free school meals category[2].

GCSE and GCSE equivalent subjects -*following permitted exclusions	2015-16
*Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE & Equivalents in at least 5 subjects	99.1
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	76.2
The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category[3]	71.5
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics	67.12
The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category	50.5
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 5 subjects	94.98
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)	39.66

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[1] SIMS: School Information Management System
[2] See benchmarking data and guidance contained in the annual DE Circulars on: 'School Development Planning and Target-Setting'.
[3] See benchmarking data and guidance contained in the DE Circular 2011/03: 'School Development Planning and Target-Setting'.

Attainment of pupils in individual subjects at GCSE level at grades A* to C 2015-16

Based on data held by the school in SIMS[4] and verified with the ETI, the percentage of year 12 pupils achieving at GCSE level at grades A* to C in individual subjects in St Ronan's College in 2015-16 is compared with the three-year NI average for similar pupils.

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 as this comparison is based on one year of data for St Ronan's College against the three-year NI average for similar pupils, therefore comparisons between subjects should be treated with caution.
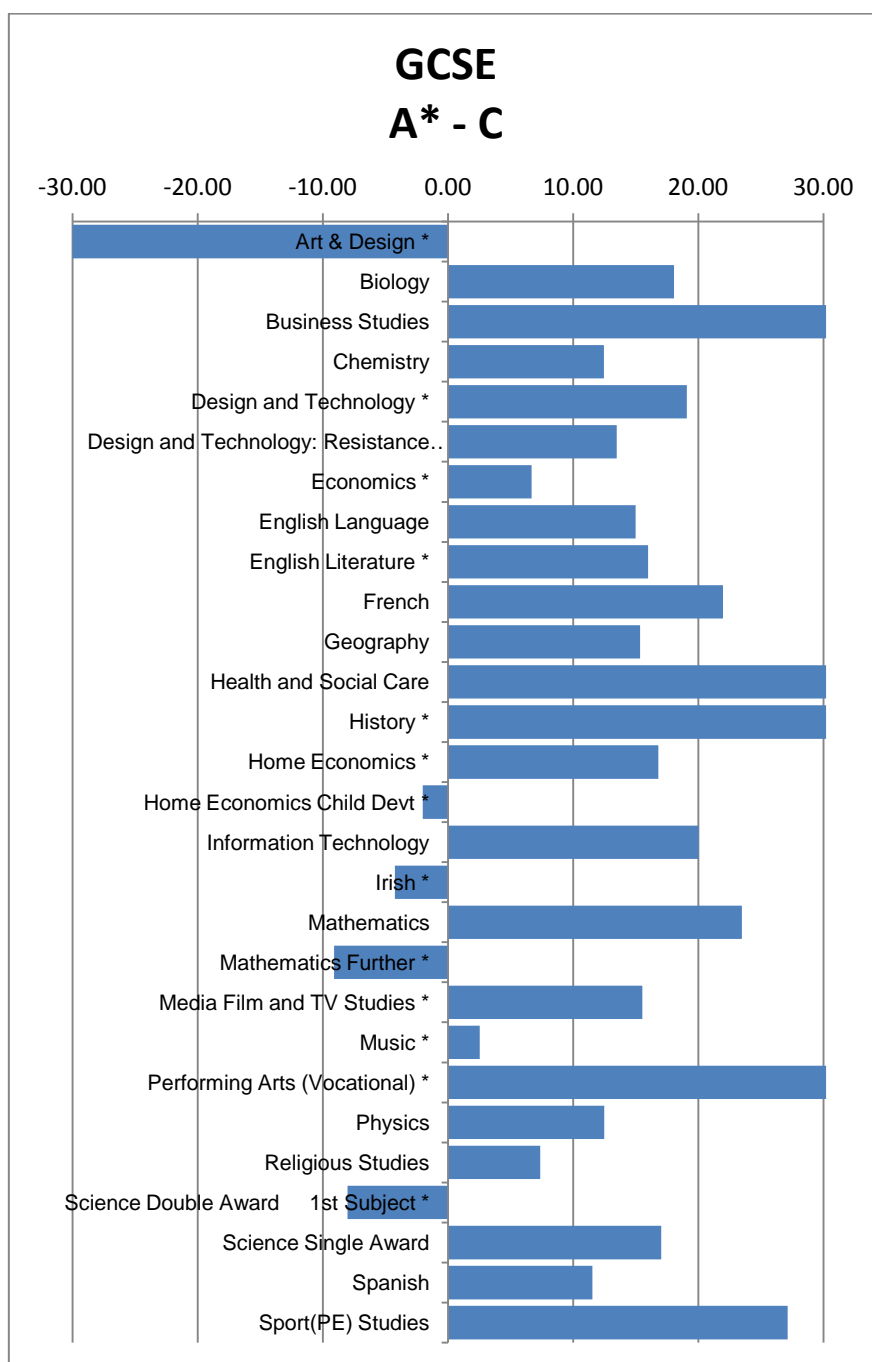
*indicates fewer than 30 entries in 2015-16

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[4] SIMS: School Information Management System

Other examination results at key stage 4 in 2015-16

Based on data held by the school in SIMS and verified with ETI, the table below shows the percentage of year 12 pupils in St. Ronan's College achieving grades A* to C and A* to E in vocational/applied courses equivalent to GCSE level. No average is available from the examining board for the subjects in this table to facilitate comparison.

Other level 2 courses taken in 2015-16

Level 2	2015-16	Total entry over 3 years
	% A*- C	
Occupational Studies Business & Services	100	15
Occupational Studies Construction Studies	100	13
Occupational Studies Technology & innovation	68.42	19
Occupational Studies Engineering	100	12
OCN Personal Health & Wellbeing (cert)	100	8
Occupational Studies Environment & Society	66.67	9
BTEC Science level 2	0	3
COPE (ASDAN)	100	23

GCE A level examination results at grades A* to C 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 St Ronan's 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 in 2015-16.

GCE A Level or equivalent	*2015-16*
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels & Equivalents in at least 3 subjects	90.38
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	48.08
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 2 A2 levels	98.72

Other examination results: 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 St Ronan's College achieving at grades A* to C in vocational/applied courses equivalent to GCE A level in 2015-16. No average is available from the examining board(s) for the subjects in this table to facilitate comparison.
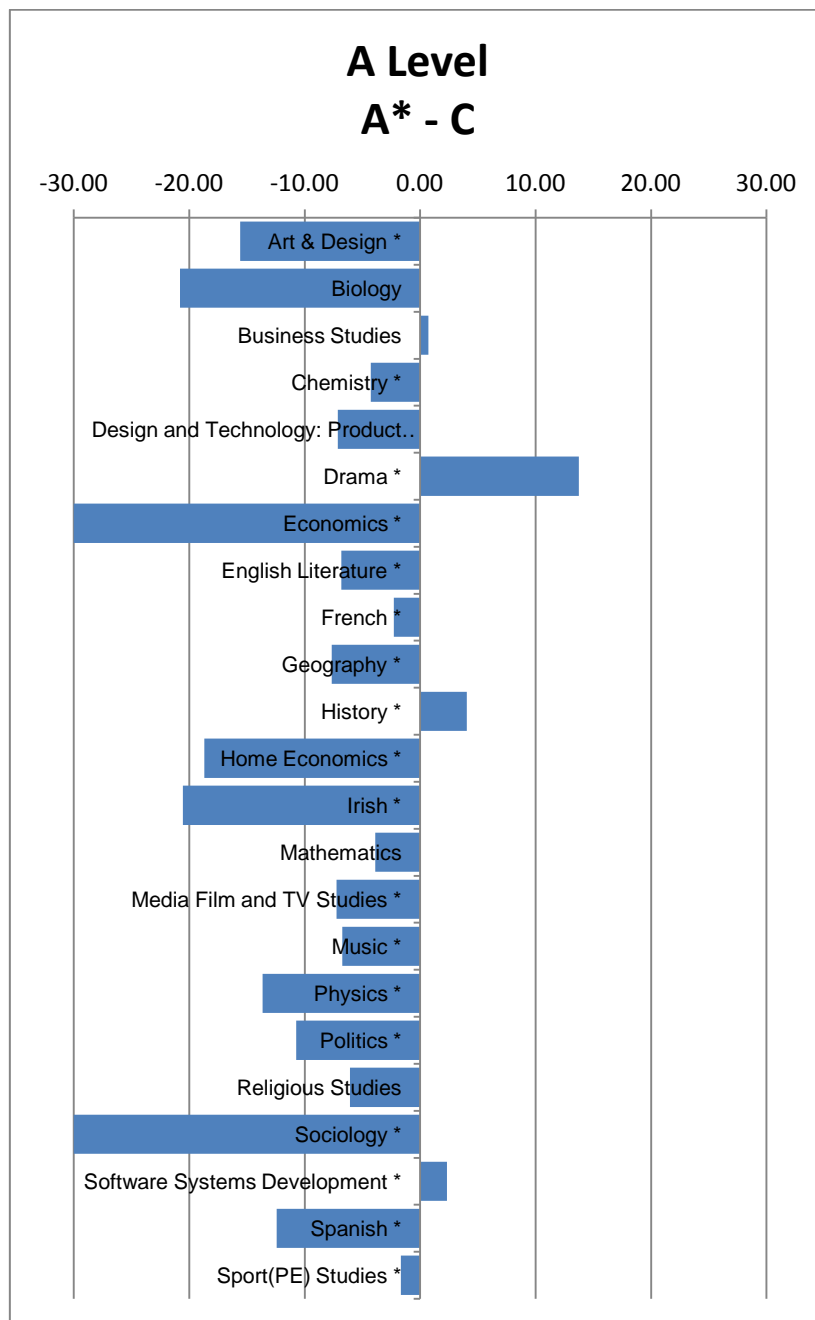
Other level 3 courses taken in 2015-16

Level 3	2015-16 % A* - C	Total entry
Applied Business	95.65	23
Applied Science	54.55	11
BTEC Subsidiary Diploma level 3 Engineering	100.00	5
BTEC Subsidiary Diploma level 3 in Sport Studies	80.00	5
BTEC Subsidiary Diploma level 3 in Travel and Tourism	66.67	3
Health & Social Care	72.73	55

Attainment of pupils in individual subjects at GCE A level at grades A* to C in 2015-16

Based on data held by the school in SIMS and verified with ETI, the bar chart below shows the percentage of year 14 pupils achieving at GCE A level at grades A* to C in individual subjects in St Ronan's College in 2015-16 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 as this comparison is based on one year of data only for St Ronan's College against the three-year NI average for similar pupils, therefore comparisons between subjects should be treated with caution.

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

A Level
A* - C

Subject	
-30.00 -20.00 -10.00 0.00 10.00 20.00 30.00	

Art & Design *
Biology
Business Studies
Chemistry *
Design and Technology: Product..
Drama *
Economics *
English Literature *
French *
Geography *
History *
Home Economics *
Irish *
Mathematics
Media Film and TV Studies *
Music *
Physics *
Politics *
Religious Studies
Sociology *
Software Systems Development *
Spanish *
Sport(PE) Studies *

*indicates fewer than 20 entries in 2015-16

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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 Ronan's College from year 12 to year 13 and then from year 13 to year 14, compared with the NI average for non-selective schools from school census returns to the Department of Education for the most recent year for which data is available.

2015-16	NI Average	School
% Yr 12 staying on to Yr 13	47.8	61.4
% Yr 13 staying on to Yr 14	78.2	76.0

Leavers' destinations

Based on data held and verified by the school with ETI, the table below shows the percentage of all of the pupils from St Ronan's College who leave school to enter further education, higher education or employment, or are seeking employment compared with the average for non-selective schools.

	NI	School	Level 2 (No.)	Level 3 (No.)	Level 4 (No.)
Total Number of Leavers	13157	296	89	207	
Employment	11.7	9.8	7	22	
Institute of Further Education	44.9	37.8	52	60	
Institute of Higher Education	16.0	36.2	0	101	
Work-based Learning (Training)	20.6	1.7	3	2	
Unemployed	4.4	9.5	13	15	
Unknown	2.5	4.7	8	6	

Health and Safety

1. There is a need for an urgent review by the board of governors and principal of the access arrangements to the school buildings on all three sites.