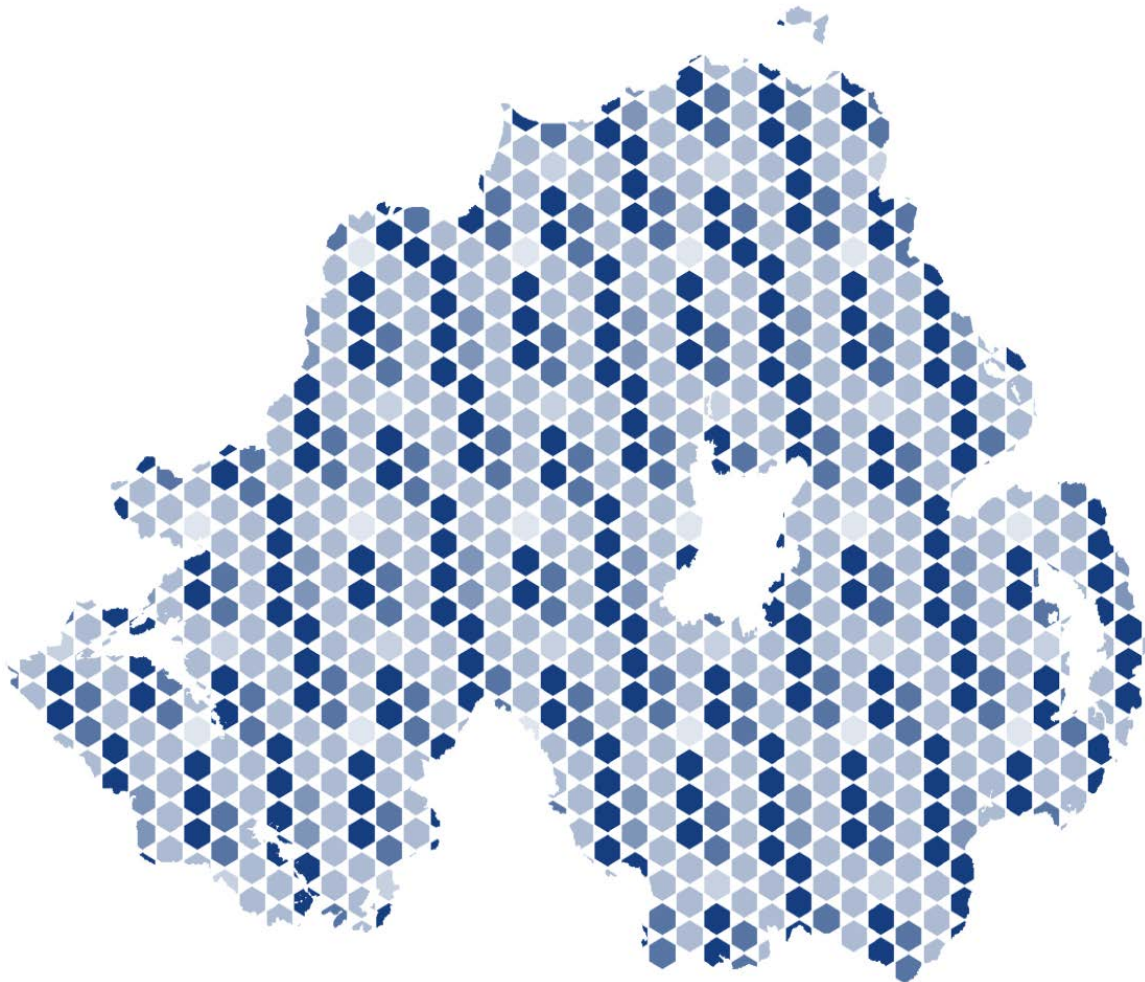


POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Sullivan Upper School,
Holywood

Co-educational, 11-18, voluntary, selective school

Report of an Inspection
in November 2015

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 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.

Ten percent of parents (85) responded to the questionnaires, with 61 providing written comments. Almost all of the parents commented positively on: the dedication and commitment of particular members of staff; the academic success of the pupils; and the individual pastoral support provided for them. A minority of the parents who provided written comments raised issues relating to variation in the quality of the pupils' learning experiences across subject areas and a lack of recognition by some staff of pupil effort. Forty-two percent of staff (55) responded to the questionnaires, with six of them providing written comments. The small number of staff who provided written comments commented positively on the commitment of the staff to providing good learning opportunities for the pupils. The issues raised in the questionnaires by staff and by parent/carers were discussed (maintaining the confidentiality of the respondents) with eight school governors and the principal.

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.

3. Context

The pupils progress to Sullivan Upper School from over 25 contributory primary schools and come from a wide catchment area. The school is regularly oversubscribed. On entry to year 8, almost all of the pupils have attained at or above the expected level in English and mathematics. The school participates in the North Down and Ards Area Learning Community, with curricular collaboration taking place at post-16 with Priory College. In the past four years, the senior leadership of the school has been restructured with the reduction from three to two vice-principal posts and the creation of five temporary senior manager posts. The senior managers lead improvement in the areas of assessment and reporting, whole-school events, effective use of data, information and communication technology (ICT) and staff development.

Sullivan Upper School, Holywood	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Year 8 Intake	153	153	150	153
Enrolment	1080	1076	1077	1077
% Attendance (NI Average for selective schools)	96.1 (95.3)	96.8 (95.8)	96.6 (N/A)	N/A (N/A)
FSME Percentage ¹	2.31	2.04	3.99	4.36
% (No.) of pupils on the SEN register	3.61 (39)	4.09 (44)	4.92 (53)	3.81 (41)
No. of pupils with statements of educational need	13	14	14	16
No. of newcomers	0	0	0	0
<i>Intake²:</i>				
% of Y8 pupils with L5 English	78.4	48.4	#	#
% of Y8 pupils with L5 mathematics	90.9	52.9	#	#
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in English	99.6	99.4	#	#
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in mathematics	100	98.7	#	#
<i>Source: data as held by the school.</i>				

Source: data as held by the school.

* fewer than 5

N/A not available

Data unavailable due to industrial action in some primary schools

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	High level of capacity for sustained improvement
Achievements and standards	Very good
Provision for learning	Very good
Leadership and management	Very good

5. Achievements and standards

- The pupils are articulate, motivated and respectful in their engagement with their peers and with adults. They benefit from the many opportunities provided within lessons to discuss and debate, think critically and to develop their independence as learners. When given the opportunity, the pupils respond well to the high level of challenge set for them by their teachers and they show maturity and creativity in their written work.
- Through their participation in a wide range of extra-curricular sporting, cultural, business, musical, academic and charitable opportunities provided by the school, the pupils develop effective social and interpersonal skills, including leadership, teamwork and mentoring. They are well prepared for the transition to the next stage of their education and adult life.

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

² 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 standards attained by the pupils in English are outstanding. Over the last three years, the outcomes in GCSE English at grades A* to B are well above the Northern Ireland (NI) average when compared with similar schools. The outcomes at grades A* to B at GCSE level and at A* to C at GCE A level in English literature are also above the corresponding NI average. From year 8 onwards, the standard of the pupils' written work, their reading and research, attentive listening and confident oral language skills are advanced for their age.
- The standards attained by the pupils in mathematics are outstanding. The pupils are motivated, confident, enjoy learning mathematics and can work effectively both collaboratively and independently. The pupils' ability to discuss their thinking, and summarise and share their learning, is a notable strength. The pupils make expected or better progress across key stage (KS) 3 and KS4. The level and quality of the pupils' written work, and attainment in public examinations at all levels, is very high. The uptake of mathematics at post-16 is strong.
- The standards attained by the pupils in history are very good; their attainment at GCE A level is a particular strength. As they progress through the school, the pupils acquire and develop historical skills systematically; they display high levels of competence in analysing sources, a good awareness of different perspectives and interpretations and understand well key historical concepts. The standard of the pupils' written work is high.
- The standards attained by the pupils, including for those pupils who have special educational needs, are very good. Over the last three years, the percentage of pupils attaining seven or more GCSEs, including English and mathematics, at grades A* to C has been in line with the NI average for similar selective schools. Most GCSE subjects at grades A* to B are above the respective NI three year averages for selective schools.
- Over the last three years, at GCE A level, the percentage of pupils attaining at grades A* to C in at least three subjects is in line with the NI average for similar schools. It is notable that over four-fifths of individual subjects perform above the corresponding three year NI average for similar schools.
- In 2014/15, almost all of the year 12 pupils progressed into year 13. The proportion of year 13 pupils who progress to year 14, and the proportion of year 14 pupils who progress to higher education, are above the NI average for selective schools.

6. Provision for learning

- Planning is effective in most subject areas and guides appropriate progression in learning. In the best practice, the medium and long-term planning builds on the prior learning of the pupils, takes good account of their ability and interests and outlines a range of high quality learning and teaching strategies to meet the learning needs of all of the pupils; it is important that this best practice is disseminated at whole-school level.

- Almost all of the lessons observed in the inspection were effective in promoting learning; over three-fifths (65%) of them were highly effective. The key features of the most effective practice were: appropriately high levels of challenge; well structured lessons with a good pace; opportunities for purposeful, collaborative activities; the enthusiasm and high levels of specialist knowledge of the teacher; effective questioning to extend pupils' thinking skills; and excellent use of plenaries to consolidate learning.
- The recent focus on the use of assessment for learning to promote high quality learning and teaching is having a positive impact on the pupils' experiences and the outcomes they achieve. The key learning points are made explicit to the pupils and the sharing of success criteria allows for effective self and peer assessment to be a feature of the highly effective practice. The school has made a good start in the use of internal assessment data at KS3 to inform planning to ensure that the individual learning needs of pupils are met. The need, however, to develop further the target-setting process at whole school level has been identified appropriately, and in particular, the need to share the pupil targets more consistently with pupils and parents in order to raise even further the very good standards attained.
- The provision for learning in English, including the ongoing reflective practice, is very good and in a significant minority of instances is outstanding. The relevant schemes and lesson plans are always very well conceived, progressive and effectively managed. The pupils work well together with a commendable focus and attention to their teacher, each other and to the tasks in hand. The level of questioning by the teachers, and at times by the pupils themselves, is effective in extending learning. The quality and detail of the oral and written feedback provided by teachers, and through the effective use of peer and self assessment, helps the pupils understand better how they can improve their work.
- The approach to literacy is guided to good effect by an appropriately informed range of improvement priorities, underpinned by a whole-school policy for developing literacy across the school. The teaching, in some subjects in addition to English, supports well the further development of the pupils' literacy. The enrichment and enjoyment of language and literature is promoted through a variety of extra-curricular activities, including by visiting writers.
- The provision for learning in mathematics is very good. The teachers hold suitably high expectations of what the pupils can achieve and the mathematics lessons have appropriate structure and rigour. In the best practice observed: there was an appropriately wide range of learning experiences which engaged the pupils actively; the pupils' knowledge and understanding was assessed effectively, allowing the learning to be tailored closely to ability levels and for any misconceptions to be explored in order to extend learning; and pupils were encouraged and supported to 'have a go'. During these lessons, the pupils had sufficient time to think and articulate their thinking, and consolidate their learning.
- During the inspection, there was evidence of pupils using their numeracy skills appropriately and accurately to enhance and extend their learning in only a small number of subject areas, and this needs to be reviewed and extended.

- The provision for learning in history is very good; it develops well the pupils' historical knowledge, skills and understanding. The pupils benefit significantly from the collaborative learning approaches, which are planned well by the teachers, and the judicious use of resources which stimulate and challenge the pupils' thinking. The provision is enhanced further through the effective links with the heritage sector, visiting speakers and trips to places of historical interest.
- The arrangements for the care and support of pupils are effective. Throughout the school, there is a clear commitment to inclusion and a culture of care and respect for each other. The caring and welcoming ethos reflects well the school motto 'Iamh foisdineach an uachtar, the gentle hand foremost'. The needs of those pupils who require additional support with aspects of their learning are identified at an early stage and effective interventions and support enable them to interact confidently with their peers, engage well in their learning and make good progress. They are supported well by their teachers, classroom assistants and all school staff to fully participate in all aspects of the life of the school. The effective individual education plans are very clear and together with supporting documentation are used effectively by most teachers to guide lesson planning. The pupils respond well to the positive learning environment and the support provided to develop their talents and to prepare them effectively for the challenges and responsibilities of adult life. There is, however, insufficient focus on promoting positive behaviour. The leaders of the pastoral provision need to develop an effective system of rewards to better recognise the achievements and efforts of all the pupils. There is also a need to review the positive behaviour policy to ensure a consistent approach is adopted by all members of the school community.
- The provision for careers education, information, advice and guidance is effective. Pupils benefit from carefully planned guidance consultations at key transition points, access to a dedicated careers counsellor, occupational presentations and additional careers-related enrichment events and experiences. As a result, most of the pupils are well informed and have a clear understanding of the career options and progression pathways available to them. In addition, the pupils at post-16 participate in well managed, relevant work experience placements which support effectively the development of their employability and career planning skills. The pupils have access to a progressive taught programme at KS3 and post-16; to improve further the quality and continuity of the taught programme, there is a need to enhance the careers provision at KS4 and to seek the pupils' views more effectively when evaluating and developing the provision.
- The school has placed appropriately a high priority on the curriculum planning process in the school development plan. The recent review at KS3 has improved the curriculum provision which now meets more effectively the needs of these pupils. The suitability of educational pathways at KS4 and post-16 needs further development to meet the range of ability and interests of the pupils and, as such, is a key focus of the strategic curriculum review. While this review is still at the planning stage, there is evidence of creative and innovative approaches to developing individual pathways for a minority of the pupils at post-16. The school is meeting the requirements of the Entitlement Framework at post-16, and is very close to meeting these requirements at KS4.

7. Leadership and management

- The identification of appropriate priorities for development in the school development plan³ is underpinned by a thorough analysis of performance data and sound self-evaluation practices. The development plans of individual departments are informed well by the school development plan leading to a shared vision for improvement and a steady momentum to the pace of change. To help inform the identification of appropriate priorities, the school recognises the need to develop further its mechanisms for seeking the views of the pupils and parents on the quality and impact of the provision.
- Through a distributive leadership structure, the senior leaders, including the bursar, work well collaboratively to support the school's well-conceived improvement agenda and to identify highly effective practice in all aspects of provision, both within the school and externally. Over the last three years, they have implemented well a number of key strategies to address some variation in standards across subject areas and to improve the overall quality of the learning experiences for all of the pupils. The senior leaders use to good effect staff development days and the 'Performance Review: Staff Development' cycle to support the achievement of the agreed key strategic objectives, particularly in relation to work on improving classroom practice. The middle leaders have been empowered to bring about change in their respective areas of responsibility and have good opportunities to share effective practice with colleagues; their work is instrumental to the high achievement of pupils and the wider successes of the school.
- Based on evidence presented at the time of inspection, there can be a high degree of confidence in the aspects of governance evaluated. The governors bring a rich blend of experience and expertise to the various sub-committees and have a very well-developed strategic overview of the work of the school. They oversee effectively and robustly the sound planning and deployment of the available financial and human resources in the interests of the pupils. They provide appropriate levels of professional support and constructive, critical challenge to the principal and other relevant staff to help ensure the provision of high quality learning experiences and outcomes for the pupils.
- On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the school has comprehensive arrangements in place for safeguarding children and young people. These arrangements reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education. In discussions with the pupils, they reported that they feel safe and know who to talk to if they have any concerns about their safety or wellbeing.

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.

³ The SDP meets fully the requirements of the School Development Planning Regulations (NI) 2010.

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 SIMS⁴ and verified with ETI, the table below compares the percentage of year 12 pupils in Sullivan Upper School achieving seven or more GCSEs at grades A* to C and equivalent subjects and the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals with the NI average for selective schools in the same free school meals category⁵.

GCSE and GCSE equivalent subjects - *following two permitted exclusions	2013	2014	2015
*Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE & equivalents in at least seven subjects	98.8	99.4	99.4
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least seven subjects	96.9	94.2	96.8
The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category	96.4	96.8	N/A
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least seven subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics	96.3	94.2	96.2
The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category	95.0	95.9	N/A
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least five subjects	100	98.7	98.7
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)	100	100	85.7

Other examination results: key stage 4

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

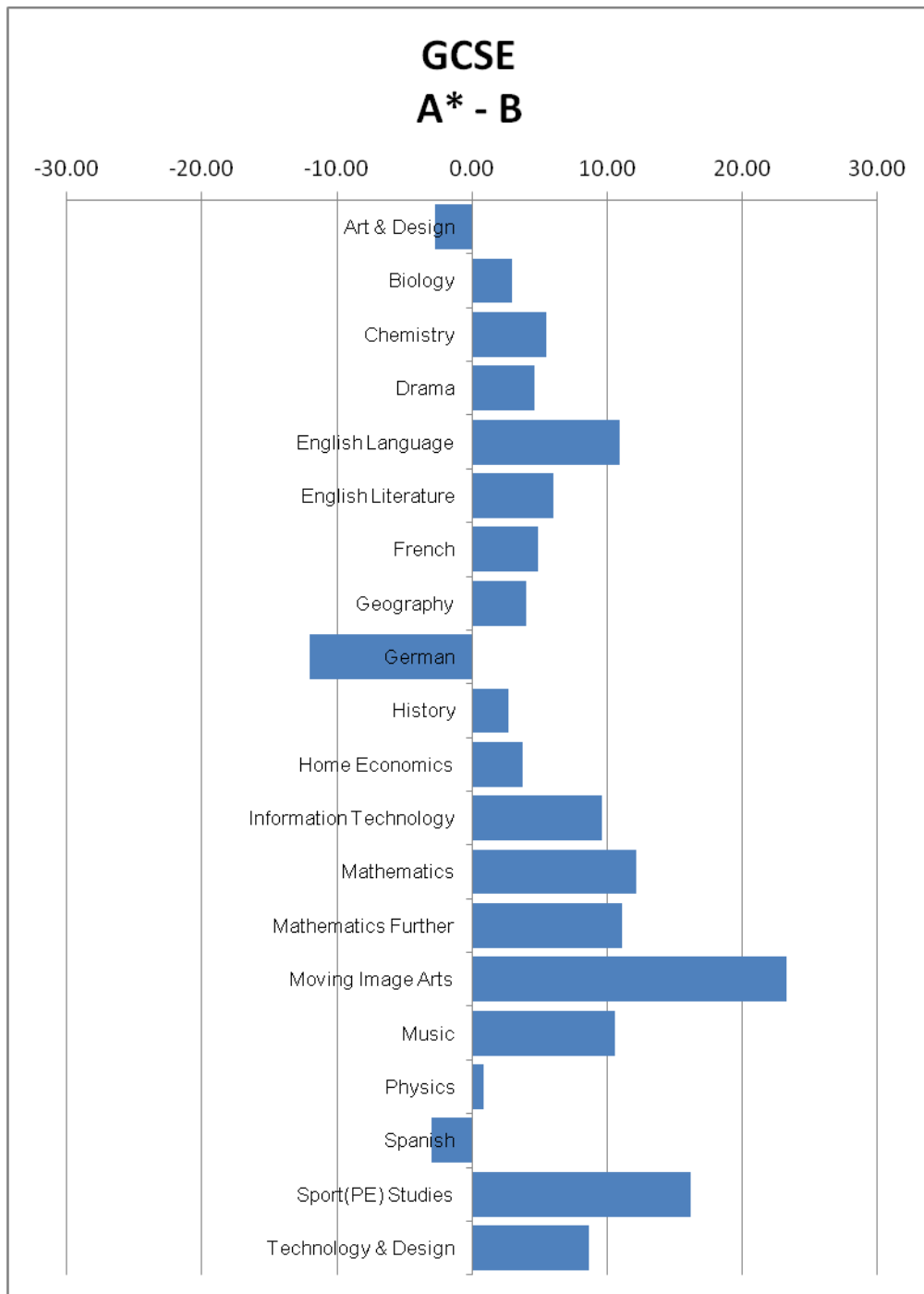
GCSE Subject	2012-13		2013-14		2014-15		Total entry over 3 years
	% A*-B	% A*-E	% A*-B	% A*-E	% A*-B	% A*-E	
<i>Religious Studies (short course)</i>	75.3	100	83.3	99.4	76.9	99.4	470

⁴ SIMS: School Information Management System

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

Attainment of pupils in individual subjects at GCSE level at grades A* to B 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 pupils achieving at GCSE level at grades A* to B in individual subjects in Sullivan Upper School is compared with the three-year NI average for similar schools. 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 Sullivan Upper School achieving three or more GCE A levels at grades A* to C. The table compares the percentage achieving three or more GCEs at grades A* to C with the NI average for selective schools in the same free school meals category⁶.

GCE A Level or equivalent – *following seven permitted exclusions	2013	2014	2015
*Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels & equivalents in at least three subjects	97.9	97.9	98.6
*Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least three A2 levels	81.8	76.1	81.3
The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category	81.1	75.3	N/A

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 12 pupils in Sullivan Upper School achieving grades A* to C and A* to E 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.

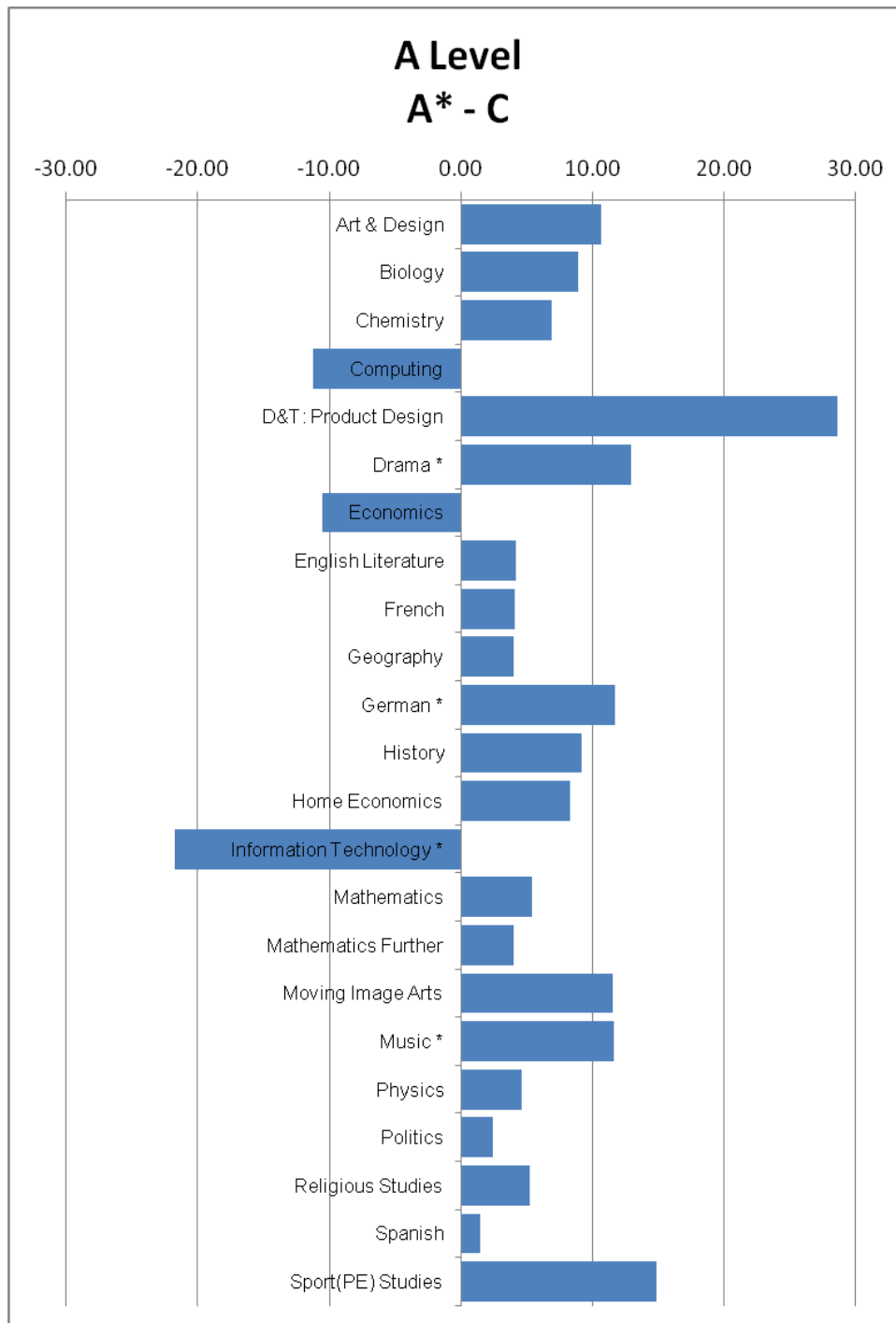
GCE Subject	2012-13		2013-14		2014-15		Total entry over 3 years
	% A*-C	% A*-E	% A*-C	% A*-E	% A*-C	% A*-E	
CCEA Business Studies (vocational)	95.5	100	95.8	100	95.2	100	67

Level 3	2012-13		2013-14		2014-15		Total entry over 3 years
	% A* - C	% A* - E	% A*-C	%A* - E	% A*-C	% A*-E	
BTEC Health and Social Care	100	100	n/a	n/a	100	100	4

⁶ See benchmarking data and guidance contained in the annual DE Circulars on: 'School Development Planning and Target-Setting'.

Attainment of pupils in individual subjects at GCE A level at grades A* to C from 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 pupils achieving at GCE level at grades A* to C in individual subjects in Sullivan Upper School is compared with the three-year NI average for similar schools (all pupils in all schools). A positive value (to the right) shows that the average individual subject performance in 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 Sullivan Upper School from year 12 to year 13 and then from year 13 to year 14, compared with the NI average for selective schools from school census returns to the Department of Education for the most recent year for which data is available.

	NI Average	School
% Yr 12 staying on to Yr 13	95.6	95.5
% Yr 13 staying on to Yr 14	94.1	96.7

Leavers' destinations

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

	2013/14 NI %	2013/14 School %	2013/14 School Nos.	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Total number of leavers			153			
Employment	4.2	3.9	6			
Further Education	20.6	15.7	24	0	16	8
Higher Education	70.6	79.1	121			
Work-based learning (Training)	1.4	0	0			
Unemployed	1.1	1.3	2			
Unknown	2.1	0	0			

Accommodation

1. There is restricted access to certain areas of the school site for pupils and visitors who have physical disabilities due to a lack of accessibility ramps and/or elevators.

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