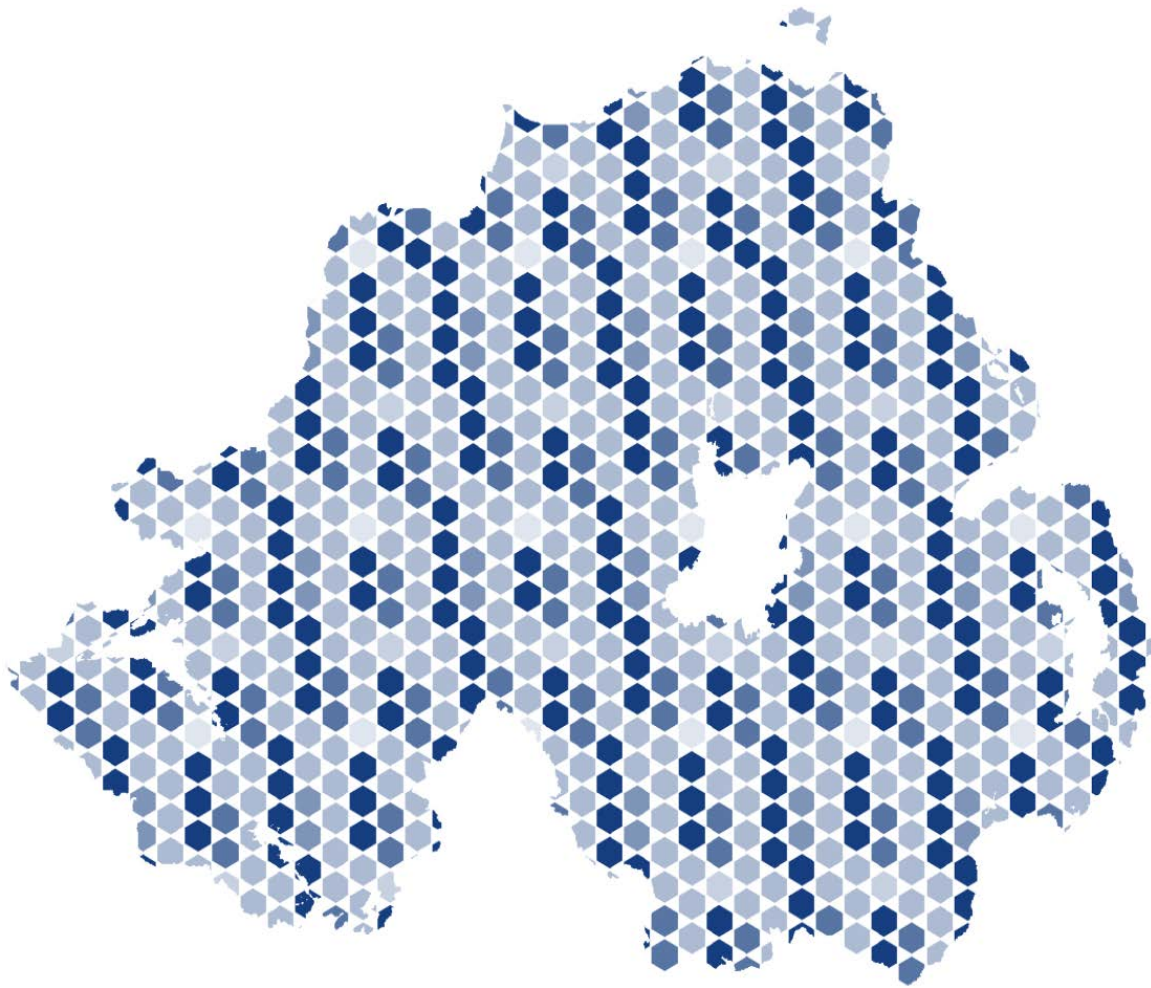


POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Down High School

Controlled, co-educational, 11-18, selective school

Report of an Inspection
in October 2012



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CONTEXT OF THE INSPECTION (METHOD)

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

Inspectors scrutinised documentation and the pupils' written work and held formal and informal discussions with pupils, teachers and staff with specific responsibilities.

The arrangements for this inspection included:

- a meeting with representatives from the governors;
- meetings with groups of pupils from years 8, 12, 13 and 14; and
- the opportunity for the parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire.

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

Questionnaire	Number issued	Number returned	Percentage returned	Number with comments
Parents	194	101	52%	57
Teachers	62	56	90%	15
Support Staff	24	16	67%	*

* fewer than 5

QUANTITATIVE TERMS

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

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

PERFORMANCE LEVELS

The Education and Training Inspectorate (Inspectorate) use the following performance levels (grades) in reports:

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

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL

Down High School draws its pupils from Downpatrick and the wider area. Of the total enrolment, approximately 30% of the pupils are in the sixth form. While the enrolment has risen slightly, the school is regularly oversubscribed. The proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals and those requiring additional support with their learning are small.

Down High School	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Year 8 Intake	132	132	131	133
Enrolment	941	946	950	968
% Attendance (NI Average)	95 (95)	95 (95)	96 (95)	
FSME Percentage	2	3	4	5
% (No) of pupils on SEN register	6 (44)	7 (44)	7 (49)	7 (46)
No. of pupils with statements of educational needs	10	10	9	15
No. of newcomers	-	*	-	-
Intake				
% of Y8 pupils with L5 English	73	72	73	83
% of Y8 pupils with L5 mathematics	89	86	89	97
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in English	100	99	100	100
% of Y8 pupils with L4 and above in mathematics	100	99	100	100

Source: data as held by the school.

* fewer than 5

1.2 FOCUS AND SCOPE OF THE INSPECTION

The standard inspection of Down High School focused on achievements and standards, learning and teaching, curriculum provision and on leadership and management across the school as a whole.

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

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

1.3 OVERALL FINDINGS OF THE INSPECTION

Overall Performance Level	Very good
Achievements and Standards	Good
Provision for Learning	Very good
Leadership and Management	Very good

2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

2.1 The standards achieved by the pupils are good.

KEY FINDINGS

The school's distinctive inclusive and pupil-centred ethos is highly conducive to learning. The pupils are well-motivated and articulate confidently in class activities; their behaviour is exemplary. Almost all make good progress across the curriculum.

Data on Year 12 (Key Stage 4) performance

GCSE and GCSE equivalent subjects - *following permitted exclusions	2010	2011	2012
*Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE & Equivalents in at least 7 subjects	100	100	100
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects	92	94	95
<i>Comparison with the NI average for similar schools in the same FSM category</i>	<i>Below average</i>	<i>In line with the average</i>	<i>In line with the average</i>
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics	92	92	95
<i>Comparison with the NI average for similar schools in the same FSM category</i>	<i>In line with the average</i>	<i>In line with the average</i>	<i>In line with the average</i>
*Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 5 subjects	97	97	99
Percentage of FSM entitled school leavers achieving 5 or more GCSEs Grades A*-C or equivalent (including GCSE English and GCSE Mathematics)	100	100	100

Source: Data as held and verified by the school, with DE benchmarks¹

In 2012, the pupils achieved good results at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations. Over the past three years there has been an overall improvement in the proportion of pupils achieving seven or more subjects, including English and mathematics, at grades A*-C. The performance of a majority of the individual GCSE subjects, at grades A*-B, is within five percentage points of, or above, the corresponding three-year Northern Ireland average: a small number of subjects have scope for improvement.²

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

² See Appendix 1

Improving further the current outcomes at GCSE for all pupils is a key and appropriate feature of the current school development plan.

Data on Year 14 (A2) performance

GCE A Level or equivalent	2010	2011	2012
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels & Equivalentents in at least 3 subjects	97	100	100
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	74	80	81
<i>Comparison with the NI average for similar schools in the same FSM category</i>	<i>Below average</i>	<i>Above average</i>	<i>Above average</i>

Source: Data as held and verified by the school, with DE benchmarks³.

The percentage of Year 14 pupils attaining Grade C or above in at least 3 General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) levels has demonstrated significant and continuing improvement over the last three years and is above the average for similar schools. At A level, most subjects are within five percentage points of, or above, the corresponding three-year Northern Ireland average. In a small number of subjects there is scope for urgent improvement. The school has prioritised the need, and is implementing fully, a wide range of strategies to continue to raise further the pupils' levels of attainment at A level and to address inconsistencies in subject performance.

Almost all of the pupils who enrol in year 13 stay on and progress from A level and equivalent study into higher education.

3. PROVISION FOR LEARNING

3.1 The quality of the provision for learning is very good.

KEY FINDINGS

The quality of the provision in English is very good, in modern languages and in science it is good⁴.

The quality of the lessons observed ranged from outstanding to satisfactory. Most of the teaching observed was good or better, with almost one half very good or outstanding. The school has established a working group to identify and disseminate good practice in learning and teaching; given that one fifth of the lessons need improvement, the inspection confirms that this is an appropriate priority.

In the most effective practice, the teachers structure the lessons well, make explicit connections to previous learning and set challenging tasks which reflect their high expectations. The pupils, including those identified as needing additional support with their learning, have well-planned opportunities to participate in active and enjoyable learning experiences; in only a minority of the lessons is ICT used effectively to enhance the pupils' learning.

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

³ DE Circular 2011/03: 'School Development Planning and Target-Setting'.

⁴ For detailed findings of the provision in English, modern languages and science see Appendix 2.

Most of the pupils with special educational needs attain good standards. The teachers and the co-ordinators support the pupils very well in their holistic development and their educational achievement through assessment, which informs their planning, and the use of an appropriately wide range of learning and teaching approaches. These pupils benefit from effective arrangements to support them in individual subjects, in careers advice and through pastoral care.

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

KEY FINDINGS

The pupils are very welcoming to visitors and are confident and courteous. They are well aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being. Effective use is made of pupil consultation through the school council to enhance the learning experiences for all pupils.

The high levels of commitment to the welfare of the pupils are expressed through the very good quality of the arrangements for pastoral care. The pupils and the parents appreciate fully the quality of this support.

A distinctive ethos of trust and respect permeates the life and work of the school as a result of the very good working relationships at all levels. The deputy head teacher with responsibility for pastoral care provides effective leadership and is well supported by a strong pastoral team.

The availability of an extensive extra-curricular programme for the pupils helps to develop individual talents, confidence and self-esteem.

The pupils are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles through the very good attention given to healthy eating and physical activity; for example, the healthy break and lunch options, the range of physical activities provided and healthy cooking opportunities.

3.3 The curricular provision for the pupils at key stage 3, key stage 4 and in the sixth form is very good.

KEY FINDINGS

The curriculum is suitably broad and balanced and meets effectively the learning needs of all of the pupils including, by 2013, a curriculum for post-16 pupils which will match well the interests, abilities and career aspirations of the widening intake of pupils to the sixth form.

There is very good collaboration between the school and other education providers, including the further education sector, within the Lecale area learning community. There are clear arrangements for the evaluation of the school's progress towards implementation of the Entitlement Framework.

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

The pupils at key stages 3 and 4 and their parents have good access to CEIAG. The promotion of careers through subject teaching has been developed following a thorough review by the co-ordinator and his work with the heads of department. The school plays an active role in promoting CEIAG in the learning community and has developed good links with other schools and external agencies. The action plan for CEIAG identifies appropriately the need to improve further the quality and breadth of guidance for pupils in years 13 and 14.

4. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 The leadership and the management are very good.

KEY FINDINGS

The clear strategic vision for the school, the distributive approach to leadership and the culture of reflective practice which has been initiated across the school are a consequence of the personal example set by the Principal, whose high standards and expectations are well respected by the staff, the parents and the pupils. The senior leadership team is also instrumental in effecting school improvement; the team leads collegially and manages effectively whole-school development. Strategic leadership draws successfully on the collective and individual strengths of the team.

There is a clear and appropriate commitment to support and develop further the leadership and professional capacity of middle managers, in particular the heads of department and co-ordinators. The governors have a very good working knowledge of the school; they work effectively with the Principal and are fully committed to the school's development and improvement.

The current school development plan meets fully the requirements of the School Development Plan Regulations (NI) 2010. The senior leadership team makes good analytical use of performance data, has consulted widely on the areas for development and has identified appropriate priorities to improve further the provision. A notable feature is the well-planned programme of staff development which draws effectively on external support and existing internal expertise.

The ETI reported to the Principal and governors the many positive responses and the very few concerns emerging from the questionnaires. Where appropriate, these have been commented on within the report.

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

Very good links and partnerships are maintained with a wide range of organisations and external agencies including local employers, schools and support services which broaden the range of the pupils' experiences and support well their learning.

Financial resources are well-managed, providing pupils with a suitable curriculum, making effective use of all available resources and, in doing so, providing good value for money.

The limited accommodation⁵ is very well maintained and, within some constraints, is used effectively to support learning and teaching.

⁵ Issues relating to the school's accommodation are detailed in Appendix 3.

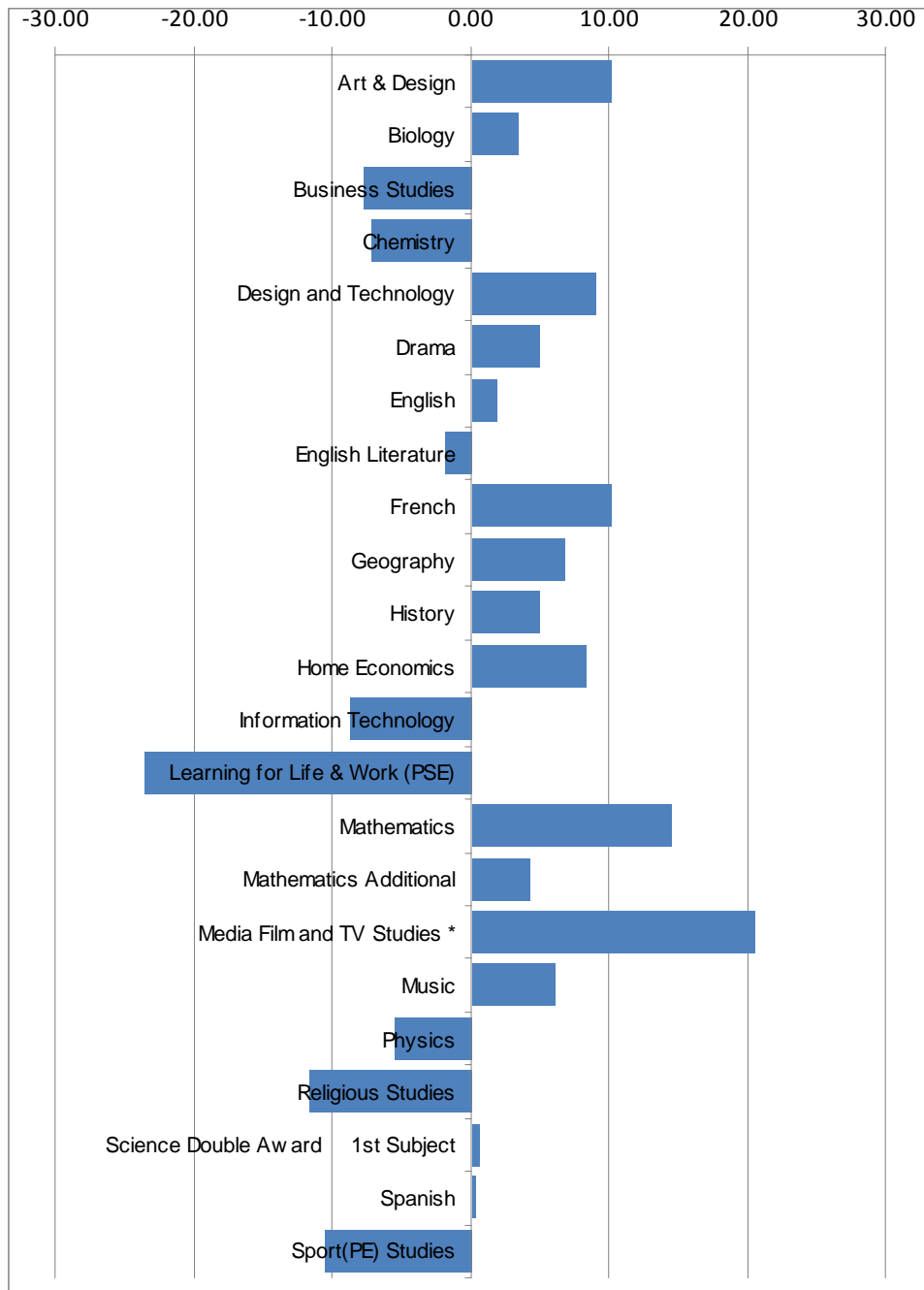
5. CONCLUSION

5.1 In the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by the school is very good. The school is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the pupils; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

5.2 The main area for improvement is the need to continue to focus on the dissemination of the most effective practice in learning and teaching, within a collegial culture of self-evaluation, in order to raise further the improving standards attained by the pupils.

1.1 GCSE EXAMINATION RESULTS

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



1.2 OTHER EXAMINATION RESULTS: KEY STAGE 4

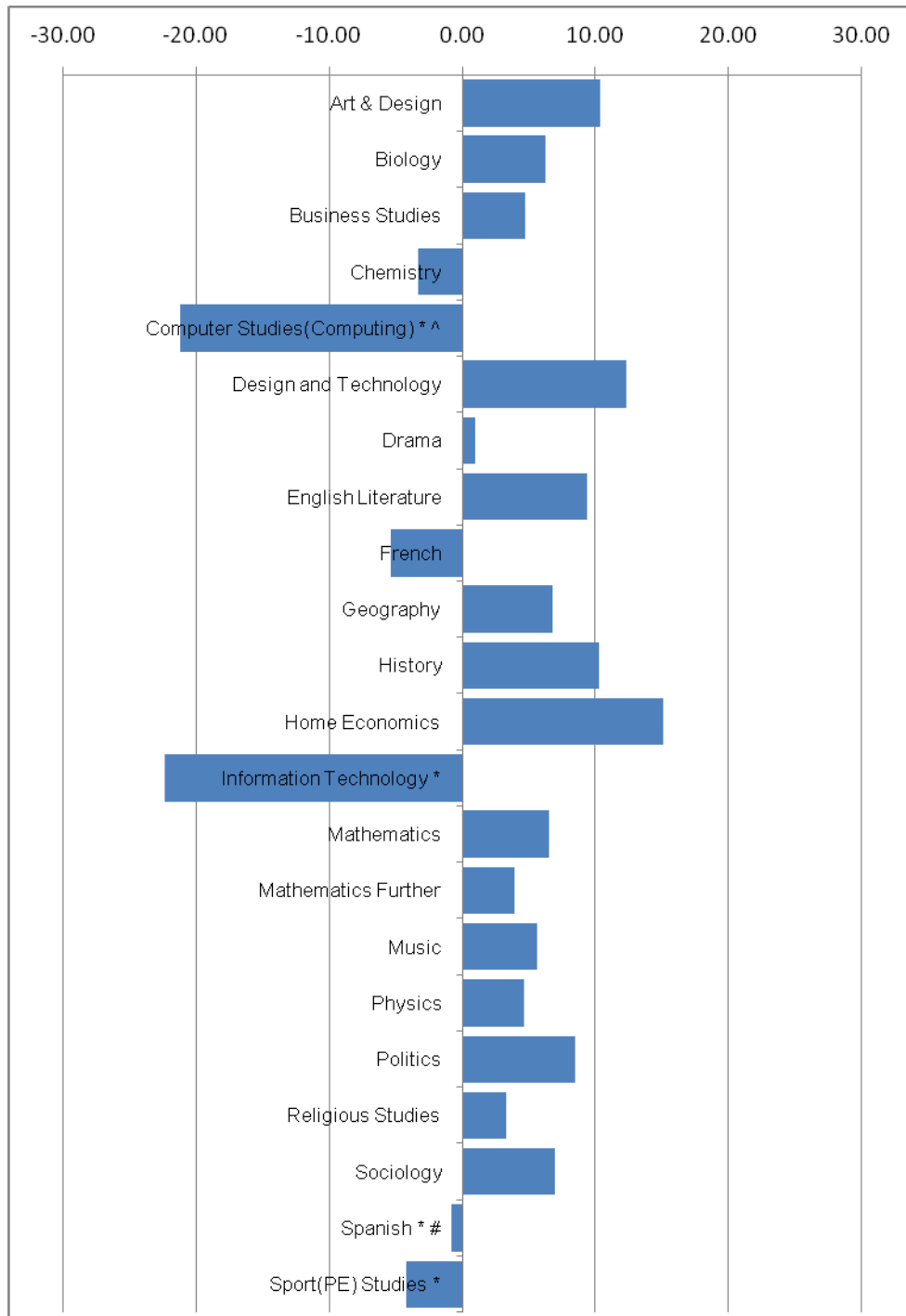
Other courses taken in the last three years.

GCSE Subject	2011	2012	Total entry over 3 years
	% A*-B	% A*-B	
Leisure and Tourism	50	33	13
Media: Communication and Production	21	15	27

Level 2	2011	2012	Total entry over 3 years
	% pass	% pass	
<i>BTEC Engineering</i>	100	100	11
<i>BTEC IT</i>	100	100	4

1.3 GCE RESULTS

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



* total number of entries fewer than 20

^ no entries in 2012

no entries in 2010

1.4 OTHER RESULTS: POST-16

Other courses taken in the last three years. (All Level 3, unless otherwise stated)

A2 Subject	2010	2011	2012	Total entry over 3 years
	% A*-C	% A*-C	% A*-C	
Health and Social Care	92	60	94	40
Leisure Studies	75	100	83	20
Moving Image Arts	-	100	100	21

1.5 STAYING ON RATE 2011/2012

(Current year 13/14 as proportion of year 12 from 1/2 years previously)

Year 13	93	NI Av. Year 13	95
Year 14	94	NI Av. Year 14	90

1.6 LEAVERS DESTINATIONS 2010/11

	Year 12	NI %	Yr 13/14	NI%
Total Number of Leavers	15		140	
Another School	7%	32.5	1%	2.1
Employment	0%	2.4	0%	3.6
Full-time Further Education	73%	50.6	4%	10
Full-time Higher Education	N/A	N/A	93%	80.2
Full-time Training	7%	8.4	0%	0.8
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	0%	1.2	0%	1.3
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	13%	4.8	2%	2

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS: ENGLISH, MODERN LANGUAGES AND SCIENCE

ENGLISH

The provision for English is very good.

The main strengths are:

- the combination of high-quality learning experiences for the pupils in language and literature;
- the pupils' confidence and high standards in talking and listening, reading and writing;
- the generally very good and, at times, outstanding quality of the teaching observed;
- the good, and improving, results in public examinations at GCSE and GCE A level;
- the well-judged, self-evaluating and measured leadership provided by the head of English; and
- the commitment of all of the teachers to develop the curriculum and broaden the pupils' independence in learning.

The area for improvement is:

- the need for the teachers to develop a collegial approach to sharing their best practice in learning and teaching approaches in order to raise standards further.

MODERN LANGUAGES

The provision for Modern Languages is good.

The main strengths are:

- the positive ethos and high expectations created by the teachers;
- the comprehensive departmental planning for learning and assessment;
- the quality of the learning and teaching which is consistently good;
- the effective monitoring of the pupils' work and progress;
- the wide range of lively teaching approaches which capture the interest of the pupils; and
- the good results achieved by the pupils in French and Spanish at GCSE and A level.

The area for improvement is:

- the need to increase and extend the use of the target language by the teachers and the pupils in order to maximise opportunities for language practice within lessons.

SCIENCE

The provision for science is good.

The main strengths are:

- the very good or outstanding teaching observed in just under one half of the lessons, where pupils completed a wide range of experimental and written work to a very good standard;
- the good standards attained in public examinations;
- the good quality of the self-evaluative reports on biology, chemistry and physics produced for the inspection, under the direction of the separate heads of department;
- the very good leadership of the heads of biology and chemistry in leading their departments to produce a wide range of written and other resources for the pupils' use;
- the pupils' detailed and accurate record of a wide range of scientific work in a majority of the classes; and
- the very good balance between practical and theoretical activities in the majority of classes where nearly all of the pupils reach good to very good standards.

The areas for improvement are:

- the need to improve further the quality of teaching and the standards reached in a significant minority of the physics and KS3 classes; and
- the need to disseminate more effectively the very good or outstanding practice already existing, through the heads of chemistry, physics and biology working as a team to achieve this goal within a strengthened self-evaluative culture.

ACCOMMODATION

- There are significant shortcomings in the school's current accommodation. Almost one half of the classes are held in temporary classrooms, some of which are too small.

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