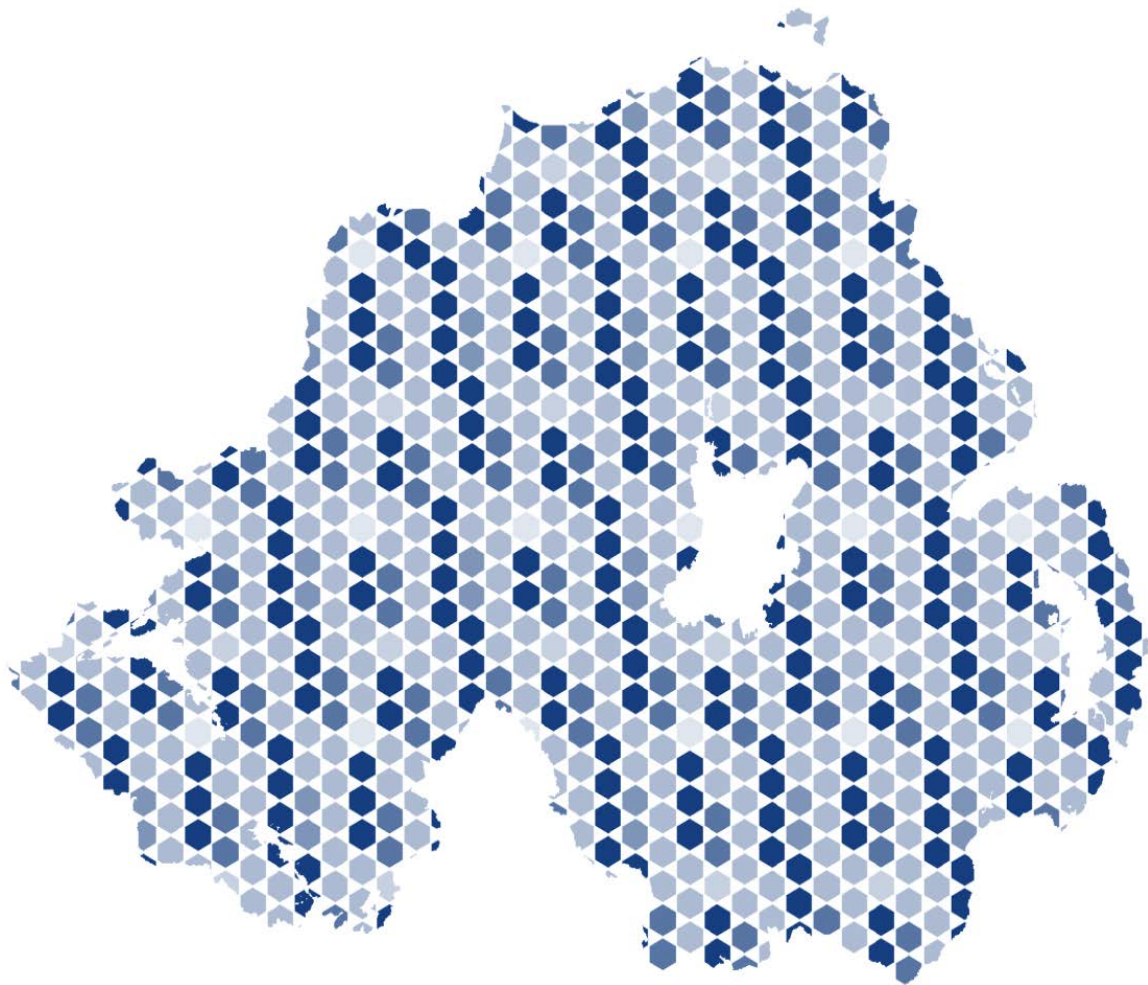


# POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

St Mary's High School,  
Newry

Maintained, all-girls, 11-18, non-selective school

Report of an Inspection  
in October 2015



Providing Inspection Services for

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



## 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 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 teaching and learning, 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.

Six percent of parents (29 in total) and 88% of staff (56 in total) responded to the questionnaires. Almost all of the parents who responded were very affirmative of the work of the school. Their responses demonstrated a strong appreciation of the supportive learning environment where the pupils enjoy their learning and are valued. All of the staff who responded were very positive in their comments on the life and work of the school. In particular, they highlighted the respectful, inclusive atmosphere of the school which promotes a spirit of collegiality and high expectations. The very few issues raised in the questionnaires were discussed with the principal and governors.

## **2. Focus of the inspection**

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

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

In addition to the focus on English/literacy and mathematics/numeracy, there was a supplementary subject focus on modern languages in this inspection.

## **3. Context**

St Mary's High School is a maintained, all-girls, non-selective school, located in the city of Newry. The school attracts almost all of its pupils from the city and the remainder from surrounding rural areas. The enrolment, which had remained steady over the past three years, has increased this year.

The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals has increased over the last three years to almost one-half of the pupils. Thirty-nine percent of the pupils come from Neighbourhood Renewal Areas and 9% are newcomer pupils. Approximately one-third of the pupils enter the school with the expected level of literacy and just over one-quarter of them with the expected level of numeracy. The school has identified just over one-quarter of its pupils as being in need of additional support with some aspects of their learning.

Over recent years, the school has achieved a wide range of national awards and accreditations. It is a Rights Respecting School (Level 2), an Eco School and has attained Investors in People at gold standard. The school is an active participant of the Newry and Mourne Area Learning Community

St Mary's High School, Newry	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Year 8 Intake	80	88	93	102
Enrolment	554	553	554	570
% Attendance (NI Average)	93.6% (91.3% )	94% (92%)	93.8% (n/a)	N/A (n/a)
FSME Percentage <sup>1</sup>	38%	38%	47%	48%
% and (Number) of pupils on SEN register	27% (149)	27% (149)	20% (109)	26% (148)
No. of pupils with statements of educational needs in the mainstream school	34	34	32	29
No. of newcomers	41	42	41	50
<i>Intake<sup>2</sup>:</i>				
% of Y8 pupils with L5 English	4%	2%	KS2 information not received	KS2 information not received
% of Y8 pupils with L5 mathematics	6%	2%		
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in English	65%	69%		
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in mathematics	60%	64%		

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

\* fewer than 5

N/A not available

#### 4. Overall findings of the inspection

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	High level of capacity for sustained improvement
<b>Achievements and standards</b>	Outstanding
<b>Provision for learning</b>	Very Good
<b>Leadership and management</b>	Outstanding

#### 5. Achievements and standards

- The pupils are confident, respectful, friendly and polite. Their social skills are highly developed and they engage easily and willingly with adults and their peers. They have positive dispositions to learning, high self-esteem and take pride in their work. They set high expectations for themselves and show maturity in their learning, allowing them to reflect on and improve their work. The rich and diverse extra-curricular programme further develops the pupils' interests, confidence, resilience and independence.

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

<sup>2</sup> From 2013, KS2 standards in English and mathematics are reported as Levels of Progression in Communication and Using Mathematics and cannot be compared directly with KS2 data from previous years

- The pupils' attainment in English is outstanding and in maths and French it is very good. Over the past three years, the school's performance in English language in GCSE at grades A\* to C is well above the Northern Ireland (NI) average for similar non-selective schools and consistently above in mathematics. Entries for GCSE English literature are consistently good and attainment at grades A\* to C is well above the corresponding NI average. In French, the percentage of pupils achieving at grades A\* to C is above the NI average in two of the past three years.
- In public examinations, the pupils' attainments are very high and reflect the pupil-centred provision and the high expectations of the staff. The results in public examinations at the end of key stage (KS) 4 are outstanding and a significant strength of the work of the school. Over the past three years, the percentage of pupils attaining five or more GCSEs or equivalent at grades A\* to C has been consistently well above the NI average for non-selective schools in the same free school meal band. When English and mathematics are included, the percentage of pupils attaining at grades A\* to C at GCSE or equivalent is also well above the NI average for similar schools.
- In GCE A level, at grades A\* to C, there has been an improving trend over the past three years; in two of the last three years the percentage of pupils achieving three or more GCE A level examinations at grades A\* to C has been above the NI average for non-selective schools. In addition, the standards the pupils achieve in vocational subjects at KS 4 and post-16 are very high.
- Over the past three years, the attainment by pupils entitled to free school meals of five or more GCSEs or equivalent at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics, is well above the NI average.
- The pupils who require additional support with aspects of their learning attain very well and follow suitable curriculum pathways that enable them to progress to further education, higher education, training or employment.
- The percentage of pupils progressing to higher education courses, including courses provided by the further education sector, is rising and well above the average for similar schools. Over the past three years, nearly three-fifths of the year 12 pupils progressed to post-16 provision in the school. Almost all pupils progress from year 13 to year 14.

## **6. Provision for learning**

- There is a coherent, whole-school approach to the arrangements for planning, teaching and assessment. The teachers' planning is comprehensive and rigorous, taking very good account of the pupils' interests, needs and abilities.
- All of the teaching observed during the inspection was effective in promoting learning (good or better); most lessons were highly effective (very good or better) with almost one-fifth being outstanding. The highly effective learning and teaching is exemplified by: realistically high expectations; challenging and achievable tasks; effective questioning to enable the pupils to think and express their opinions; and well-planned plenary sessions which deepen the pupils' learning and consolidate their skills and knowledge.

- The teachers thoroughly monitor the pupils' work and progression in learning through regular, robust assessments and the pupils are provided with many opportunities to engage actively in assessing their own work and that of their peers.
- In English, most of the lessons observed were highly effective. Teachers employ a range of appropriate strategies, including skilful questioning, effective differentiation and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to promote high quality engagement and to stimulate focused discussion. A notable strength of the drive to further improve standards is the focus on a collaborative approach to writing, preceded by well-planned purposeful talking and listening opportunities.
- In mathematics, the majority of the lessons observed were highly effective. The pupils consolidate and extend their mathematical understanding by engaging positively in well-planned paired work, group work and in whole-class discussions. They offer answers willingly and confidently in class. A key strength of the mathematics provision is the range of effective learning, teaching and assessment strategies used by the teachers to engage the pupils actively in their learning.
- There is a clear strategic approach taken to the promotion of the pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum; both literacy and numeracy are promoted effectively in a range of subjects throughout the school. It is appropriate that the school is developing further a more coherent cross-curricular programme for the development of the pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills.
- The very good provision in modern languages is characterised by a wide range of engaging and enjoyable learning activities which take good account of the pupils' interests and ability levels. A key feature of the provision is the focus on developing the pupils' speaking skills through well-planned paired and group work. Effective questioning is used to extend the pupils' thinking and oral responses.
- The quality of the arrangements for care and support in the school is outstanding. The school's mission statement "*optimum semper facere - always to do one's best*" pervades the life and work of the school. All of the staff are highly committed to the academic and pastoral needs of the pupils and there are excellent relationships at all levels throughout the school. The school takes a very inclusive approach to the provision for special educational needs; the pupils who require additional support with their learning develop their confidence and social skills in a caring learning environment. The staff are very well informed about the individual needs of pupils and a dedicated highly effective support team provide tailored support for those pupils who need it. The revised individual education plans provide clear guidance for staff and identify a range of appropriate strategies to help support and further develop the pupils' learning. The non-teaching staff provide invaluable support for the teachers and the pupils.

- A key strength of the pastoral provision is the highly effective use made of pupil consultation to inform and enrich the learning experiences for all pupils. The strong pastoral ethos and effective personal development programme are based on a deep appreciation of each individual's rights and their active participation as local and global citizens.
- The provision for careers education, information, advice and guidance is very effective. It is afforded a high priority in the school development plan, aligned appropriately with the curriculum planning process in the school and the pupils benefit from timetabled and well-planned, progressive provision across all of the key stages. As a result, most of the pupils have a sound knowledge and understanding of the career options and progression pathways available to them and they are well guided and supported, particularly at the key transition points. The arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the provision, at all levels, are robust and very effective. While the pupils have opportunities to undertake work experience placements at KS 4 and post-16, more work needs to be done to ensure a closer match between their career interests and aspirations and the placements.
- The curriculum planning process is flexible, pupil centred and often tailored to meet the needs of individual pupils. A sufficiently broad curriculum offer is provided at key stages 3 and 4. The high level of attainment by the pupils at the end of KS 4 is underpinned by: carefully planned option choices; a good balance between academic and vocational or applied subjects; and sound advice and guidance provided to the pupils as they make their choices, which is well informed by a thorough analysis of comprehensive qualitative and quantitative data. At post-16, whilst the breadth of the curriculum is enhanced through collaboration with a small number of other schools and the local further education college, the range of subject choices, and the uptake by the pupils of STEM-related priority skills areas, is too narrow. A high and increasing proportion of the pupils progress to appropriate further and higher education courses.

## **7. Leadership and management**

- The school improvement process is clearly linked to a well-constructed school development plan<sup>3</sup> (SDP) that has involved extensive consultation with all relevant stakeholders. Self-evaluation leading to improvement is rigorous, embedded and highly effective. The SDP identifies appropriate priorities that reflect the school's commitment to raising standards within a high quality and pupil-centred learning environment. The associated action plans focus sharply on improving further the quality of the learning experiences provided for the pupils and the standards they attain. In addition, a well-conceived staff development programme ensures that the priorities for improvement, agreed in the SDP, are being met.

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<sup>3</sup> The school development plan meets the requirements of the School Development Planning Regulations (NI) 2010.



- The senior leadership team (SLT) has a clear strategic vision for the school and provides outstanding, transformational leadership. They possess complementary leadership skills and provide high quality support and guidance for all the staff. A significant strength of the SLT is their commitment to empowering, supporting and enabling all members of the school community to lead effectively the areas for which they have responsibility. This has resulted in an engaged, dynamic school with a clear sense of purpose and identity. The very effective middle leaders are receptive to change and highly committed to the collegial vision for improvement, in a culture of encouragement, consultation, challenge and support.
- The governors are very well informed and have a clear understanding of the key aspects of the work and life of the school. They maintain a regular overview of the outworking of the SDP and take great pride in the inclusive nature of the school and the high levels attained by the pupils in public examinations. They play an integral and appropriately challenging role in nearly all aspects of school life. Based on the evidence presented at the time of inspection, the Inspectorate evaluation is that there can be a high degree of confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated.
- 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**

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.

## Examination performance and other statistical data

### GCSE and equivalent examination results from 2012-13 to 2014-15

Based on data held by the school in SIMS<sup>4</sup> and verified with ETI, the table below compares the percentage of year 12 pupils in St Mary's High School achieving five or more GCSE examinations and equivalent at grades A\* to C, and the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals with the NI average for non-selective schools in the same free school meals category<sup>5</sup>.

<b>GCSE and GCSE equivalent subjects - *following permitted exclusions</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
*Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE & Equivalents in at least five subjects	100%	100%	100%
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least five subjects	90.2%	85.7%	86.8%
<a href="#">The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category<sup>4</sup></a>	67.8%	74.1%	N/A
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least five subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics	58.5%	59.7%	56.5%
<a href="#">The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</a>	31.4%	44.4%	N/A
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades E or above in at least five subjects	96.3%	98.7%	100%
Percentage of Year 12 entitled to free school meals achieving five or more GCSEs Grades A* to C or equivalent (including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics)	38.2%	63.6%	37.8%

<sup>4</sup> SIMS: School Information Management System

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

### Other examination results at key stage 4 from 2012-13 to 2014-15

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

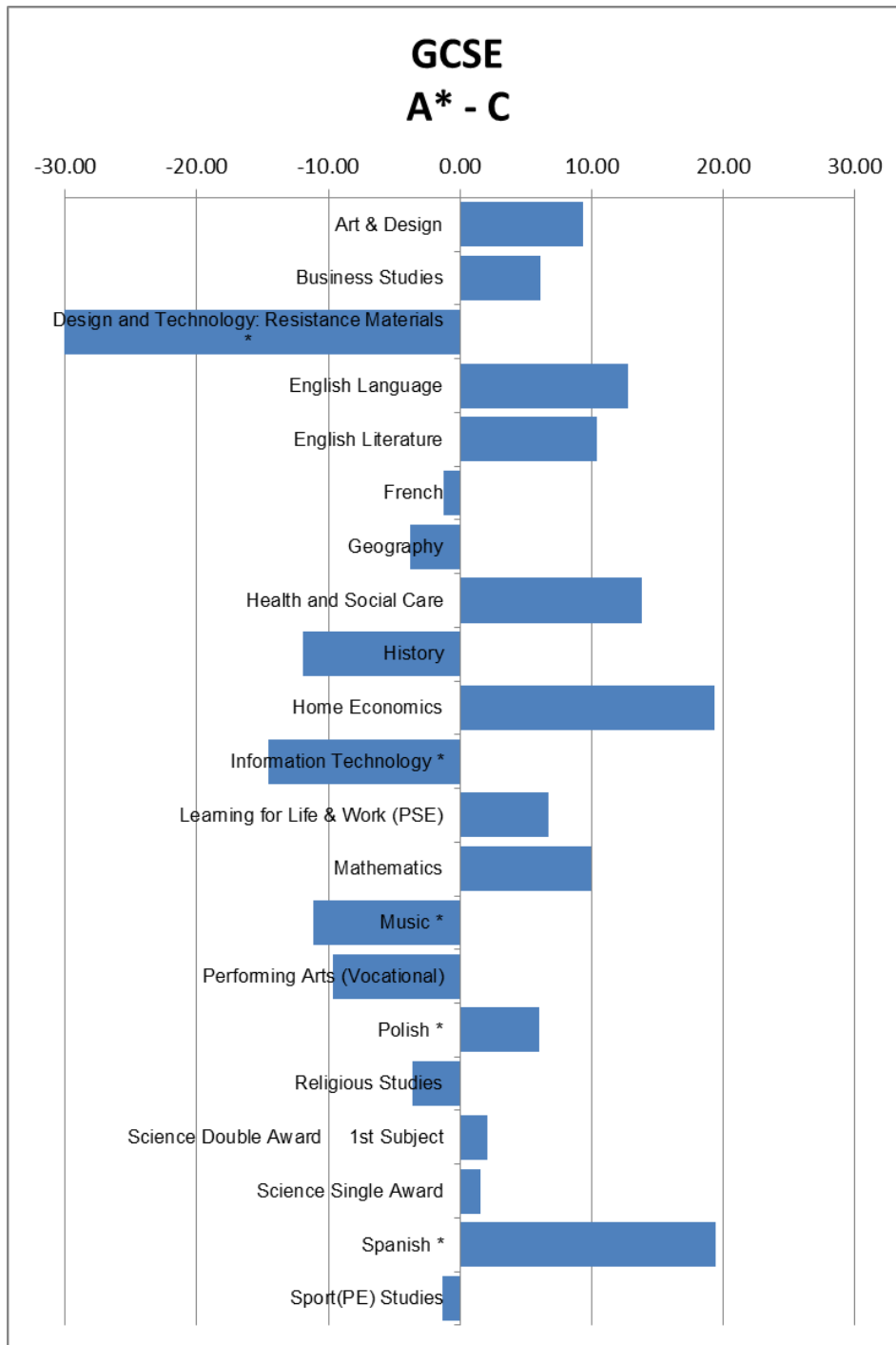
### Other courses taken in at least two of the last three years

Level 2	2013	2014	2015	Total entry over 3 years
	% A*-C	% A*-C	% A*-C	
<b>Double Award BTEC/OCR</b>				
BTEC Children's Care, Learning and Development	95%	100%	95.1%	91
BTEC Applied Science Double Award	93.3%	100%	100%	64
BTEC Hospitality	100%	100%		18
BTEC Creative Media Production	100%	100%		9
BTEC Engineering		100%	100%	8
OCR National First Award in Business	94.7%	100%	85.7%	35
BTEC Applied Science	100%	100%	100%	9

## Attainment of pupils in individual subjects at GCSE level at grades A\* to C from 2012-13 to 2014-15

Based on data held by the school in SIMS and verified with 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 this school 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

### GCE A level examination results at grades A\* to C from 2012-13 to 2014-15

Based on data held by the school in SIMS and verified with ETI, the table below shows the percentage of year 14 pupils in St Mary's High 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 of pupils achieving three or more GCE A levels at grades A\* to C with the NI average for non-selective schools in the same free school meals category.

<b>GCE A Level or equivalent</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels & Equivalents in at least three subjects	86.4%	80.5%	84.4%
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least three A2 levels	36.4%	51.2%	53.3%
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	43.9%	46.7%	N/A
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades E or above in at least two A2 levels	100%	100%	97.8%

### Other examination results from 2013-14 to 2014-2015: 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 grades A\* to C in vocational/applied courses equivalent to GCE level. No average is available from the examining boards for the subjects in this table to facilitate comparison.

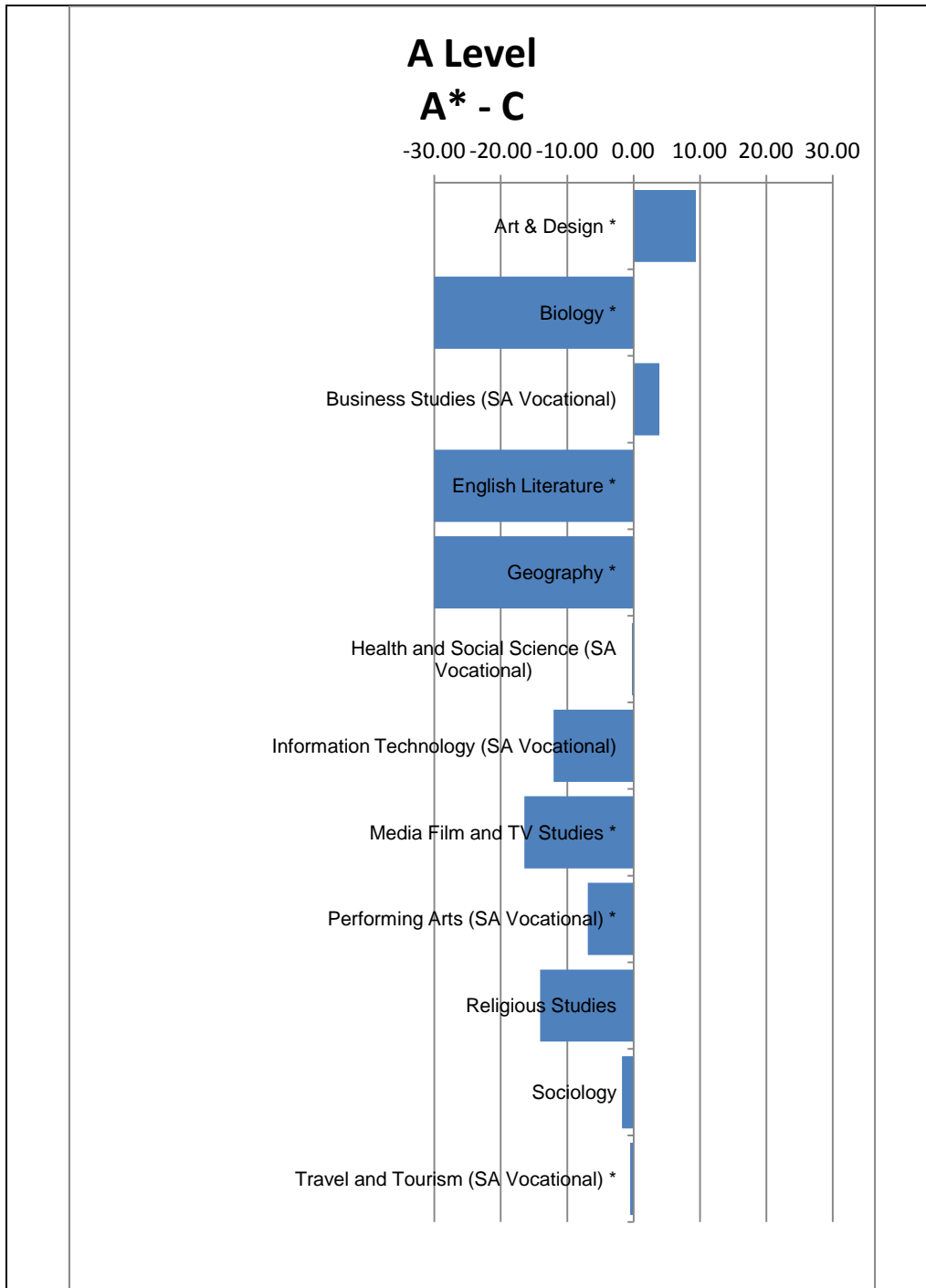
### Other Level 3 courses taken in at least two of the last three years

<b>Level 3</b>	2013	2014	2015	Total entry over 3 years
	% A*-C	% A*-C	% A*-C	
BTEC National Award Children's Care, Learning and Development	100%	100%	100%	20
BTEC Sports Studies	100%	100%	100%	17

## Attainment of pupils in individual subjects at GCE A level at grades A\* to C from 2012-13 to 2014-15

Based on data held by the school in SIMS and verified with ETI, the average over three years of the percentage of year 14 pupils achieving at GCE level at grades A\* to C in individual subjects in this school 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 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 this school 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.

	<b>NI Average</b>	<b>School</b>
% Yr 12 staying on to Yr 13	52.9%	58.9%
% Yr 13 staying on to Yr 14	79.5%	98%

## Leavers' destinations

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

	<b>2013/14 NI %</b>	<b>2013/14 School %</b>	<b>2013/14 School Nos.</b>	<b>Level 3</b>	<b>Level 4</b>
Total number of leavers			82		
Employment	9.2	13.4	11		
Further Education	44.2	54.9	45	38	7
Higher Education	19.9	29.3	24		24
Training	18.9	1.2	1		
Unemployed	5.1	1.2	1		
Unknown	2.7	0	0		

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