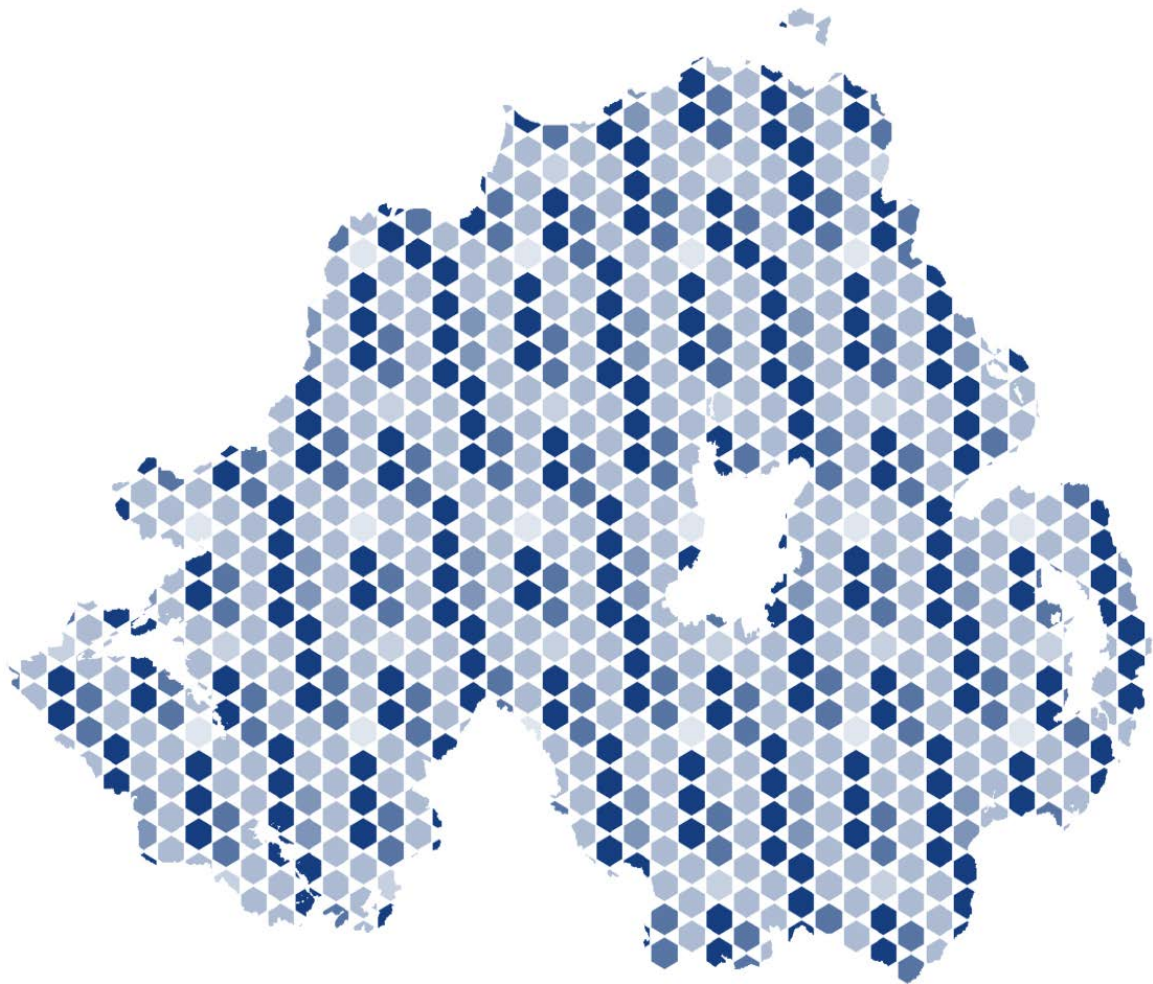


POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Coláiste Feirste, Belfast

Irish-medium, co-educational, non-selective, 11-19 school

Report of an Inspection in
October 2016



Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education
Department for the Economy
and other commissioning Departments



Quantitative terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

Performance levels

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) use the following performance levels when reporting on Achievement and standards, on Provision for learning and on Leadership and management:

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Important area(s) for improvement
Requires significant improvement
Requires urgent improvement

Overall effectiveness

The ETI use one of the following inspection outcomes when evaluating the overall effectiveness of the school:

The school has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.
The school demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.
The school needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.
The school needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the learners. It requires external support to do so. The ETI will monitor and report on the school's progress in addressing the areas for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.

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1. Inspection method and evidence base

The key questions and quality indicators which guide inspection and self-evaluation of post-primary schools, which were applied to this inspection, are available in the ETI publication *Together Towards Improvement: a process for self-evaluation* at: <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/together-towards-improvement/together-towards-improvement-post-primary.htm>.

Inspectors observed learning and teaching, scrutinised documentation, data and the pupils' written work and held formal and informal discussions with pupils (individually and in groups), teachers and staff with specific responsibilities.

The arrangements for this inspection included a meeting with representatives from the governors and the opportunity for all parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

Twelve percent of parents (65) and 80% of staff (64) responded to the questionnaires. The parental responses were extremely positive and affirmative of the work of the school. Almost all of the parents who responded reported that they are happy with their child's experiences at the school. All of the staff who responded to the questionnaires also affirmed the work of the school. Almost one-third of the staff provided additional comments; they reported positively on the mutual respect and positive relationships that exist at all levels within the school. The staff also commented positively on the standards attained by the pupils. A small number of 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 Gaeilge/literacy, English/literacy and mathematics/numeracy, there was a supplementary focus on the provision for history in this inspection.

3. Context

Coláiste Feirste is an Irish-medium co-educational post-primary school for 11-19 year olds. The school is situated in West Belfast. Most of the pupils come from the local and Greater Belfast areas; a minority of the pupils, however, travel up to 40 miles daily to attend the school. The school is situated in an area of high socio-economic need. Over the last three years, the school enrolment has increased by 11%, from 581 to 644. The school has identified 43% of its pupils as being in need of additional support with some aspects of their learning.

Coláiste Feirste has a school-funded learning support centre where a key stage (KS) 3 *croífhoghlaim* (core learning) system, which is unique to the school, is used to support the pupils' learning; it has developed specific Irish-medium pedagogies and support strategies for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and associated barriers to learning.

The school is currently undergoing an extensive building project to extend and improve the accommodation.

Coláiste Feirste Belfast	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Year 8 Intake	94	111	103	125
Enrolment	564	581	605	644
% Attendance (NI Average)	94.3 (92.0)	94.3 (92.0)	92.3 (N/A)	N/A (N/A)
FSME Percentage ¹	39	61	66	59
% and (Number) of pupils on SEN register	38.5 (217)	43.2 (251)	47.8 (289)	42.7 (275)
No. of pupils with statements of educational need in the mainstream school	24	21	24	22
No. of newcomers	0	0	0	*
<i>Source: data as held by the school.</i>				

Source: data as held by the school.

* fewer than 5

N/A not available

4. Overall findings of the inspection

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

5. Achievements and standards

- The pupils engage collaboratively with one another and with the staff in an ethos of mutual respect. They are keen to learn and set high standards for themselves. They develop progressively a wide range of skills in effective communication and leadership. As bilingual speakers, the pupils demonstrate a high degree of flexibility and fluency, readily and comfortably moving between communicating in Irish and English in order to engage with others, as required.

¹ The term 'FSME Percentage' refers to the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals.

- The standards attained by the pupils in English are very good. In most of the lessons, the pupils speak clearly and present their work confidently; the writing in most of the books is accurate, well structured and set in relevant contexts. Over the past three years, the percentage of pupils attaining at grades A* to C in GCSE English has been consistently well above the Northern Ireland (NI) average for similar schools. While the pupils' outcomes in GCSE English literature have fluctuated over the same period, the percentage attaining at grades A* to C is also above the corresponding NI average.
- The standards attained by the pupils in Gaeilge are outstanding. The percentage of pupils achieving at grades A* to C in GCSE Gaeilge has been consistently above the NI average over the past three years, with most achieving at grades A* to B. The pupils' use of Irish as the language of learning and for social interaction is outstanding. They speak with clarity and confidence, and with increasing fluency, as they move through the school. The attainment of the large number of pupils entered for GCE A level Irish has been above the NI average for the past three years. All pupils attain at grades A* to C in GCSE Irish, with almost all attaining at grades A* to B.
- The standards attained by the pupils in mathematics are very good. In most of the lessons, the pupils are motivated and enjoy their learning, are able to work independently and can summarise their learning. Pupils attain well in GCSE mathematics and despite some fluctuation, there is an overall upward trend. Almost all pupils were entered for GCSE mathematics over the past three years. Achievements in GCSE are well above the NI three year average for similar schools.
- In history, the standards attained by the pupils are very good. The pupils can think flexibly and critically and, in the high quality of their written work, they demonstrate a sound knowledge and understanding of subject-specific terminology and the nature, purpose and reliability of a variety of sources of historical evidence. The percentage of the pupils who attain at grades A* to C in GCSE history, over the past three years, has been consistently well above the NI average for similar schools. In two of the past three years, while the numbers are small, all of the pupils entered for GCE A level history attained at grades A* to C.
- Over the past three years, the percentage of pupils attaining five or more GCSE qualifications or equivalent at grades A* to C is consistently significantly above the NI average for non-selective schools in the same free school meals band. In the same period, the percentage of pupils attaining five or more GCSE qualifications or equivalent at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, is consistently well above the NI average for similar non-selective schools, as is the corresponding percentage for pupils entitled to free schools meals. Almost all of the subjects at GCSE grades A* to C are in line with or above the corresponding three-year average for similar schools. It is a strength of the work of the school that pupil attainments in over one-half of the subjects are more than ten percentage points above the subject average.

- Over the past three years, approximately one-half of the pupils attain three or more GCE A levels, or equivalent, at grades A* to C; this proportion is slightly above the average for non-selective schools. Attainment in the small number of vocational subjects is very good. The percentage of pupils attaining two or more GCE A levels or equivalent at grades A* to E is significantly below the average for non-selective schools, which is not good enough.
- While the school has applied appropriately the ineligibility criteria as set out by the Department of Education to withdraw a small number of pupils from public examinations data, there is a need to improve the administrative aspects of the withdrawal process to ensure all documentation relating to, and associated with, the application of the ineligibility criteria is comprehensive and retained.
- Given the wide range and complexity of need of the pupils with additional learning needs, and the systematic monitoring of an appropriately wide range of pastoral and academic indicators of successful attainment, these pupils make very good progress.
- Almost one-half of year 14 pupils progress to courses in higher education; this is well above the NI average for non-selective schools and is a strength of the standards attained by the pupils. A minority of pupils, however, leave the school at the end of year 13, or at the end of year 14, with a level of attainment which is insufficient to progress them to the next level of study.

6. Provision for learning

- The quality of the planning, teaching and assessment are good overall. Almost all (88%) of the lessons observed were good or better and promoted and progressed the pupils' learning; of these 35% were very good or better. The more effective practice is characterised by: effective open-ended questioning to extend the pupils' understanding and to assess their learning; an innovative use of a wide variety of teaching methodologies, including the effective use of information and communication technology (ICT); good use of the pupils' interests and career aspirations to inform the context of the learning; and well-planned opportunities for the pupils to learn from their peers.
- In recent years, significant work has been undertaken by the school to develop the use of baseline assessments through the medium of Irish to inform planning for learning and to measure more effectively the progress made by the pupils. There is, however, too much variability in the effectiveness of the use of this data by teachers. While the pupils' work is marked regularly by the teachers, there is variation in the quality and impact of the marking, particularly in the quality of the feedback provided for pupils to inform them of how to further improve their work. There are, however, examples of excellent practice in marking for improvement which should be disseminated further through the school to help address this variation.
- The provision for learning in mathematics is good. The provision for learning in history and Gaeilge is very good. While the provision for learning in English is good, due to a lack of evidence of a shared, collegial vision for sustained improvement within the department, the overall provision for English is an important area for improvement.

- Literacy in Irish and English is promoted well, and to good effect, throughout the school. Most of the teachers have a sound understanding of how to promote effectively progression in the standards of spoken Irish; the pupils' oral communication is developed well across the curriculum through, for example, well-structured opportunities to present their work to a variety of audiences. A small number of subject departments are implementing a pioneering, research-based literacy development programme, with a view to sharing the learning across the school. The benefits of the pupils' biliteracy, which include greater awareness of language structure, wider perspectives and well-developed social skills, are built upon effectively through the many opportunities provided for the pupils to lead the learning with their peers.
- The integration of numeracy across the curriculum is effective, providing pupils with good opportunities to use and apply their mathematical knowledge. There is evidence of the pupils using mathematics accurately in subject-specific contexts in areas of learning such as home economics, history, motor vehicle studies and science to support their numeracy development.
- The provision for the care and support of the pupils is a significant strength of the school. It is characterised by an inclusive ethos, respectful relationships and a strong sense of community. The sector-leading behaviour for learning policy impacts very positively on the pupils' sense of self-worth, underpins their high expectations and promotes in the pupils a responsibility for the success of their own and others' learning. As a result, throughout the school the pupils demonstrate consistently their readiness to learn.
- A high priority is given to meeting the needs of pupils who require additional support with aspects of their learning. Effective and timely communication with the contributory primary schools, along with the school's internal procedures, ensures that the needs of the pupils are identified promptly and effectively planned for. The school has invested significant resources in its '*lonad*' ('hub' or learning support centre), which is staffed by a knowledgeable and committed team. The '*lonad*' is central to the provision of appropriate support for the pupils and effective guidance for staff; its vision and influence are in evidence throughout the school. It provides a bespoke core curriculum in literacy and numeracy for a number of carefully selected pupils at key stages 3 and 4, along with individually tailored interventions to promote progress in learning in these key areas for around 40% of the pupils each year. Transitions between classes in the '*lonad*' and the mainstream school are smooth and the pupils who require additional support are fully integrated into all aspects of the life and work of the school. The school has excellent relationships with numerous external agencies which further support the staff in meeting the wide-ranging social, emotional, behavioural and learning needs of the pupils.
- The school's extra-curricular programme, its establishment of Irish-language youth clubs and its engagement with local sporting and cultural organisations enrich the pupils' learning experiences and provide them with opportunities to develop a broad range of skills and to undertake numerous leadership roles.

- The curriculum provision is coherent, particularly at key stages 3 and 4. The school works innovatively through regular review, well-planned staff development opportunities and substantial engagement with examining boards to provide a suitably broad and balanced curriculum delivered through the medium of Irish and which meets the learning needs of most of the pupils. The school is an active member of the West Belfast learning community. At post-16, the curriculum is not flexible enough to meet the needs, interests and abilities of all of the pupils; there is, therefore, a need to review the curriculum offer to provide a broader range of curriculum pathways given the school's policy of affording all pupils access to its post-16 provision.
- A well-planned, progressive programme for discrete careers provision and employability has been established to good effect across all of the keystages. The pupils have good opportunities to engage in work-related learning through purposeful work experience at post-16 and a 'take my child to work' day for year 11 pupils. At key transition points, the pupils have good access to a range of job fairs and up-to-date, subject-specific careers information as well as meetings with careers officers and individual, impartial careers advice and guidance interviews. The use of internal performance data is at an early stage within the department: it is important for the teachers within the careers provision to use this data more effectively, along with labour market intelligence, to tailor the careers provision to meet more fully the needs and career aspirations of all of the pupils.

7. Leadership and management

- Appropriate priorities for the ongoing school improvement are identified through comprehensive and meaningful consultation with the whole-school community and other stakeholders, including local businesses and youth services. The school development plan and associated action plans guide well the work of the school in a clear and coherent way. While the evaluations of the school development plan detail comprehensively the nature of the actions for improvement being taken, the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of these actions on improving the quality of the pupils' learning experiences and the standards they attain is not sufficiently robust.
- The senior leadership team (SLT) has a clear strategic vision for the school and provides high quality support and guidance for the staff. They have high expectations and lead by example. Recent school improvements, which have been brought about as a result of high quality care and a commitment to the school's aims and values, are raising further the educational aspirations and expectations of the pupils and of the wider community. A significant strength of the SLT is their commitment to empowering, supporting and enabling members of the school community to lead effectively the areas for which they have responsibility. This is particularly evident for those departments or individual teachers that have had to develop and grow outside their specialism in order to meet the needs of the pupils. This work has resulted in an innovative, dynamic and unique school with a clear sense of collective purpose and identity.

- The work of the middle leaders is effective; they are committed to the collegial whole-school vision for improvement in a culture of encouragement, consultation, challenge and support. They have many opportunities to share with other colleagues aspects of their effective practice as is evident through the in-school *comhphobal cleachtais* (community of practice). This work helps to improve the quality of the provision and to raise standards further. While the processes for self-evaluation in a majority of the departments are of a good quality, these processes need to be refined further to plan for and set more specific, realistic, measurable and time-bound targets for improvement.
- 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 school improvement, are highly supportive of the senior leaders and work of the school, but offer a level of challenge as appropriate. They are committed to enabling the pupils and staff to excel and they have the highest expectations of and for the staff and pupils. A key feature of the governance is the drive to raise pupil aspirations and improve their life chances, as positive contributors to society, locally and globally, and as ambassadors for the Irish language and associated culture.
- On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the school has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding young people. These arrangements 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 any concerns are dealt with promptly.

8. Overall effectiveness

Coláiste Feirste demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners.

The areas for improvement that the school has demonstrated the capacity to address, are to:

- develop further planning for learning in order to improve the consistency of the learning experiences for all of the pupils; and
- sharpen the action planning process at the middle leadership level.

The ETI will monitor how the school sustains improvement.

Examination performance and other statistical data

GCSE and equivalent examination results from 2013-14 to 2015-16

Based on data held by the school in SIMS² and verified with the ETI, the table below compares the percentage of year 12 pupils in Coláiste Feirste achieving five or more GCSE examinations at grades 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 category³.

GCSE and GCSE equivalent subjects - * following 15 permitted exclusions	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
*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	96.1	86.2	88.8
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category⁴</i>	<i>74.1</i>	<i>72.9</i>	N/A
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics	57.1	42.5	69.4
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	<i>44.4</i>	<i>32.9</i>	N/A
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 5 subjects	96.7	96.7	100
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)	50	37.2	63.2

² SIMS: School Information Management System

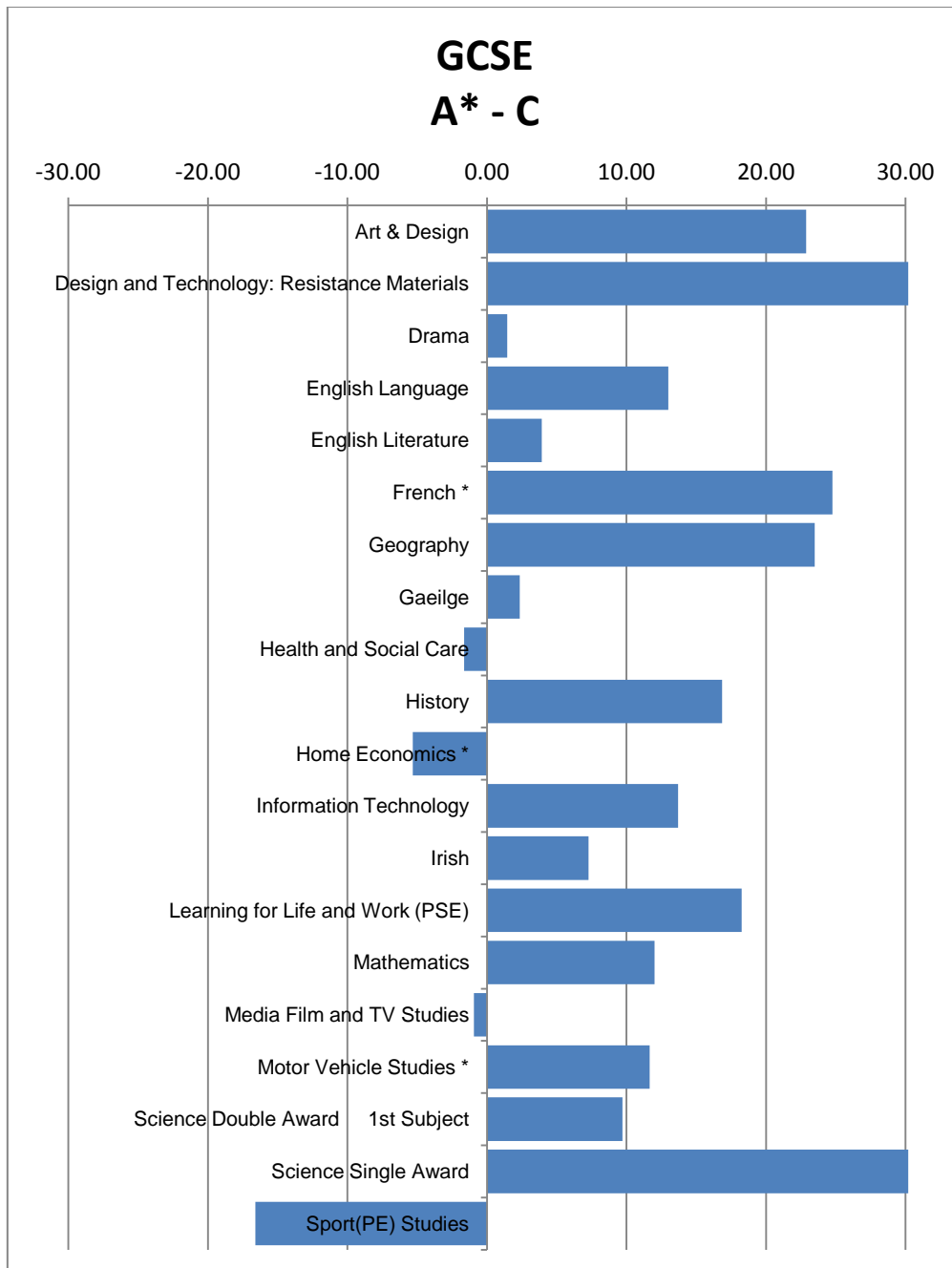
³ See benchmarking data and guidance contained in the annual DE Circulars on: 'School Development Planning and Target-Setting'.

⁴ 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 from 2013-14 to 2015-16

Based on data held by the school in SIMS⁵ and verified with the ETI, the average over three years of the percentage of year 12 pupils achieving at GCSE level at grades A* to C in individual subjects in Coláiste Feirste 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 therefore comparisons between subjects should be treated with caution.



*indicates fewer than 30 entries over 3 years

⁵ SIMS: School Information Management System

GCE A level examination results at grades A* to C from 2013-14 to 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 Coláiste Feirste achieving three or more GCE A levels at grades A* to C, and two or more GCE A levels at grades A* to E.

GCE A Level or equivalent, - * following 16 permitted exclusions	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels & Equivalents in at least 3 subjects	75	70	84
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	49.3	46.3	50
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least 2 A2 levels	75.3	74.1	82.1

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 this school achieving at grades A* to C in vocational/applied courses equivalent to GCE A level. No average is available from the examining board(s) for the subjects in this table to facilitate comparison.

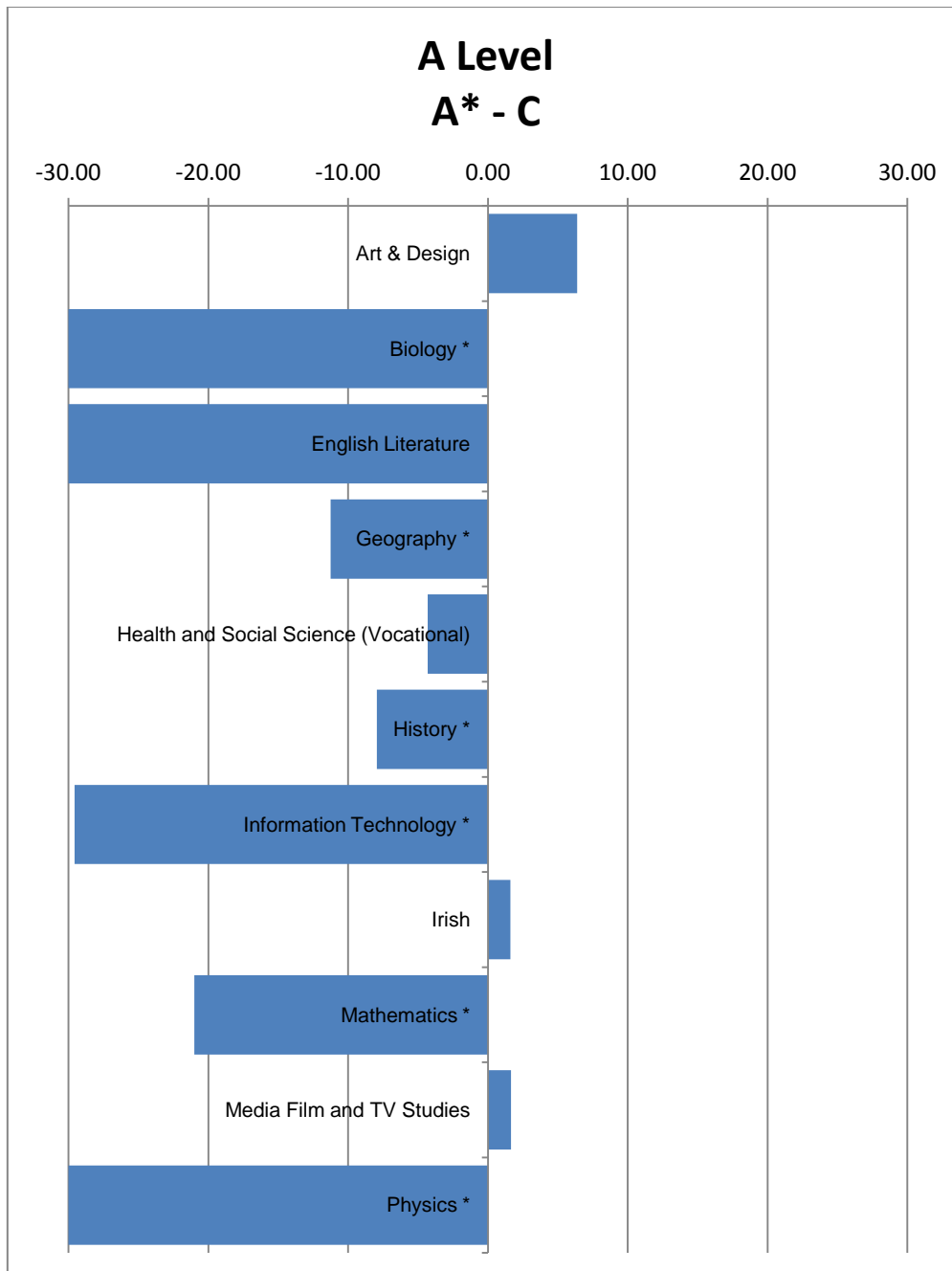
Other level 3 courses taken in at least two of the last three years.

Level 3	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	Total entry over 3 years
	% A* - C	% A* - C	% A* - C	
BTEC Subsidiary Diploma in Performing Arts	100	75	100	21
BTEC Subsidiary Diploma in Business	----	100	92	27
BTEC Subsidiary Diploma in Sport Studies	93	100	88	26
BTEC Subsidiary Diploma in Travel and Tourism	100	93	73	40

Attainment of pupils in individual subjects at GCE A level at grades A* to C from 2013-14 to 2015-16

Based on data held by the school in SIMS and verified with ETI, the bar chart below shows the average over three years of the percentage of year 14 pupils achieving at GCE A level at grades A* to C in individual subjects in Coláiste Feirste 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 and therefore comparisons between subjects should be treated with caution.

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



*indicates fewer than 20 entries over 3 years

Staying on rate

Based on data held in SIMS by the school and verified with ETI, the table below shows the percentage of the pupils who stay on at Coláiste Feirste 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	87.2
% Yr 13 staying on to Yr 14	78.2	79.5

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 Coláiste Feirste 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	6845	71			
Employment	11.7	16.9			
Institute of Further Education	44.9	9.9	2	5	
Institute of Higher Education	16.0	46.5			33
Work-based Learning (Training)	20.6	14.1			
Unemployed	4.4	7.0			
Unknown	2.5	5.6			

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