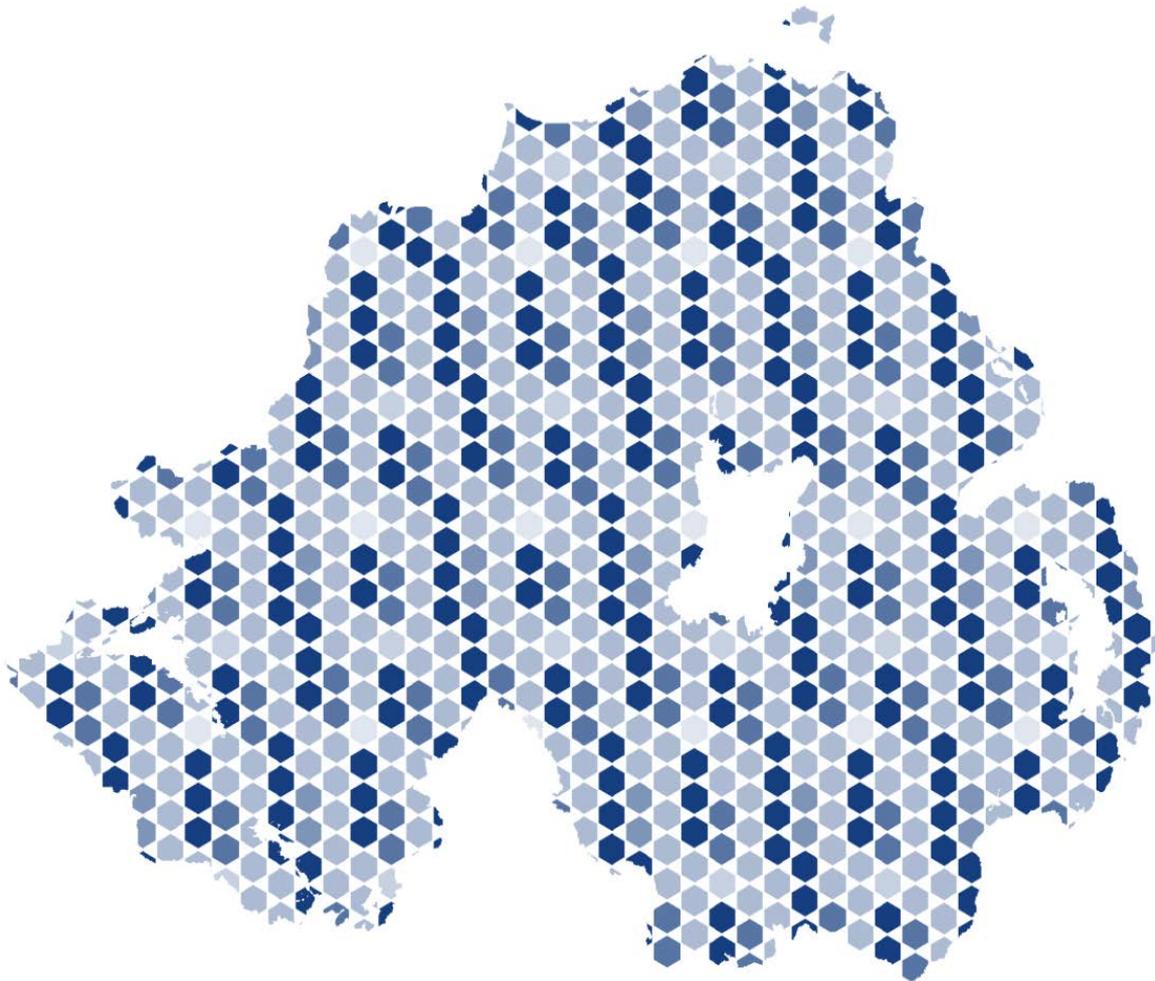


# POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training  
Inspectorate

## Belfast Royal Academy

Non-denominational, co-educational, 11-18, voluntary  
grammar school

Report of an Inspection  
in March 2013



Providing Inspection Services for

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

CUSTOMER  
SERVICE  
EXCELLENCE



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

Performance Level
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

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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.eti.gov.uk/index/together-towards-improvement/together-towards-improvement-post-primary.htm>. Inspectors observed teaching and learning, 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; and
- the opportunity for the parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

Data on the returns on questionnaire sent in advance of the inspection to parents and school staff is shown in the table below.

Questionnaire	Number issued	Number returned	Percentage returned	Number with comments
Parents	285	78	27%	62
Teachers	93	53	57%	18
Support Staff	43	7	16.1%	6

### Acknowledgement

The senior staff of Belfast Royal Academy kindly agreed that the ETI could pilot some new approaches to inspecting and reporting in this inspection in line with ETI's commitments in 'Every School A Good School'. The new approaches are designed to strengthen further the complementary aspects of internal evaluation and of inspection in contributing to the school's processes for continuous improvement. The ETI is grateful for the agreement and participation of the whole school.

## 2. Context

Belfast Royal Academy is a large non-denominational voluntary grammar school serving a diverse community in north Belfast and south Antrim. The school is regularly over-subscribed; upon entry to the school approximately two-thirds of the intake achieve above the expected level in English and, in mathematics, most of the intake do so. There is a dynamic and sustainable sixth form.

<b>Belfast Royal Academy</b>	<b>2009/10</b>	<b>2010/11</b>	<b>2011/12</b>	<b>2012/13</b>
Year 8 Intake	204	204	203	203
Enrolment	1401	1416	1421	1402
% Attendance (NI Average)	94.1 (92.3)	95.0 (92.3)	95.0 (92.6)	NA
FSME Percentage <sup>1</sup>	6.6	6.3	7.0	7.5
% (No.) of pupils on the SEN register	3.9	4.2	5.3	5.6
No. of pupils with statements of educational needs in the mainstream school	54	59	76	79
No. of newcomers	23	15	7	*
<b>Intake</b>				
% of Y8 pupils with L5 English	60.3	66.5	61.8	68.0
% of Y8 pupils with L5 mathematics	82.8	87.2	89.7	89.2
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in English	98.0	100	99.5	98.0
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in mathematics	99.0	100	100	98.5

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

\* fewer than 5

### 3. Focus of inspection

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

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

### 4. Overall findings

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

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

## 5. Achievement and Standards

The good quality of the pupils' achievements and standards is evident in a number of key strengths.

There is an effective focus on nurturing all aspects of the pupils' development and as a consequence, their ability to work independently and persist systematically in their learning is good. They are keen to mentor and support each other in their learning.

An effective emphasis is placed on the development of the pupils' literacy and numeracy. In English and mathematics, as well as across the curriculum, the pupils are very skilful in communicating their ideas confidently, listening actively and responding to others and defending their thinking; they are also proficient in their mathematical thinking and problem-solving.

The standards<sup>2</sup> in most of the GCSE<sup>3</sup> subjects at grades A\*-B, and in a majority of the subjects at GCE A<sup>4</sup> level at grades A\*-C demonstrate an improving trend over the past 5 years. When GCSE English and mathematics are included, standards are within less than two percentage of the average for similar schools; in a school of this size the year-on-year improvements are benefitting a substantial number of pupils each year.

GCSE qualifications attained by the small proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals have improved steadily over the past 3 years; last year all such pupils achieved the expected standard.

***The school has identified appropriately as a priority in its school development plan the need to continue to raise standards consistently across all of the subjects.***

## 6. Provision

The approach to planning, teaching, learning and assessment was effective in most of the practice seen during the inspection.

In most instances, the purpose of the teaching is presented to and understood well by the pupils and, as a result, they engage closely in their learning.

A significant minority of the teaching is innovative, including effective instances of the use of ICT as a teaching and learning tool.

***The review of teaching and learning, which was a priority in the school action plan for 2011-12, should be sustained for longer to help disseminate the innovative practices and ensure consistently good quality teaching and learning across the whole school.***

The pupils who met with inspectors say that they feel safe and secure in school and are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being.

The very good quality of the provision for pastoral care is evident in the ways in which the staff exemplify the caring ethos of the school and show a strong commitment to the pupils' welfare.

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<sup>2</sup> See the appendix for performance and statistical data

<sup>3</sup> General Certificate of Secondary Education

<sup>4</sup> Certificate of Education Advanced

Excellent working relationships, throughout the school, reflect strongly its core values. There is a growing sense of the pupils' personal and social responsibility as well developed individuals, with a concern for others and for the environment and encouraged to think in a global context.

The pupils benefit from extensive enrichment activities, including a wide range of sporting, other cultural and extra-curricular opportunities, which are provided by many of the teachers.

The effective working relationships with a wide range of external agencies and professionals provide very good support to vulnerable pupils and those at risk of marginalisation.

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

***The senior leaders need to: clarify the reporting arrangements on child protection for staff, substitute teachers and parents; develop further the staff Code of Practice in relation to roles in pastoral care and expectations in teaching and learning, standards and outcomes; and update the policy for promoting positive behaviour.***

The provision for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory overall.

Not all of the teachers are making sufficient use of diagnostic tests to provide baseline assessments against which progress can be tracked to ensure that they are maintaining a clear overview of the progress of all of the pupils.

***Teachers need additional staff development to help them improve the quality of the individual education plans and their use to inform lesson planning.***

The formal curriculum is appropriately broad and balanced, particularly at Key Stage (KS) 3; at KS4 it meets fully the requirements of the Entitlement Framework. At post-16 level, good progress is being made towards meeting the requirements of the Entitlement Framework.

***The pupils need a broader curricular choice at post-16 in order to meet more fully their needs and abilities and future career choices.***

Careers education, information, advice and guidance is very good across all key stages and appropriate action plans are in place to strengthen provision further. The pupils are given good advice about subject choices and available progression routes.

At post-16, they engage in meaningful work experience placements and value the highly the support they receive in preparing their applications and mock interviews. Subject teachers are making an increasing contribution to careers information for the pupils

## **7. Leadership and Management**

There are evident strengths throughout the leadership, management and governance of the school.

The Headmaster, the senior management team and the governors, provide, collectively, a very well-managed and challenging approach to improvement through increasingly distributed leadership at all levels.

Outstanding direction is provided from the top, expressed both through a commitment to developing the pupils to their full potential and through effective school development planning and self-evaluation.

The action plans identify effectively important whole school priorities for improvement, including a focus on the need to continue to raise standards further and ensure consistency for all of the pupils.

The parents, staff and school community can have a high degree of confidence in the effectiveness of both senior leadership and governance.

The capacity of the middle management team to lead their areas of responsibility and contribute to whole school improvement is being developed well.

The teachers at all levels avail readily of opportunities to undertake additional roles of responsibility and to contribute to important school developments which benefit the pupils.

***The senior management need to continue building the capacity of middle managers through well-targeted staff development to enable them to monitor and evaluate the provision in their areas in a more systematic and consistent manner in all subjects.***

## **8. Conclusion**

The quality of education provided by the school is good. The school has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision and its very good leadership, governance and management.

The inspection has identified aspects for continued improvement, which the school and governors have demonstrated the capacity to address, which include enhancing further the processes for monitoring and evaluation of the provision to ensure greater consistency in planning, teaching and learning and to continue to raise standards across all of the subjects.

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

## Performance and statistical data

## GCSE EXAMINATION RESULTS

Data on Year 12 (Key Stage 4) performance:

<b>GCSE and GCSE equivalent subjects - *following permitted exclusions</b>	2010	2011	2012
*Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE & Equivalents in at least 7 subjects	99.0	99.0	99.0
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects	87.3	88.0	90.0
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	<i>92.3</i>	<i>94.9</i>	<i>93.7</i>
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics	86.8	87.6	89.6
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	<i>91.3</i>	<i>93.7</i>	<i>91.3</i>
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	92.2	94.7	95.5
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)	83.3	90.0	100

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

## GCE EXAMINATION RESULTS

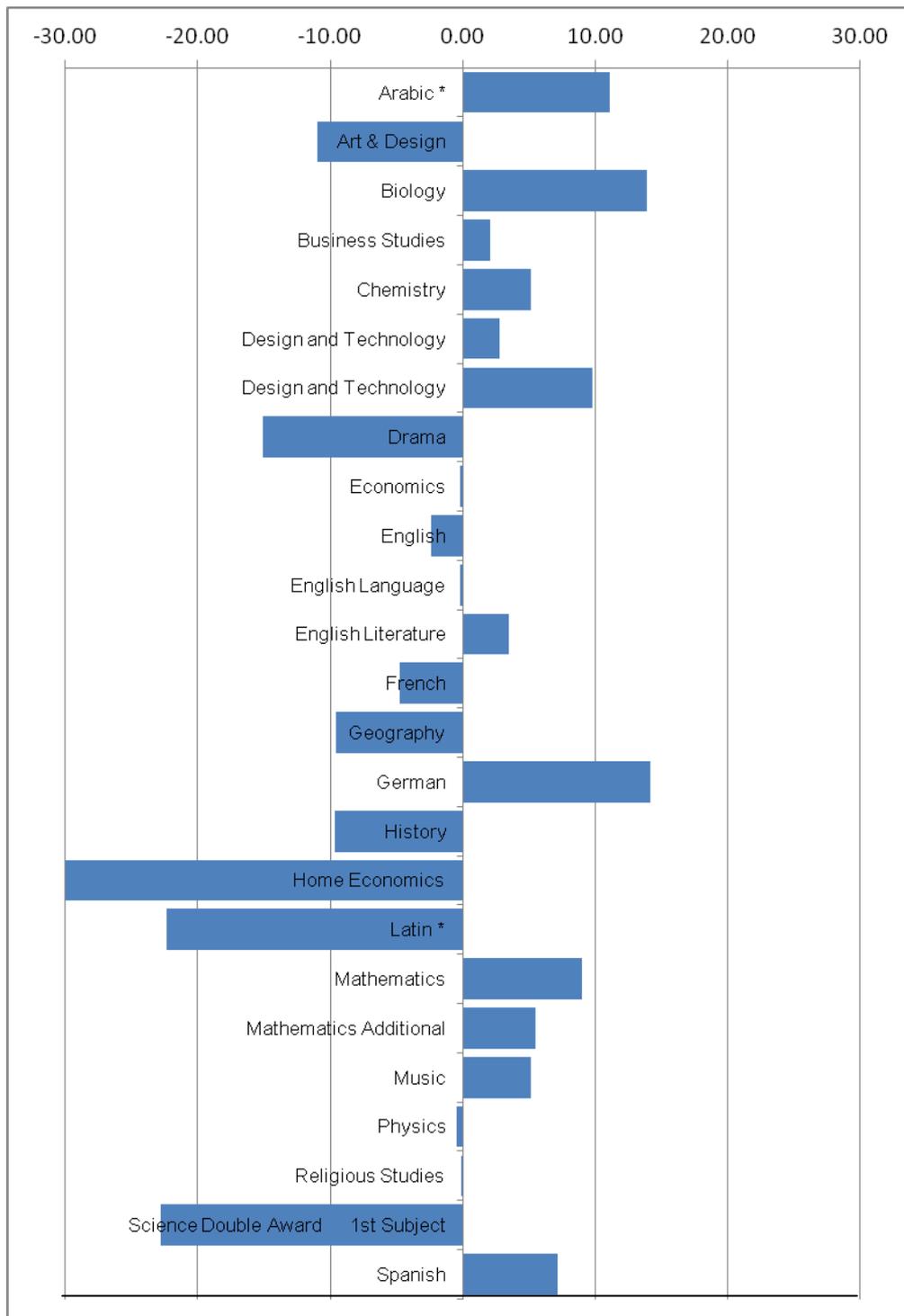
Data on Year 14 (A2) performance

<b>GCE A Level or equivalent</b>	2010	2011	2012
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels & Equivalents in at least 3 subjects	100	100	97.9
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	68.3	73.0	73.9
<i>The NI average for similar schools in the same free school meals category</i>	<i>77.5</i>	<i>78.0</i>	<i>75.2</i>

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

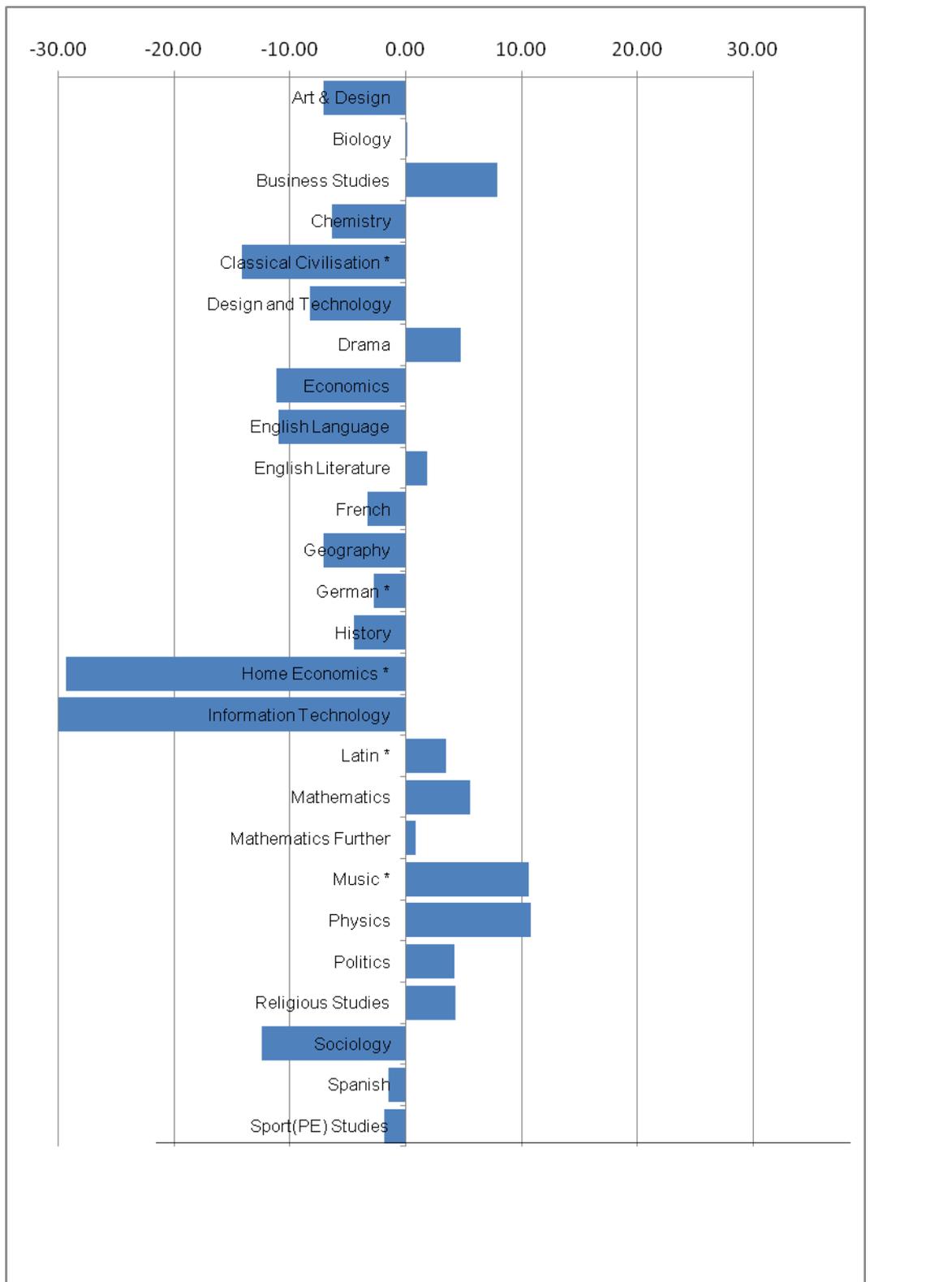
## GCSE EXAMINATION RESULTS

### Comparison with the three-year NI average at grades A\*-B 2009-10 to 2011-12



- total number of entries fewer than 30

**Comparison with the three-year GCE NI average at grades A\* to C 2009-10 to 2011-12**



- total number of entries fewer than 20

**STAYING ON RATE** (Current year13/14 as proportion of year 12 from 1/2 years previously)

Year 13	93.8	NI Av. Year 13	95.1
Year 14	94.6	NI Av. Year 14	89.5

**LEAVERS' DESTINATIONS**

	Year 12	NI %	Year 13/14	NI%
TOTAL	27		191	
Another School	*	32.5	*	2.1
Employment	0%	2.4	3%	3.6
Full-time Further Education	74%	50.6	7%	10.0
Full-time Higher Education	NA	NA	83%	80.2
Full-time Training	*	8.4	*	0.8
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	0%	1.2	*	1.3
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	*	4.8	3%	2.0

\* = fewer than 5

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