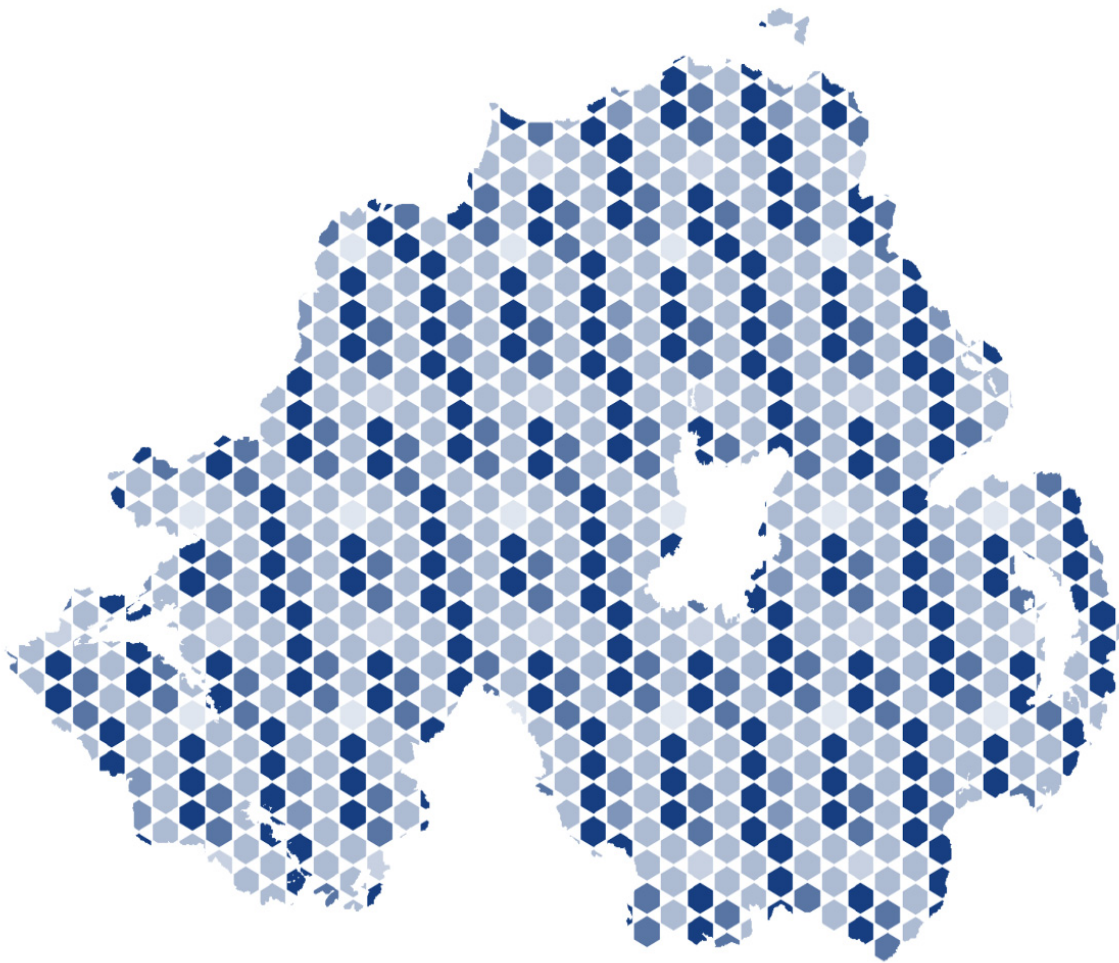


POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Our Lady of Mercy Girls' School

Maintained, Non-selective, Girls' 11-18 School

Report of an Inspection
in October 2011



Providing Inspection Services for

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

CUSTOMER
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EXCELLENCE



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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%

In assessing the various features of the provision, Inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE REPORT

The term '*similar schools*' refers to schools in the same free school meal category, as defined by DE, whether they are selective or non-selective.

CEIAG	Careers Education Information Advice and Guidance
DE	Department of Education
ETI	Education and Training Inspectorate
EF	Entitlement Framework
FSM	Free School Meals
GCE A	General Certificate of Education Advanced Levels
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
KS	Key Stage
NI	Northern Ireland
SDP	School Development Plan
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SMT	Senior Management Team

1. CONTEXT

1.1 Our Lady of Mercy Girls' School is situated in north Belfast. Enrolment is declining, in line with a trend of falling post-primary pupil numbers in the wider area. The school attracts pupils with a range of academic ability including a significant proportion with special educational needs. There are 118 pupils in a sixth form.

Our Lady of Mercy Girls' School	2008	2009	2010	2011
Enrolment	421	438	429	385
FSM (Band 4) Percentage	40	42	44	48
% (No) of pupils on SEN register	62 (260)	61 (269)	60 (258)	40 (152)
<i>No. of pupils with statements</i>	6	5	4	6
<i>No. of newcomers</i>	5	2	6	4
Intake				
% of Y8 pupils with L5 English		13	6	6
% of Y8 pupils with L5 Mathematics		9	10	13
% of Y8 pupils with L4 English		47	60	69
% of Y8 pupils with L4 Mathematics		45	46	50

Source: Data as held by the school.

2. OVERALL FINDINGS OF THE INSPECTION

2.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school is good.

The school has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address. ETI will monitor the school's progress on the areas for improvement.

3. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

3.1 The standards achieved by the pupils are good¹.

KEY FINDINGS

The pupils demonstrate a positive disposition to learning, develop very good personal and social skills, including self-confidence and resilience, and interact confidently with adults and peers. They make effective use of their preferred learning styles to improve their learning. They have appropriately high aspirations and use their good communication skills within and across the curriculum.

The pupils who require additional support with their learning make good progress.

¹ For detailed results in public examinations, including in vocational subjects, see Appendices 1 and 2.

Comparisons based on FSM Percentage	2009	2010	2011
Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE & Equivalents in at least 5 subjects	100	100	100
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	65	62.5	66
<i>Comparison with the NI average for similar schools in the same FSM category</i>	<i>Well above the average</i>	<i>Well above the average</i>	<i>Well above the average</i>
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects including English and Mathematics	29	13.8	15.1
<i>Comparison with the NI average for similar schools in the same FSM category</i>	<i>Above the average</i>	<i>Well below the average</i>	<i>Well below the average</i>
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 5 subjects	89.2	90.3	92.5

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

The pupils attain GCSE outcomes that compare very favourably with similar schools in NI for five GCSEs at Grade A*-C. Two-fifths surpass the NI average by 5% or more. In the past three years, 61% of the pupils attained Grade A*-C in English whilst only 21% of the pupils attained Grade A*-C in mathematics. The school is keen to continue to reduce the variation in the outcomes for the pupils in individual subjects and especially in mathematics.

	2009	2010	2011
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels & Equivalents in at least 3 subjects	82	100	97
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	40.9	35	41
<i>Comparison with the NI average for all non-selective schools</i>	<i>In line with the average</i>	<i>Below the average</i>	<i>In line with the average</i>
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 2 A2 levels	100	95	97.4
<i>Comparison with the NI average for all non-selective schools</i>	<i>Above the average</i>	<i>In line with the average</i>	<i>Above the average</i>

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

The percentage of pupils attaining three grades A* - C is in line with the average for non-selective schools in NI in two of the past three years. In addition, the percentage of pupils obtaining 2 or more grades A* - E has been above the NI average for non-selective schools in two of the past three years. Whilst there is good pupil uptake for the applied subjects, the number of pupils entered in other subjects is low.

4. PROVISION FOR LEARNING

4.1 The quality of provision for learning is good.

KEY FINDINGS

The quality of learning and teaching across the school is good overall.

The quality of the provision in art and design is very good, in mathematics it is inadequate and in science it is outstanding.

Just over three-quarters of lessons observed were good or very good, in almost equal measure, as evidenced in the active engagement of the pupils, characterised by the quality of their questions, in response to the teachers' high expectations, the well-planned, well-communicated lessons and the inclusive ethos of the teaching.

Around one-quarter of the lessons had important areas for improvement, including the lack of challenge, slow pace and the lack of cognisance of, and building upon, prior learning.

The quality of provision for SEN is satisfactory.

The progress of pupils with significant SEN is monitored closely by the SENCO and year heads in regular meetings. In addition, there are effective links with those staff who have pastoral responsibilities.

There is insufficient collaboration between departments as part of the quality assurance of the whole-school provision in SEN and insufficient dissemination of the existing good practice to effect improvement.

4.2 The quality of the care, guidance and support of pupils is good.

KEY FINDINGS

The school has a very caring and supportive ethos, evidenced by the excellent working relationships between the pupils and the staff. Throughout the inspection, the pupils demonstrated exemplary behaviour and engaged enthusiastically in discussion with the inspection team. The pupils are well aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being.

The personal development programme gives very good focus to addressing the range of sensitive and complex issues facing the pupils. In addition, the pupils respect diversity as a result of their involvement with other schools in the Shared Education Programme.

The pupils enjoy a wide range of extra-curricular activities, and the staff make good use of their established links with external agencies to enhance the pupils' experiences and support their learning.

4.3 The curricular provision for the pupils is satisfactory.

KEY FINDINGS

At KS3, the curriculum is suitably broad and balanced.

At KS4, limited collaboration with the North Belfast Learning Community constrains the school's capacity to increase appropriately the breadth and balance of the curriculum.

At post-16, there is a narrow range of courses provided for the pupils and the school needs to review the viability of its provision.

The provision for careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) is very good.

The careers provision is coherent, supportive and well-resourced. There is a strong focus on the progressive development of the pupils' employability skills and personal qualities to enable informed, sensible and realistic decisions at key transition points.

5. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.1 The leadership and the management are good.

KEY FINDINGS

The Principal has been in post for just over one year. His drive for school improvement is focused on ensuring that all the pupils attain consistently high standards across the areas of learning; he is also committed to the rationale for the Entitlement Framework. He is supported effectively by the vice-principal, also in post for just over one year, whose management of the pastoral provision is a strength of the school.

The majority of the heads of department have implemented effective strategies to improve the quality of learning and teaching and the standards achieved in public examinations. There is variation in how these strategies have been implemented in a significant minority of departments, leading to inconsistencies in the standards achieved. There is a need to develop collaboration between middle and senior management to identify good practice, ensure greater consistency in monitoring and to evaluate the quality of provision to effect improvement.

The SDP meets fully the requirements of the School Development Plan Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005. The SDP identifies, through consultation, appropriate priorities. Its implementation is closely monitored by the Principal, vice-principal and Board of Governors. There is variation in the quality of precise and measurable targets identified in action plans. The newly-constituted SMT needs to further monitor and evaluate the outworking of these action plans to bring about improvement.

The school has very good, comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children, which reflect the guidance issued by DE.

The school has very good links with local employers to raise awareness of careers and it promotes well community relations by developing further its links with other schools.

The school has a significant financial deficit, which the Principal, with the support of the governors, has plans in place to reduce. As a matter of urgency, it will be important that the employing authority, school governors, and the staff plan for and manage issues related to the sustainability of the school provision and school budget, and in particular, the sixth form provision in order to address the current and future needs of the pupils and the staff.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school is good.

The school has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the school has demonstrated the capacity to address.

6.2 The main areas for improvement are the need to:

- develop collaboration between the middle management and senior management to identify good practice and ensure greater consistency in monitoring and evaluating the quality of provision to bring about improvement; and
- improve the quality and outcomes of the mathematics provision.

The ETI will monitor the school's progress on the areas for improvement.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

- 1.1 i. School: Our Lady of Mercy Girls' School v. Date of Inspection: W/C 07/10/11
 ii. School Reference Number: 123-0104 vi. Area of Study: Standard Inspection
 iii. Age Range: 11-18
 iv. Status: Catholic Maintained

1.2 Intake/Enrolment

School Year	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Year 8 Intake	64	62	57	50	32
Total enrolment	429	421	438	429	385

1.3 Attendance

Year 2010/11	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average 2010/11	NI Average 2009/10
% Attendance	93.6	91.6	88.2	84.5	90.2	93	92.4	90	91

- 1.4 i. Total Number of Teachers: 26.76 iii. Contact ratio (percentage of timetabled time in direct class contact): 0.7683
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 14.385 Number of Teachers involved in Area of Study: (Focused only) 8

Year 2011/12	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTAL
Enrolment: Girls	32	51	60	64	78	64	36	385
Enrolment: Total	32	51	60	64	78	64	36	385
PTR	16.667	14.497	15.1	12.772	14.378	11.395	11.351	

- 1.5 Staying On Rate (2009/10) (Current year 13/14 as proportion of year 12 from 1/2 years previously)

Year 13	89.9	NI Av Year 13	47.4
Year 14	68.1	NI Av Year 14	34.5

1.6 Leavers' Destinations

2009/10	Year 12	NI%	Year 13/14	NI%
Total Number of Leavers	24		66	
Another School	25%	14.8	6%	2.4
Employment	38%	5.2	38%	12.3
Full-time Further Education	21%	47.5	20%	28
Full-time Higher Education	N/A	N/A	11%	42.5
Full-time Training	13%	25.1	2%	5.1
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	0%	3.6	9%	5.8
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	4%	3.8	15%	3.9

GCSE RESULTS A*-C

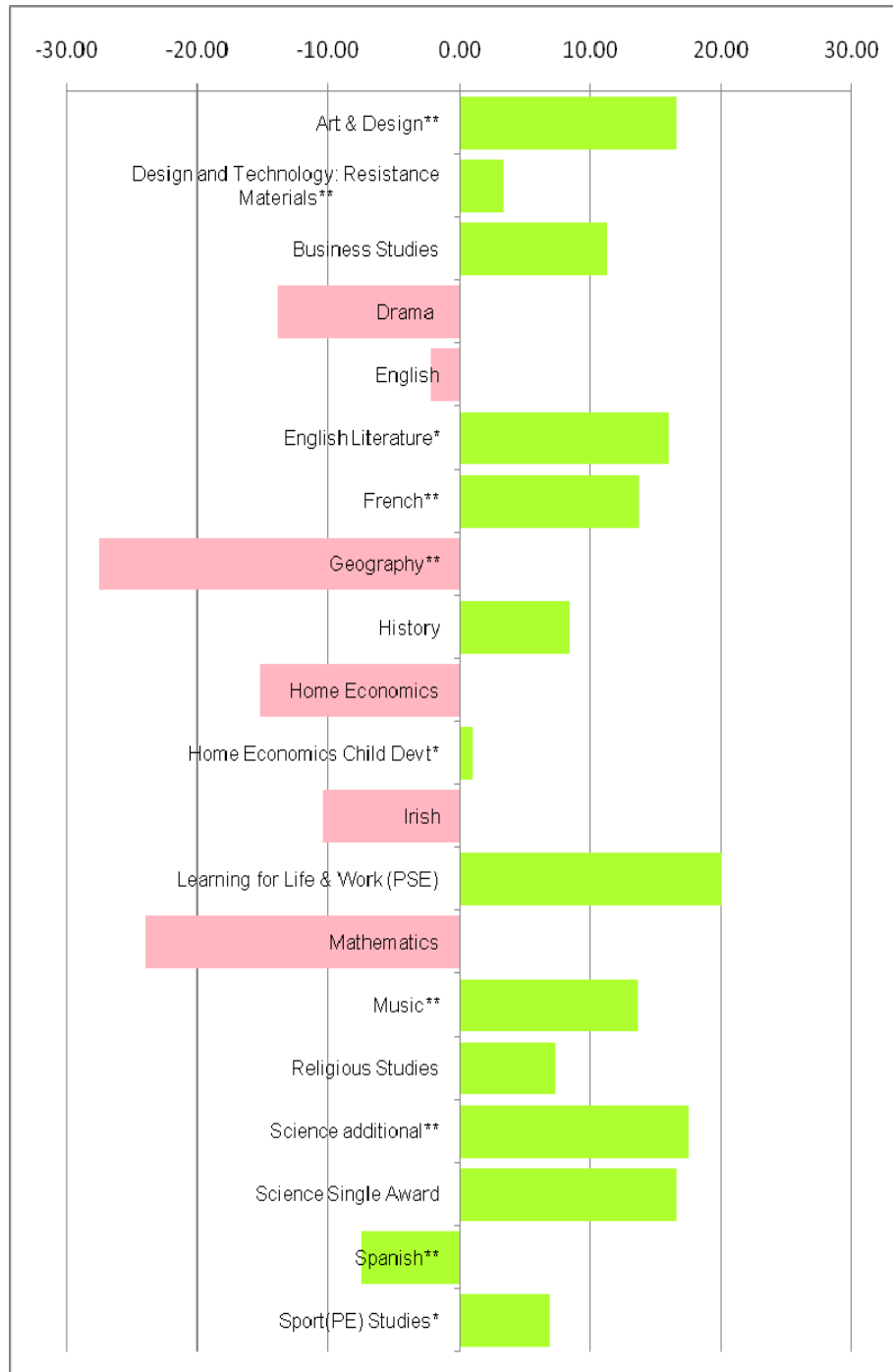
HEADLINE STANDARDS

NB: The NI average for all non-selective schools of pupils obtaining Grades C or above in at least five subjects including English and mathematics in 2010 is 34.9%

Comparisons based on FSM Band 4	2009	2010	2011
Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE & Equivalentents in at least 5 subjects	100	100	100
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	65	62.5	66
<i>Comparison with the NI average for similar schools</i>	<i>Well above the average</i>	<i>Well above the average</i>	<i>Well above the average</i>
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects including English and Mathematics	29	13.8	15.1
<i>Comparison with the NI average for similar schools</i>	<i>Above the average</i>	<i>Well below the average</i>	<i>Well below the average</i>
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 5 subjects	89.2	90.3	92.5

TABLE 2 shows the 3 year average performance of each individual subject at GCSE Grades A*-C and at Grades A*-E, compared with the corresponding NI average.

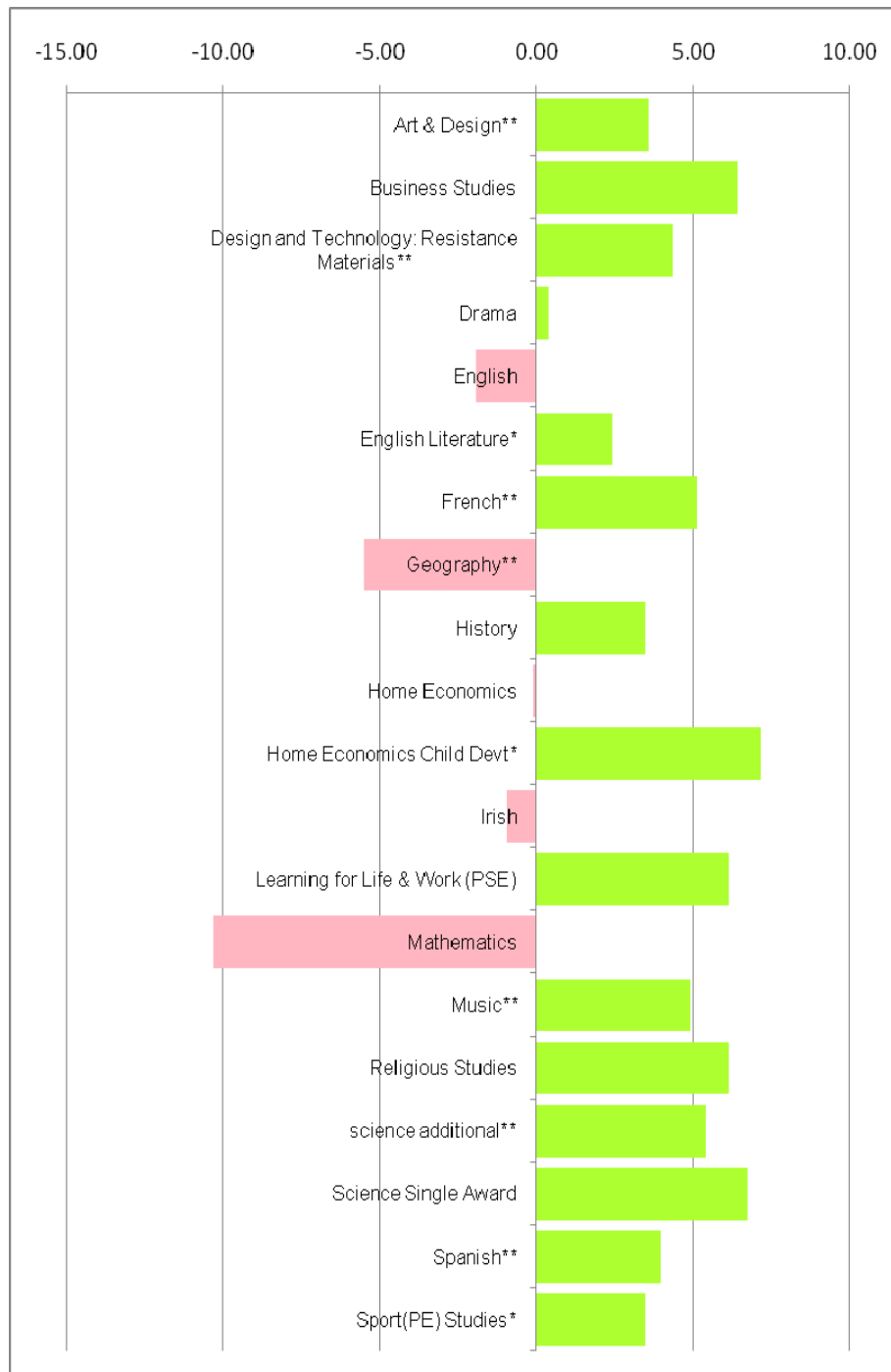
GCSE results A*-C



*Denotes subjects which had a total entry of fewer than 30 pupils over three years

** Denotes subjects which had a total entry of fewer than 20 pupils over three years.

GCSE results A*-E



*Denotes subjects which had a total entry of less than 30 pupils over three years

** Denotes subjects which had a total entry of less than 20 pupils over three years.

A-LEVEL RESULTS A*-C AND A*-E

NB: The NI averages in 2010 for all non-selective schools of pupils entered for A2 level or equivalent who achieve:

3 or more grades A*-C = 42.7%

2 or more grades A*-E = 94.7%

	2009	2010	2011
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels & Equivalents in at least 3 subjects	82	100	97
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	40.9	35	41.03
<i>Comparison with the NI average for all non-selective schools</i>	<i>In line with the average</i>	<i>Below the average</i>	<i>In line with the average</i>
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 2 A2 levels	100	95	97.4
<i>Comparison with the NI average for all non-selective schools</i>	<i>Above the average</i>	<i>In line with the average</i>	<i>Above the average</i>

Applied General Certificate of Education Advanced Level

	2009		2010		2011		Total Entry over 3 years
	% A-C	% A-E	% A-C	% A-E	% A-C	% A-E	
Health & Social Care	47.62	100	-	-	32.26	93.55	52
Business Studies	77.78	100	91.67	100	80.77	100	47
Sport	-	-	-	-	100	100	10

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE AREAS UNDER FOCUS

Art and Design

The overall quality of the provision for art and design is very good.

The strengths of the work include:

- the excellent working relationships between the teacher and pupils evidenced by the pupils' high level of participation and enjoyment in their lessons;
- the quality of the teaching observed which is consistently very good and is characterised by the enthusiasm of the teacher, high expectations, skilful blend of good discipline and excellent communication skills;
- the suitable priority given to developing the pupils' core skills in art and design, including drawing, research using first hand source materials, and 3D techniques and processes;
- the teacher's thorough planning and preparation for lessons including regular use of well-organised and engaging demonstrations of a range of techniques and processes; and
- the commitment and hard work of the teacher, to review and update department planning, to develop learning support materials and to establish a well-organised, stimulating learning environment.

Mathematics

The overall quality of the provision for mathematics is inadequate.

The strengths of the work include:

- the good working relationships between the pupils and most of their teachers;
- the commitment of the head of department to try new initiatives and seek external advice to identify good practice; and
- the high priority given by senior leadership to improve the quality of the provision.

The areas for improvement are:

- to improve the unsatisfactory standards attained by the pupils in mathematics;
- for the teachers to have higher expectations of what the pupils can achieve, build more effectively on prior learning, and match the work more closely to the needs, interests and ability of all of the pupils; and
- for all members of the department to work together and engage in meaningful self-evaluation that is linked to appropriate action to bring about improvement in the quality of the provision.

Science

The overall quality of the provision for science is outstanding.

The strengths include:

- the outstanding attainment by the pupils in public examinations and the high standards attained in a wide range of practical and written work;
- the outstanding teaching observed in just under half of the lessons, with a further one third very good, characterised particularly by a skilful blend of whole-class teaching interspersed frequently by well-managed group work;
- the opportunities provided for a wide range of practical work in most of the classes observed where pupils had frequent opportunities to take the initiative and exercise responsibility;
- the outstanding leadership of the head of science, resulting in the effective collegial use of high quality resources by the team;
- the outstanding quality of the departmental documentation, including detailed schemes of work, which provides clear guidance for the learning and teaching; and
- the processes used for departmental self-evaluation which lead to clear and continuous improvement in science, particularly the use of quantitative and benchmarked data to set targets for individual pupils and to track the standards they reach in public examinations.

SCOPE AND METHOD OF THE INSPECTION

The standard inspection of Our Lady of Mercy Girls' School focused on achievements and standards, learning and teaching, curriculum provision and on leadership and management across the school as a whole. The key questions and quality indicators which guide inspection and self-evaluation in these three aspects of post-primary schools, which were applied to this inspection, are available in the Inspectorate's 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>. The evaluation, based on the quality indicators, enabled ETI to make a judgement about the public value provided by the school.

Inspectors scrutinised documentation and the pupils' written work and held formal and informal discussions with pupils, teachers and staff with specific responsibilities. Specialist inspectors paid particular attention art and design, mathematics and science providing detailed oral feedback to the teachers in these areas. Detailed findings are reported in Appendix 3.

The inspection also focused on the provision for pastoral care and the arrangements for child protection; the provision for pupils requiring additional support with their learning and their inclusion in all aspects of school life, on CEIAG and on progress towards the Entitlement Framework.

The arrangements for the inspection included:

- the opportunity for the parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire to the inspection;
- meetings with representatives from the governors; and
- meetings with groups of pupils from years 8, 10, 12, 13 and 14.

Questionnaire	Number issued	Number returned	Percentage returned	Number with comments
Parents	108	25	23	8
Teachers	N/A	23	N/A	16
Support Staff	N/A	15	N/A	0

Source: Returns from questionnaires to Inspection Services Branch at DE.

The returns from almost all of the questionnaires sent to the teachers, the support staff and the parents were very positive in nearly all respects. The ETI reported to the Principal and representatives of the governors the very few areas of concern emerging from the questionnaires.

ACCOMMODATION ISSUES

A number of accommodation issues impact negatively upon the pupils' learning. The school reports that, over the last 12 months, several rooms was temporarily unavailable due to water damage.

In addition, the school's ICT infrastructure needs to be upgraded.

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