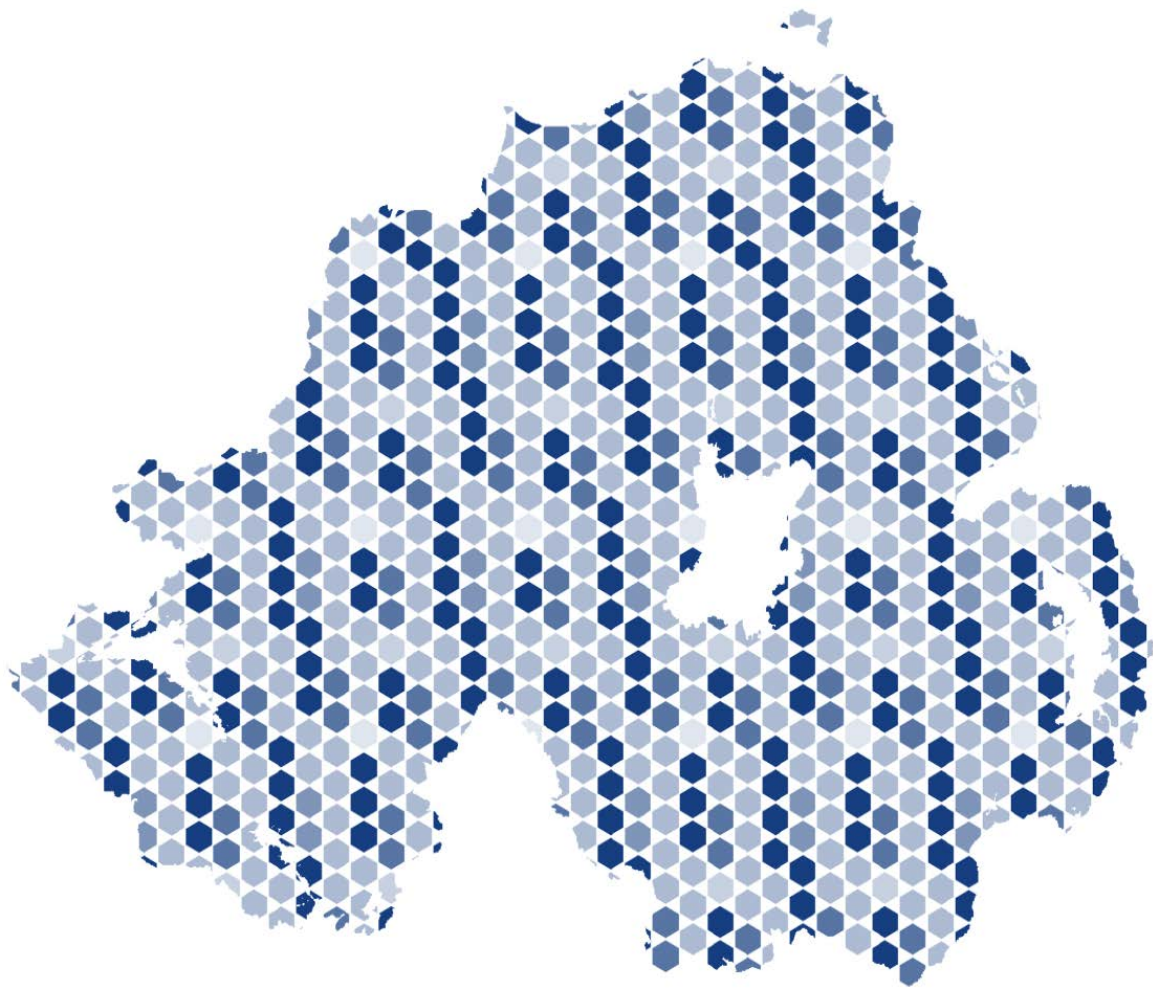


POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Ashfield Girls' High School,
Belfast

Controlled, non-selective, 11-18, girls' school

Report of an Inspection in
November 2013

eti

*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*

Providing Inspection Services for

Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

CUSTOMER
SERVICE
EXCELLENCE



Quantitative terms

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 in reports:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

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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 teaching and learning, scrutinised documentation and the pupils' written work and held formal and informal discussions with pupils, teachers and staff with specific responsibilities.

The arrangements for this inspection included:

- a meeting with representatives from the governors;
- meetings with groups of pupils; and
- the opportunity for the parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

Data on the returns on questionnaires sent in advance of the inspection to parents and school staff is shown in the table below.

Questionnaire	Number issued	Number returned	Percentage returned	Number with comments
Parents	704	9	* ¹	6
Teachers	48	21	43	*
Support Staff	31	29	93	6

* fewer than 5

2. Context

Ashfield Girls' High School serves the community in east Belfast. Over the past four years, the school has been consistently over-subscribed. On entry to the school, approximately three-fifths of the pupils have achieved at the expected level in English and mathematics. The prior attainment of the significant minority of pupils who have not achieved at the expected level in English and mathematics is very low. In addition to the pupils who have been identified as having special educational needs, a minority of the pupils experience a range of social and emotional difficulties and other complex barriers to learning. Through the introduction of a wide range of pastoral initiatives, the school has improved successfully the pupils' attendance, which is now in line with the NI average.

¹ The ETI is trialling a range of methods for collecting the views of parents/carers about the life and work of the school. As a result, the response rate to the parent/carer questionnaire may be low.

Ashfield Girls' High School	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Year 8 Intake	116	116	116	118
Enrolment	688	703	708	704
% Attendance (NI Average)	89.9 (92)	90.2 (93)	91.2 (n/a)	n/a
FSME Percentage ²	22.2	24.2	25.9	26.3
% (No.) of pupils on the SEN register	30.1 (207)	30.2 (212)	33.6 (238)	12.9 (91)
No. of pupils with statements of educational needs in the mainstream school	20	20	18	20
No. of newcomers	16	12	20	17
<i>Intake:</i>				
% of Y8 pupils with L5 English ³	3.5	8.6	6	1.7
% of Y8 pupils with L5 mathematics	6.9	9.5	5.2	2.5
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in English	68.1	66.4	61.2	60.2
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in mathematics	61.2	67.2	59.5	57.6
<i>Source: data as held by the school.</i>				

3. Focus of inspection

In order to promote improvement in the interests of all learners, the purpose of the post-primary inspection is, through an effective linking of internal and external approaches, to:

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

4. Overall finding

Overall Performance Level	Good
Achievements and Standards	Good
Provision for Learning	Good
Leadership and Management	Good

² The term 'FSME Percentage' refers to the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals.

³ From 2013, KS2 standards in English and mathematics are reported as Levels of Progression and cannot be compared directly with KS2 data from previous years.

5. Achievements and standards

- The pupils benefit from the staff's deep commitment to promoting their educational, social and emotional well-being; the staff work very effectively, and give their time generously, to develop well the pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem. As a result, the pupils are highly motivated, settle to work quickly and maintain good levels of concentration and perseverance. In paired and group work, the pupils interact well and display good communication skills. The pupils participate well in a wide range of extra-curricular and enhancement opportunities; consequently, they have a highly-developed sense of personal and social responsibility.
- The pupils make good progress in line with their prior attainment and achieve good standards in a majority of subjects, including, importantly, English at key stage (KS) 4. However, the percentage of pupils who attain five or more GCSEs including English and mathematics at grades A* to C was below the NI average in two out of the last three years; this is largely due to the inadequate standards attained by the pupils in mathematics. These standards have decreased steadily over the last three years and in 2013, only 30% of the pupils entered for GCSE mathematics achieved at grades A* to C. The school has identified appropriately the need to raise the standards attained in some subject areas, including in mathematics. The development of the role of all teachers in supporting the promotion of the pupils' numeracy skills across the curriculum is vital in addressing this aim.
- On average, one-fifth of the pupils who are entitled to free school meals have attained five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics over the last three years. The school has identified appropriately the need to raise the standards attained by these pupils, and has put in place a range of useful measures including monitoring pupil attendance and progress and the introduction of a mentoring system.
- Those pupils who require additional support for their learning make good progress and most attain standards at GCSE, or equivalent qualifications, in line with their ability.
- At post-16, the percentage of pupils attaining three or more subjects at grades A* to C is consistently above the NI average for non-selective schools. While there is variation in the standards attained by the pupils in academic subjects, the pupils achieve particularly well in the small number of vocational and applied subjects on offer. To address this variation in performance, the senior leadership team (SLT) need to ensure that the pupils have the prerequisite level of attainment and skills to cope with the significant demands of advanced study.

6. Provision

- Most of the teaching and learning observed during the inspection was good or better, with around one-third of the lessons being very good or outstanding. The most effective practice was characterised by high expectations, very good planning which supported the learning and progression of individual pupils, appropriate pace and challenge and engaging activities which promoted critical and creative thinking skills. In the least effective practice, in just under one-quarter of the lessons observed, there was over-direction by the teacher, low level tasks and insufficient opportunities to develop effectively the pupils' literacy,

numeracy and wider skills. While the school has systems in place for tracking and monitoring the pupils' progress, there is a need to improve the consistency of the marking and feedback, and setting individual learning targets in order to empower the pupils to take more responsibility for their learning.

- There is significant variation in the planning, teaching, learning and assessment across the school. Given the variation in the practice, the teachers need to develop their planning further to enable them to cater better for the wide range of abilities within the classes and to promote and develop the pupils' literacy and numeracy skills in a consistent manner. The SLT needs to support the teachers in this work by identifying and sharing the most effective practice across all departments.
- The school is working to embed a new literacy policy and promote literacy across the curriculum. Whilst the pupils have good opportunities to read and respond to a range of texts, they would benefit from more opportunities for extended writing in all subjects, less transcription of notes and fewer short tasks; such activities do not provide meaningful opportunities for the teachers to assess the extent to which successful learning is taking place and to provide meaningful feedback to pupils on how to progress. During the inspection, there were some examples of numeracy skills being developed well in technology and design and science lessons. However, in other subjects, similar opportunities were missed. The profile of numeracy needs to be raised in the school through cross-curricular work and other means.
- The pupils who require additional support with aspects of their learning work well alongside their peers and are integrated fully into all areas of school life. The school provides effective targeted support and the classroom assistants work flexibly, and very effectively, with the pupils and provide high levels of care within and beyond the classroom. In class, the education plans provide limited guidance to the teachers to help them meet the needs of individual pupils. The school has identified that subject teachers and pupils need to be involved more fully in setting appropriate learning and/or behavioural targets and in identifying specific strategies to help meet these targets.
- The very good pastoral provision is responsive to the needs of the pupils by addressing directly a range of contemporary and relevant issues. The wide range of extra-curricular activities develop well the pupils' confidence and skills in leadership and mentoring, and enrich their social experiences through, for example, the opportunities to engage meaningfully with pupils from other schools through shared education programmes. These opportunities equip the pupils well for the next stage of their education, training or work. In discussions with inspectors, the pupils reported that they value the opportunities to be involved actively in making decisions about aspects of school life, through the school councils.
- On the basis of evidence available at the time of inspection the school has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding pupils which reflect broadly the guidance issued by the Department of Education. The school has identified appropriately the need to review its arrangements for communicating more effectively the safeguarding arrangements to parents. The pupils report that they feel safe and secure in school and know who to speak to if they have any concerns about their safety and well-being.

- The pupils across the school are provided with a relevant programme of CEIAG within employability at KS3, and as discrete, timetabled careers education classes for most pupils at KS4 and post-16. All of the year 12, and some pupils in years 13, participate in a well-planned work experience programme and in careers events that develop their knowledge and understanding of the world of work and enhance their employability skills. Overall, most of the pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of the employment, training and education opportunities available to them. The school has identified appropriately the need to embed careers education further at key transition points.
- The SLT demonstrate a good commitment to meeting the requirements of the Entitlement Framework and the pupils can access Level 2 occupational courses in the local college of further education and post-16 courses through collaboration with Ashfield Boys' High School. The school provides the pupils with a broad and balanced curriculum at key stage 3. It will be important to develop the curriculum offer at Key Stage 4 and at post-16, taking cognisance of the pupils' needs and their career aspirations. In addition, those pupils who enter sixth form without attaining a GCSE at grades A* to C in English and mathematics need to be provided with sufficient support and appropriate learning opportunities to help them achieve these important qualifications. The school has identified appropriately the need to review and modify the recently-introduced timetable arrangements in order to maximise consistency in the quality of the learning experiences for all of the pupils.

7. Leadership and management

- The school development plan (SDP)⁴ informs and guides well the school's improvement agenda. High levels of consultation with all staff, parents, pupils and governors have led to the identification of appropriate priorities which are focused on raising standards, developing e-learning and enhancing further the pastoral provision. As this is the first year of the implementation of the current SDP, it will be important that the school develops further the coherence of all of the associated action plans and the current mechanisms for monitoring the impact of this work on pupil learning and achievement.
- The principal provides very good leadership in collaboration with the SLT, who lead well their various areas of responsibility. New staffing structures have been created to facilitate school development, including the re-structuring of the SLT, the enhancement of their roles and those of the middle managers to support self-evaluation and the school's improvement agenda. The leadership and management at all levels place a clear focus on achieving the best possible outcomes for the pupils and preparing them to be active members of the local and global communities.
- The leadership give due attention to the professional development of staff; there is high quality in-school training including through, for example, the work of the Learning and Teaching Forum and the ICT lead-practitioner group. However, whilst the staff development programme is linked to the priorities within the SDP, there needs to be a greater focus on embedding this work successfully in classroom practice.

⁴ The SDP meets fully the requirements of the School Development Planning Regulations (NI) 2010.

- The parents, staff and school community can have a high degree of confidence in the effectiveness of the governors; they are well informed and very supportive of the principal and staff. The governors are an integral part of school life; they play a key role in the school's improvement processes and, where appropriate, carry out their challenge function effectively.
- The school places a high value on the role of parents in supporting the education of their daughters. Effective arrangements are in place to communicate with the parents and to engage them in school life. The school reaches out to, and encourages, the involvement of the wider community; a particular strength is the provision of many e-learning opportunities for parents, primary school teachers and the local community.

8. Conclusion

In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school is good. The school has important strengths in most of its educational provision and has very good pastoral provision. The inspection has identified an area for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address. The ETI will monitor the school's progress in addressing this area for improvement.

The main area for improvement is the need for:

- leadership and management at all levels to identify and disseminate the effective practice in order to meet better the needs, interests and abilities of all of the pupils and to raise the standards they attain.

Performance and statistical data

GCSE and equivalent examination results from 2010-11 to 2012-13

Based on data held and verified by the school with ETI, the table below compares the percentage of year 12 pupils in this school achieving 5 or more GCSEs (A* to C and A* to E) 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 category⁵.

<i>GCSE and GCSE equivalent subjects - *following permitted exclusions</i>	2011	2012	2013
*Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE & Equivalents in at least 5 subjects	100	100	90.1
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	64.5	50.9	51.4
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category⁶</i>	<i>60.0</i>	<i>57.8</i>	<i>57.8</i>
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics	33.6	26.8	23.4
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	<i>33.6</i>	<i>31.8</i>	<i>31.8</i>
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 5 subjects	95.3	81.3	88.3
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)	23.5	20.8	21.7

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

⁶ See benchmarking data and guidance contained in the DE Circular 2011/03: 'School Development Planning and Target-Setting'.

Other examination results at key stage 4 from 2010-11 to 2012-13

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

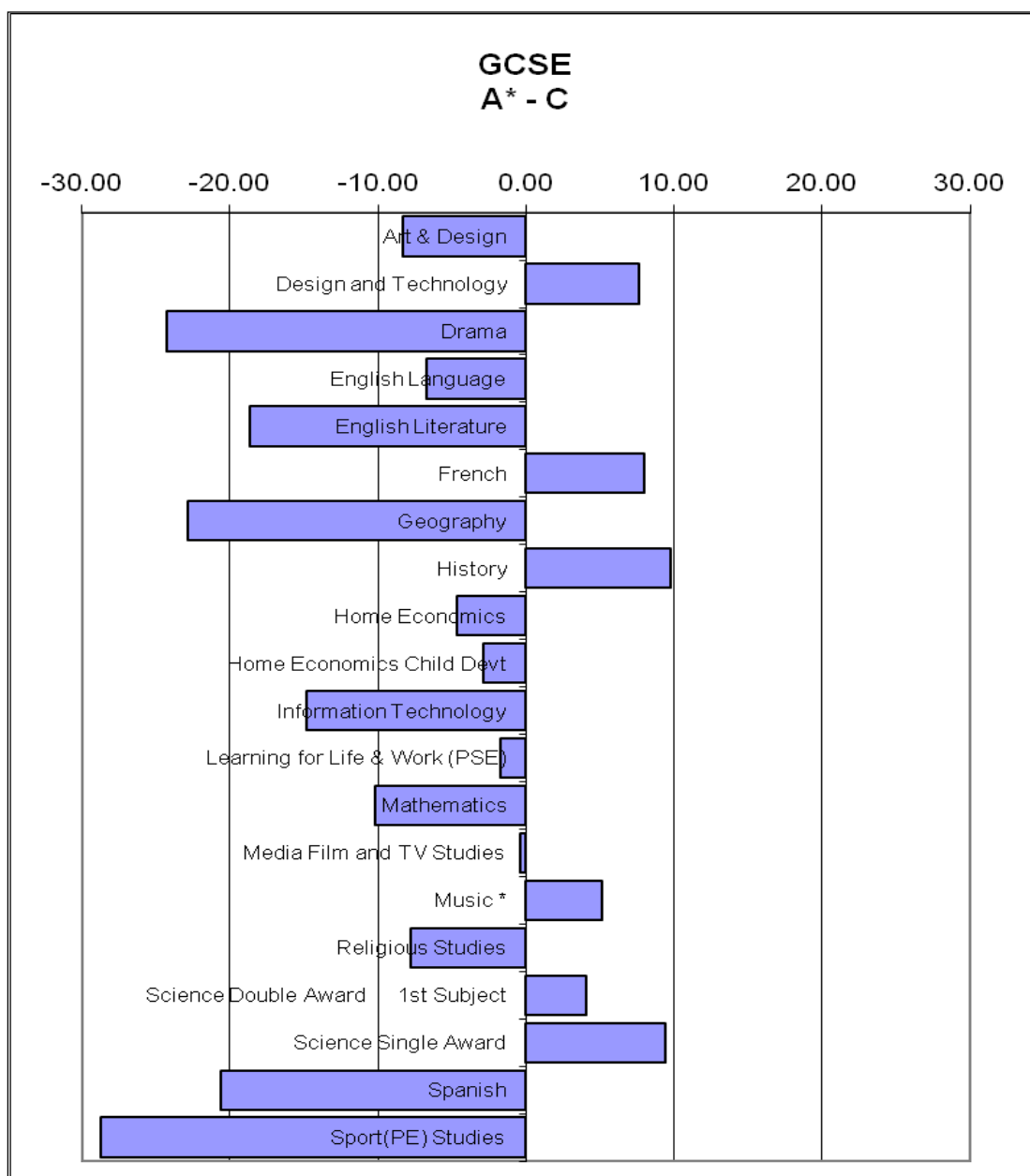
Other courses taken in at least two of the last three years

GCSE Subject	2011		2012		2013		Total entry over 3 years
	% A*-C	% A*-E	% A*-C	% A*-E	% A*-C	% A*-E	
Business (Vocational)	57	71	71	82	80	100	64
Leisure and Tourism	-	-	25	38	45	82	27

Attainment of pupils in individual subjects at GCSE level at grades A* to C from 2010-11 to 2012-13

Based on data held and verified by the school 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 this school is compared with the three-year NI average.

The comparison is shown below as the difference between these two values; 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 should be treated with caution.



*indicates fewer than 30 entries over 3 years

GCE A level examination results at grades A* to C from 2010-11 to 2012-13

Based on data held and verified by the school with ETI, the table below shows the percentage of year 14 pupils in this 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 achieving three or more GCEs (A* to C) with the NI average for non-selective schools in the same free school meals category⁷.

GCE A Level or equivalent	2011	2012	2013
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels & Equivalents in at least 3 subjects	100	98.0	87.7
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	52.3	50.0	45.6
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 2 A2 levels	100	100	98.25

Other examination results: post-16

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

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

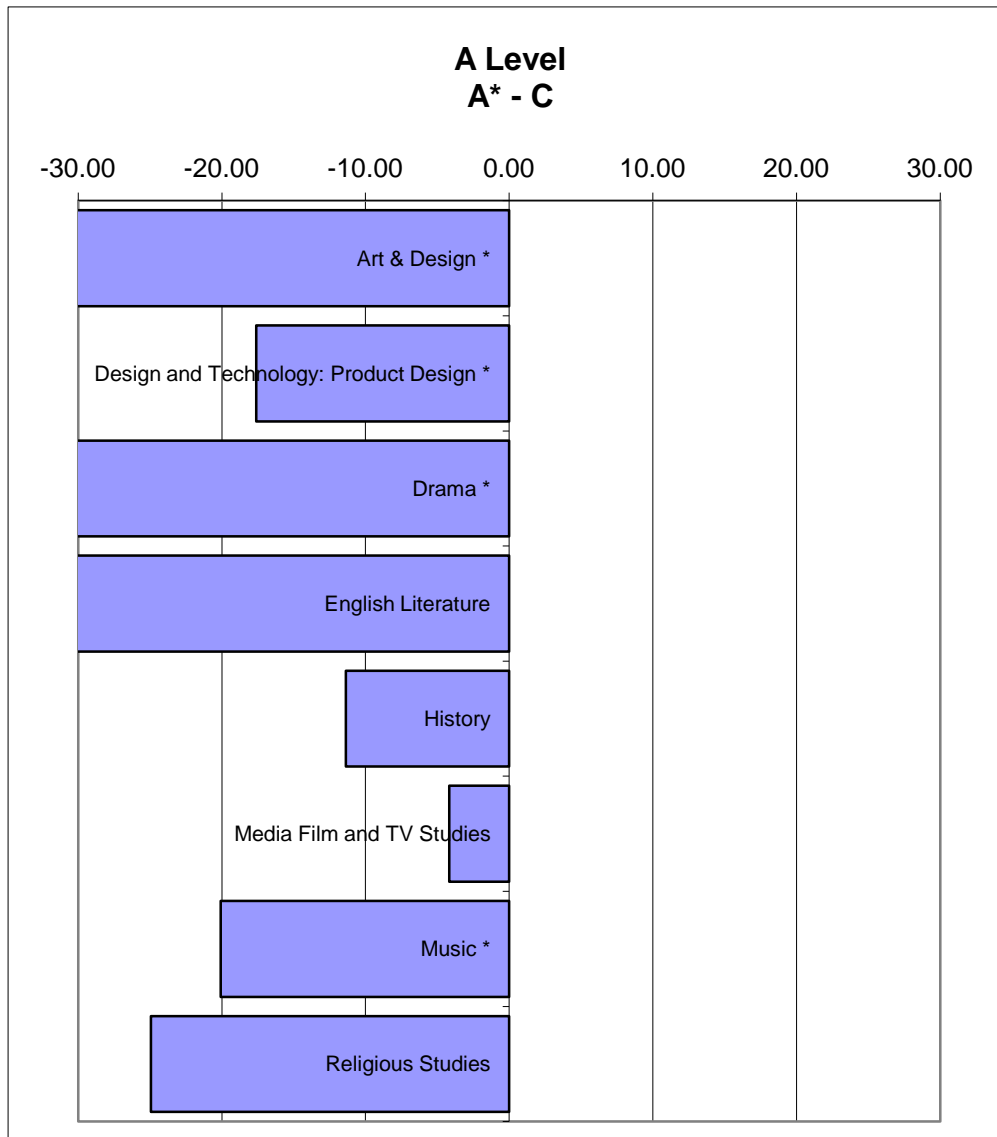
GCE Subject	2011		2012		2013		Total entry over 3 years
	% A*-C	% A*-E	% A*-C	% A*-E	% A*-C	% A*-E	
Business (Vocational)	75	100	50	100	67	100	27
Health and Social Care	79	100	77	100	52	96	69
Information Technology (Vocational)	87	100	64	100	89	100	83
Science Double Award	100	100	92	100	88	100	37

⁷ 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 2010-11 to 2012-13

Based on data held and verified by the school 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 this school is compared with the three-year NI average.

The comparison is shown below as the difference between these two values; 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

Staying on rate

Based on data held and verified by the school with ETI, the table below shows the percentage of the pupils who stay on at this school from year 12 to year 13 and then from year 13 to year 14, compared with the NI average for all schools and for the most recent year for which data is available.

	NI Average	School
% Yr 12 staying on to Yr 13	52.3	44.7
% Yr 13 staying on to Yr 14	79.9	94.4

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

	2011/12 NI %	2011/12 School %	2011/12 School Nos.
Total number of leavers	13024		119
Employment	7.9	7.6	9
Further Education	46	44.5	53
Higher Education	20.1	18.5	22
Training	18.2	27.7	33
Unemployed	4.4	0	0
Unknown	3.4	*	*

* fewer than 5

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