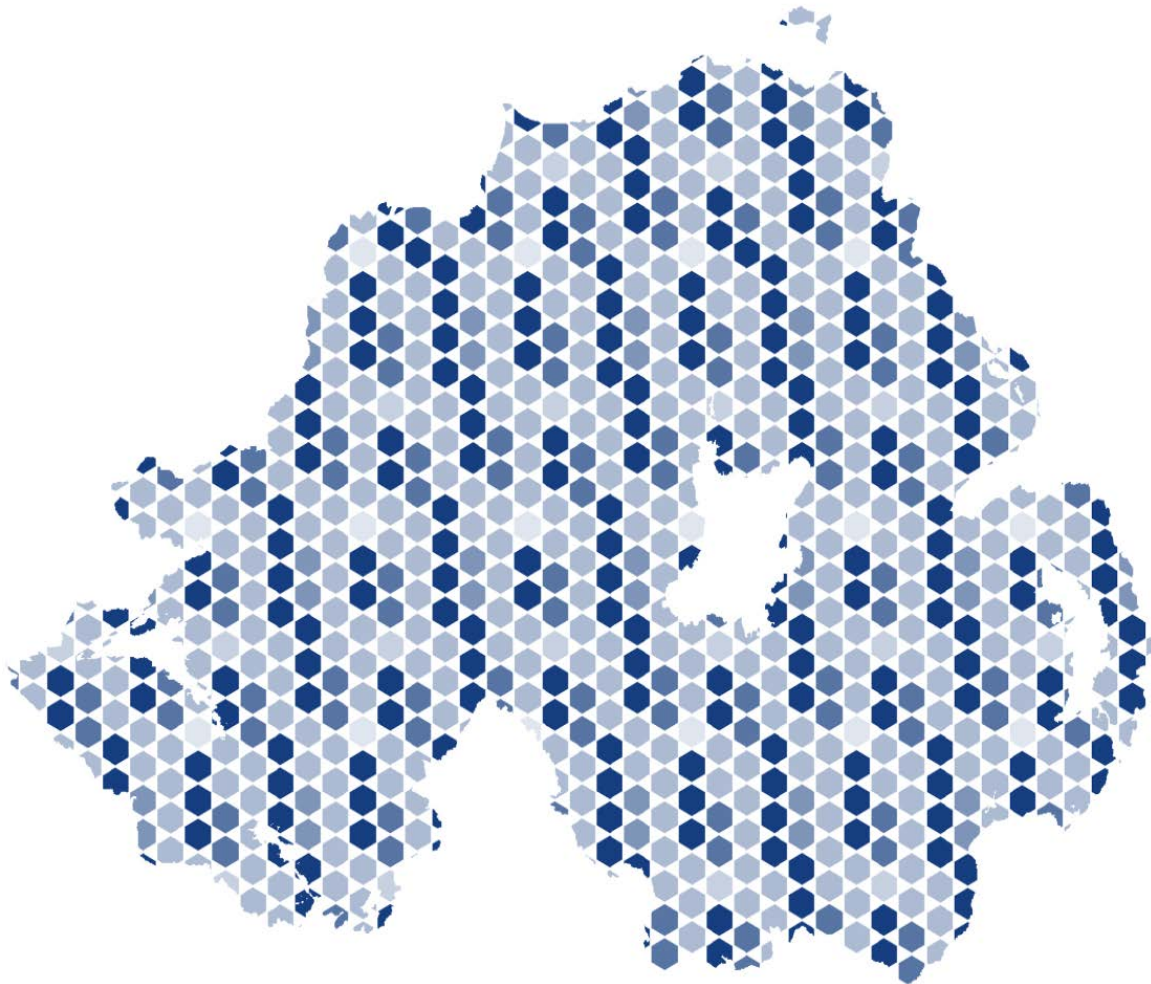


# POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

St Mary's Christian Brothers'  
Grammar School, Belfast

Voluntary, boys, 11.18, selective school

Report of an Inspection  
in November 2012



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## CONTEXT OF THE INSPECTION (METHOD)

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 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>.

Inspectors 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 from years 8, 12, 13 and 14; and
- the opportunity for the parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

Data on the questionnaire returns is shown in the table below.

Questionnaire	Number issued	Number returned	Percentage returned	Number with comments
Parents	240	78	33%	45
Teachers	80	22	32%	10
Support Staff	55	*	*	*

\* fewer than 5

## 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 (Inspectorate) use the following performance levels (grades) in reports:

<b>Performance Level</b>	<b>Descriptor</b>
Outstanding	Outstanding characterised by excellence
Very Good	Consistently good; major strengths
Good	Important strengths in most of the provision. Areas for improvement which the school has the capacity to address
Satisfactory	Overall sound/satisfactory but with areas for improvement in important areas which need to be addressed
Inadequate	A few strengths; significant areas for improvement which require prompt action
Unsatisfactory	Poor; major shortcomings which require urgent action

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL

St Mary's Christian Brothers' Grammar School is situated on the Glen Road in West Belfast. Nearly all of the pupils come from West Belfast and within three miles of the school. The enrolment has increased slightly over the last three years and the pupil attendance figures are around the NI average. Approximately 22% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is one of the highest levels for selective schools. The school has identified 7% of the pupils as requiring additional support with their learning.

St Mary's Grammar School	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Year 8 Intake	180	179	176	179
Enrolment	1155	1179	1196	1206
% Attendance (NI Average)	95 (95)	95 (95)	94 (95)	
FSME Percentage	19	21	22	22
% (No) of pupils on SEN register	7 (77)	6 (71)	9 (105)	7(90)
No. of pupils with statements of educational needs	12	15	17	22
No. of newcomers	-	-	*	*
<b>Intake</b>				
% of Y8 pupils with L5 English	28	42	27	22
% of Y8 pupils with L5 mathematics	56	59	60	39
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in English	95	95	94	92
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in mathematics	95	98	95	95

**Source:** data as held by the school.

\* fewer than 5

### 1.2 FOCUS AND SCOPE OF THE INSPECTION

The standard inspection of St Mary's Christian Brothers' Grammar School focused on achievements and standards, learning and teaching, curriculum provision and on leadership and management across the school as a whole.

Specialist inspectors paid particular attention to English, mathematics, history, and government and politics provision, and provided detailed oral feedback to the teachers in these areas; a summary of the findings is reported in Appendix 2.

The inspection also focused on: the provision for pastoral care and the arrangements for safeguarding; the provision for pupils requiring additional support with their learning and their inclusion in all aspects of school life; the provision for careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG); and, the progress towards the Entitlement Framework.

### 1.3 OVERALL FINDINGS OF THE INSPECTION

<b>Overall Performance Level</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b>
<b>Achievements and Standards</b>	<b>Inadequate</b>
<b>Provision for Learning</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b>
<b>Leadership and Management</b>	<b>Good</b>

## 2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

### 2.1 The standards achieved by the pupils are inadequate.

#### KEY FINDINGS

The pupils are courteous and display a strong sense of pride in their school. Their behaviour in and out of class is very good. They are highly motivated and have positive attitudes toward their learning. There is a clear sense of order around the school and the boys of all ages mix well together.

#### **Data on Year 12 (Key Stage 4) performance**

<b>GCSE and GCSE equivalent subjects</b>	2010	2011	2012
*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	90	81	73
<i>Comparison with the NI average for similar schools in the same FSM category</i>	<i>In line with the average</i>	<i>Well below average</i>	<i>Significantly below average</i>
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics	80	70	60
<i>Comparison with the NI average for similar schools in the same FSM category</i>	<i>Well below average</i>	<i>Significantly below average</i>	<i>Significantly below average</i>
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	96	93	88
Percentage of FSM entitled school leavers achieving 5 or more GCSEs Grades A*-C or equivalent (including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics)	83	79	50

**Source:** Data as held and verified by the school, with DE benchmarks<sup>1</sup>

**NB:** St Mary's Christian Brothers' Grammar School has an untypically high proportion of pupils with a free school meal entitlement for a selective school.

The pupils' attainment at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level is inadequate when compared with selective schools with a high free school meal entitlement (FSME). Even when taking the highest free school meals comparator available for selective schools into account, this school's percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is considerably higher. Over the past three years, the outcomes at GCSE level have remained consistently lower than the NI average for schools in the FSME category nearest to that for

<sup>1</sup> DE Circular 2011/03: 'School Development Planning and Target-Setting'.

this school. At grades A\*-B the standards attained by the pupils in all but four subjects are below, and, considerably below, the NI average by 10 percentage points or more. Significantly, standards have fallen in the past three years in both GCSE measures and while, to some extent, this reflects the low percentage attaining level 5 at key stage (KS) 2 on entry, the school has not responded sufficiently in terms of teaching and learning at KS4.

The school has identified appropriately the urgent need to raise the standards the pupils attain in most of the individual subjects at GCSE level.

In the subject areas inspected, good leadership in being provided by the heads of department in the school's drive for improvement.

Overall the pupils with special educational needs make good progress in their learning and achieve well in the accredited courses which they study.

### **Data on Year 14 (A2) performance**

<b>GCE A Level or equivalent</b>	2010	2011	2012
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels & Equivalents in at least 3 subjects	99	99	99
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	53	63	69
<i>Comparison with the NI average for similar schools in the same FSM category</i>	<i>Significantly below average</i>	<i>Well below average</i>	<i>Below average</i>

**NB:** *St Mary's Christian Brothers' Grammar School has an untypically high proportion of pupils with a free school meal entitlement for a selective school.*

The pupils' attainment at General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) level, taking account of ability levels, is now satisfactory. Over the past three years, the outcomes at A level have increased by 16 percentage points, from significantly below to below the NI average for schools in a FSME category which is closest to that for this school. Over the past three years the outcomes in over half the subjects on offer at GCE level have been in line with or above the NI average. Just under half the subjects, while still below the average, are showing significant improvement over the past three years.

The majority of the pupils, progress from A level study into further or higher education.

### **3. PROVISION FOR LEARNING**

#### **3.1 The quality of the provision for learning is satisfactory.**

#### **KEY FINDINGS**

**The quality of the provision in English, mathematics and history is satisfactory; in government and politics it is very good<sup>2</sup>.**

The quality of the lessons observed ranged from outstanding to inadequate. In two-fifths of the lessons the teaching was very good or better; almost a third of the lessons observed had need for improvement.

<sup>2</sup> For detailed findings of the provision in English, mathematics, history and government and politics see Appendix 2.

In the most effective practice, the pupils benefited from well-structured lessons which built on their previous learning. The lessons were well paced and the level of challenge was appropriately high. The teachers used skilful questioning which allowed the pupils to think creatively and express their opinions in a reasoned, articulate manner. In particular, the skills and knowledge developed and acquired were consolidated effectively through skilfully-planned plenary sessions.

Where the lessons were less than good; in particular, the learning was not sufficiently matched to the variety of needs and abilities of the pupils. Expectations were too low, and the pace and range of strategies used did not engage the boys well enough in the learning. The school is developing its self-evaluation arrangements to help identify and disseminate more effectively the existing good practice; the inspection confirms that this is an appropriate and on-going priority.

### **The quality of the provision for special educational needs is very good.**

In most classes observed, the teachers supported well those pupils identified as requiring additional support in literacy and numeracy, and nearly all reached satisfactory to good standards in line with their ability. The classroom assistants observed supported their designated pupils well.

The special education needs coordinator provides very good leadership and uses his detailed knowledge of the unique needs of individual pupils to inform staff and guide provision. Flexible personalised approaches are planned and implemented effectively.

There are close links with outside agencies to help inform practice, and well-planned staff development opportunities provide useful information and training.

The arrangements for supporting pupils, developed in close co-operation with those staff with pastoral, guidance and counselling responsibilities, ensure that the pupils integrate well with their peers and settle well to their work with clear targets set for improvement.

### **3.2 The quality of the care, guidance and support of pupils is very good.**

#### **KEY FINDINGS**

The high levels of staff commitment to the welfare of the pupils are expressed through the very good quality of the arrangements for pastoral care. Very good pastoral care was evident in the classes observed. The vice-principal with responsibility for pastoral care provides highly effective leadership, and is well supported by a capable, dedicated and extensive pastoral team who work collaboratively with the class teachers to address the under-performance of individual pupils. Suitable intervention strategies, revised study arrangements, and well-planned mentoring programmes have been introduced which support the pupils well in their learning.

The extensive extra-curricular programme provided for the pupils helps develop their individual talents, confidence and self-esteem.

The pupils who met with members of the inspection team spoke with maturity and confidence about their connections with the school community, and the wide range of learning approaches they have experienced. They spoke highly about the level of consultation during form periods and indicate that they feel safe and secure in school, and reported that they know what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being.



### **3.3 The curricular provision for the pupils is good.**

#### **KEY FINDINGS**

The school is currently meeting the requirements of the entitlement framework. The current sixth form curriculum has been strengthened with the introduction of applied subjects in recent years as a result of a more systematic analysis and review of both the provision at KS4 and in the sixth form to ensure that the needs of all pupils are being more effectively met. As a result, the school is planning to widen further the curriculum available at KS4.

#### **The quality of the provision for careers education, information and guidance (CEIAG) is very good.**

The pupils benefit greatly from the high quality careers advice and guidance provided. Access to personal guidance interviews is on request, and the prompt response time and skilful intervention is a key factor in helping the pupils make well-informed and realistic career choices. The pupils' skills and personal qualities develop progressively, which enable them to make informed decisions at key transition points.

The head of careers provides very good leadership. A well-conceived strategic overview of the CEIAG provision guides well the action planning for CEIAG and has resulted in the provision being developed significantly.

The school works in close co-operation with the Department of Employment and Learning careers service and there is a wide range of additional contributors from outside the school to the comprehensive careers programme. The extensive links with employers are used very well to give pupils an excellent experience of the world of work.

## **4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

### **4.1 The quality of the leadership and management is good.**

#### **KEY FINDINGS**

Under the Principal's leadership, over the past four years the school has completed a necessary period of review and reorganisation of its staffing, and has defined appropriately the roles and responsibilities essential to effect improvement. The initial opposition of a minority of the staff resulted in this period of change being protracted. The opposition has been overcome by effective and decisive action by the Principal and the senior leadership team (SLT).

The staff have accepted that the needs of the pupils are imperative and in the current academic year have been working collaboratively to stem the decline in GCSE results. The leaders and managers are now clear about what they need to do and supported by the Principal and members of the SLT, are leading and managing well the change necessary to have a positive effect on raising standards in a systematic and strategic way. A number of new key appointments have been made within the SLT and new heads of department for English and mathematics have been appointed; they have provided clearly-articulated plans for improvement.

Work is completed with regard to developing the teachers' skills in the use and analysis of available data to help bring about improvement; members of the SLT and middle managers are undertaking classroom observations, and the SLT is providing teachers with regular opportunities to facilitate the dissemination of good practice.

A successful range of initiatives designed to improve the pupils' learning has been introduced as a result of regular consultation with staff, parents and pupils; for example, consultation focused on raising pupil and parental expectations, where feedback was taken and acted upon to inform and subsequently to monitor changes in teaching strategies. These measures have helped to improve A level results by 16 percentage points in the past three years for Year 14 pupils obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A levels. Despite the development of a more collaborative way of working, the effectiveness of the actions taken is not yet evident in GCSE outcomes. However, in the teaching observed at GCSE level, most of the staff are employing strategies well-designed to improve standards, and which reflect the improvement objectives set out in the self-evaluative reports provided by the subject departments. Furthermore, a greater emphasis has been placed on the planning for learning, particularly at KS3, which has allowed the teachers to address more effectively for the needs of all the pupils. The key priority remains the need to improve the inadequate GCSE standards.

It is significant that the governors have intervened to support strongly the Principal in the school's drive to improve standards in public examinations. For example, a school governor regularly reviews and challenges middle managers on the targets they set for their subject departments. This information is then considered at governors' meetings and, if necessary, firm follow up action is taken.

The School Development Plan SDP meets fully the requirements of the SDP Regulations (NI) 2010). It is of a good quality with challenging and realistic targets for improvement. Overall, the school now has the capacity to effect the further necessary improvement.

The ETI reported to the Principal and governors the many positive responses and the few concerns emerging from the questionnaires.

On the basis of the evidence available at the time of inspection, the school has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children which reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

In most of the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the organisation is satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision.

The inspection has identified areas for improvement in standards, learning and teaching and in aspects of leadership and management which need to be addressed if the needs of all the learners are to be met more effectively.

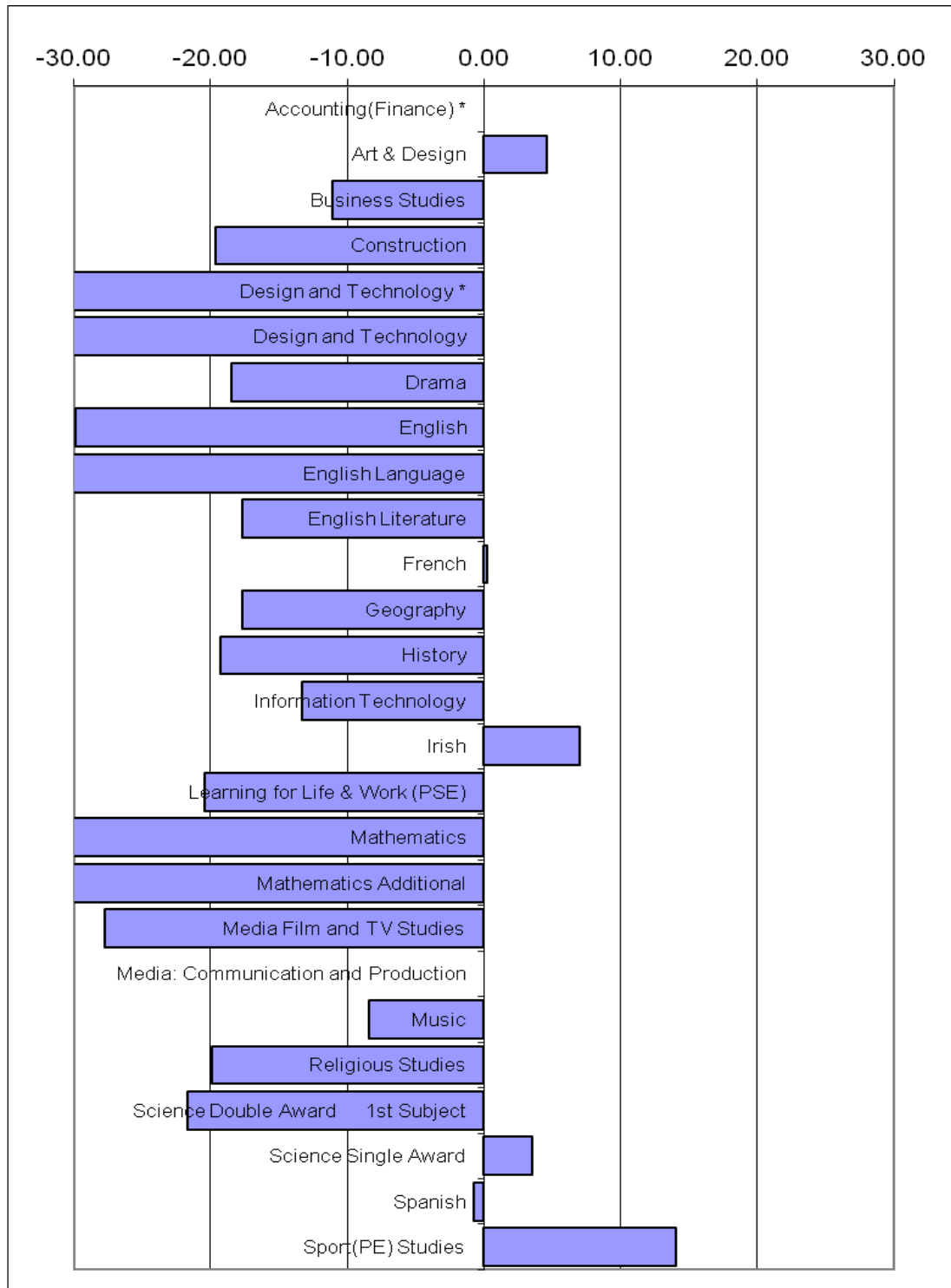
The key areas for improvement are the need to:

- provide learning activities and programmes, and a greater degree of challenge in the teaching to meet more effectively the needs of all the pupils; and
- improve the overall inadequate standards in GCSE examinations.

The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement within 12-18 months,

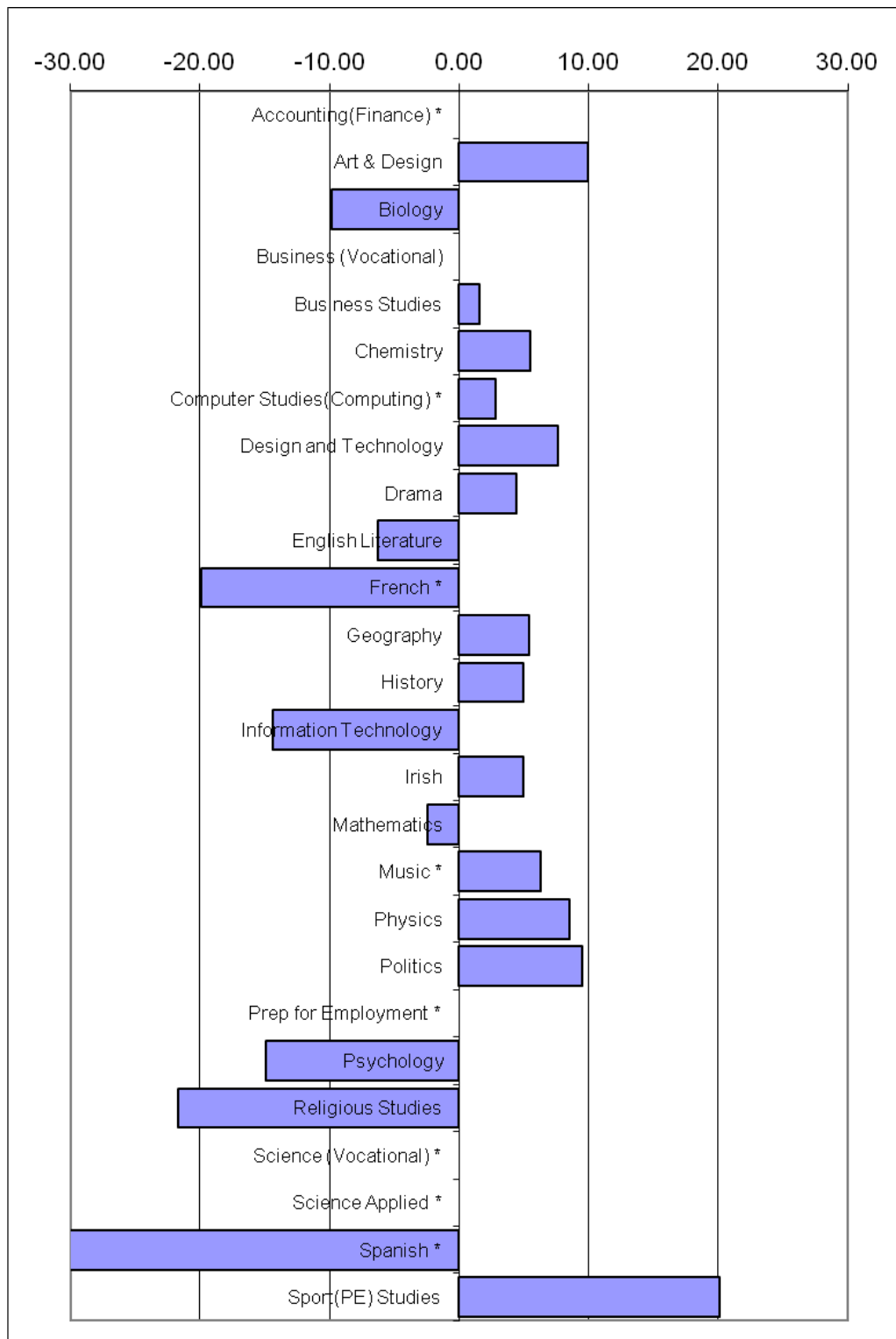
1.1 GCSE EXAMINATION RESULTS

Comparison with the three-year NI average at grades A\* - B (2009/10 – 2011/12)



## 1.2 GCE RESULTS

Comparison with the three-year NI average at grades A - C (2009/10 – 2011/12)



**SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS: ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS, HISTORY AND GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS**

**English**

The provision for English is satisfactory.

The main strengths of the English provision are the:

- behaviour, motivation and responsive attitude of the pupils;
- good leadership of the recently-appointed head of department, including the good use made of data to identify underachievement and inform target setting; and
- good or better teaching in two thirds of the lessons observed.

The areas of improvement include the need to:

- improve the standards, in particular in public examinations;
- review planning, including short term, with a sharper focus on learning; and
- disseminate the good practice that exists within the department.

**Mathematics**

The provision for mathematics is satisfactory.

The main strengths of the mathematics provision are the:

- hard-work and commitment of the teachers;
- high level of individual support provided for the pupils;
- good or better quality of teaching in three-fifths of the lessons observed;
- good leadership and management of mathematics; and
- development work in preparation for assessing Using Mathematics.

The areas of improvement include the need to:

- raise the standards achieved by the pupils in GCSE Mathematics and Additional Mathematics;
- improve the overall quality of the teaching through disseminating the very good practice within the department; and
- develop further the monitoring and evaluation strategies to ensure the implementation of the agreed actions for improvement.

## **History and Government and Politics**

The provision for history is satisfactory; for government and politics it is very good.

The main strengths of the provision include the:

- excellent standards attained by the pupils in government and politics;
- very good standards attained by the pupils in A-level history;
- good or better quality of the teaching in over one-half of the lessons observed in both subjects;
- quality of the extended responses of the pupils in government and politics, and the ability of the pupils in both subjects to apply their learning in meaningful contexts;
- range of strategies to support and challenge the pupils in their learning at A-level in both subjects; and
- good leadership of the head of department of government and politics and the acting head of history in bringing about improvement at A-level.

The areas for improvement in history include the need to:

- raise the standards attained by the pupils at KS3 and GCSE; and
- develop more effective planning across the key stages in order that all the teachers provide high quality learning experiences for the pupils, including clear progression in the pupils' historical and thinking skills.

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