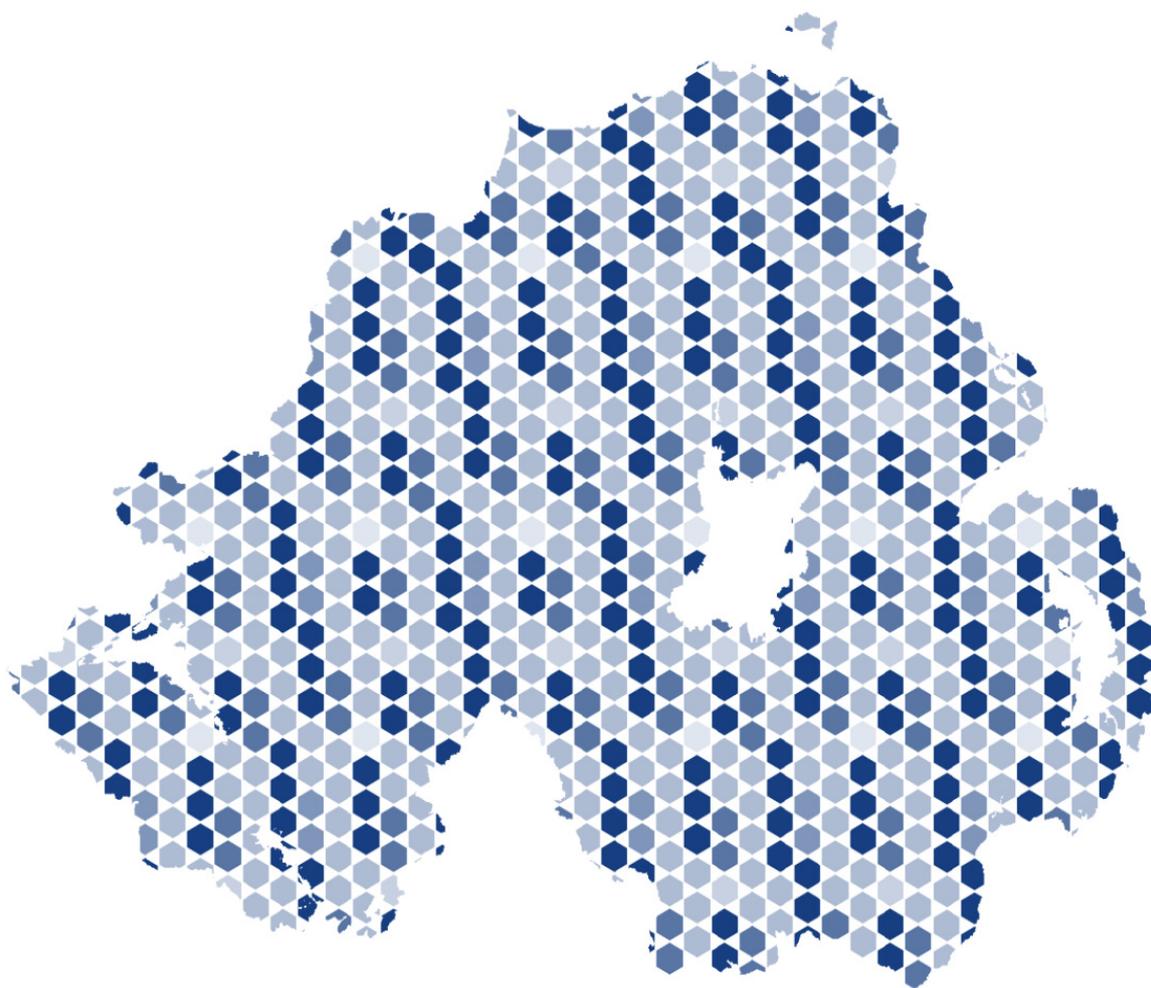


POST-PRIMARY INSPECTION



Education and Training
Inspectorate

Sacred Heart Grammar School
Newry, Co Down

All-girls' selective 11-18 school

Report of an Inspection
in March 2012



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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%

In assessing the various features of the provision, Inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE REPORT

The term '*similar schools*' refers to schools in the same free school meal category as defined by DE, whether they are selective or non-selective.

CEIAG	Careers Education Information Advice and Guidance
DE	Department of Education
ETI	Education and Training Inspectorate
FSME	Free School Meals Entitlement
GCE A	General Certificate of Education Advanced Levels
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HOD	Head of Department
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
KS	Key stage
NI	Northern Ireland
SDP	School Development Plan
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SMT	Senior Management Team
STEM	Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics

1. CONTEXT

1.1 The pupils attending Sacred Heart Grammar School are drawn both from the city and the wider geographical area. The school is regularly oversubscribed and, in the past two years, is attracting pupils with a wider ability range than previously.

Sacred Heart Grammar School, Newry	2008	2009	2010	2011
Enrolment	838	836	846	846
FSME Percentage	7.28	6.7	8.04	9.18
% (No) of pupils on SEN register	0.6 (5)	0.48 (4)	2.13 (18)	3.34 (20)
<i>No. of pupils with statements</i>	5	*	*	*
<i>No. of newcomers</i>				
Intake				
% of Y8 pupils with L5 English	59.84	68.33	76.86	82.5
% of Y8 pupils with L5 mathematics	79.51	80	90.24	83.33
% of Y8 pupils with L4 English	93.44	95.83	100	100
% of Y8 pupils with L4 mathematics	93.44	95.83	100	100

Source: Data as held by the school. * = fewer than 5

2. OVERALL FINDINGS OF THE INSPECTION

2.1 In most of the areas inspected the quality of education, including the pastoral care, provided by this school is outstanding.

The school is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the pupils; it has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

3. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

3.1 The standards achieved by the pupils are outstanding.

KEY FINDINGS

The pupils are highly motivated and, in the vast majority of instances observed, they have the opportunity to demonstrate very good levels of independence in their learning. They are able to apply their well-developed skills in language and communication. The school's caring and supportive ethos ensures that the pupils engage and interact effectively, co-operatively, and at times, collaboratively, with their teachers and their peers. They display both social and emotional maturity.

Data on Year 12 (Key Stage 4) performance

	2009	2010	2011
Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE & Equivalent in at least 7 subjects	99.17	98.37	98.37
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects including English and Mathematics	98.33	97.56	97.56
Comparison with the NI average for similar schools in the same FSME category	Well above average	Well above average	Well above average
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects	98.33	97.56	97.56
Comparison with the NI average for similar schools in the same FSME category	Well above average	Well above average	Well above average

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

The pupils' attainment at GCSE level is outstanding when compared with similar selective schools. Over the past three years, the outcomes at GCSE level have remained at a consistently very high level. At grades A*-B, the standards attained by the pupils in four-fifths of the subjects surpass the NI average by 5% or more.

Data on Year 14 (A2) performance

	2009	2010	2011
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels & Equivalents in at least 3 subjects	99.6	98.3	95.68
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	90	90.68	79.31
<i>Comparison with the NI average for similar schools in the same FSM category</i>	<i>Well above average</i>	<i>Well above average</i>	<i>Above average</i>

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

The pupils' attainment at GCE A level is also outstanding. Over the past three years, all of the subjects are above the corresponding NI averages at grades A*-C and most of the subjects exceed the average by five percentage points or more. While the pupils' attainment at GCE 'A' level grades A*-C dipped in 2011, the outcomes remained above the Northern Ireland average. The small number of pupils with SEN makes very good progress with all securing a place at university over the past three years.

4. PROVISION FOR LEARNING

4.1 The quality of provision for learning is outstanding.

KEY FINDINGS

The quality of teaching and learning in all of the lessons observed was satisfactory or better; in over two thirds of the lessons it was very good or outstanding.

In the majority of the practice seen, the pupils develop high quality thinking skills and work independently through well-planned, meaningful and productive group-work activities and as a result of thoughtful questioning from the teachers. The quality of the interaction of the pupils in these tasks was often excellent. A wide range of approaches to assessment is used very effectively by most of the teachers to consolidate and reinforce learning. Where appropriate, the pupils evaluate each others' work in a very constructive and supportive manner. As a consequence of such skilful practice, the pupils' confidence, independence, self esteem and communication skills are all enhanced significantly.

The provision for the pupils in English is outstanding; in chemistry, in science at KS3 and in history it is good.

The teachers are hard-working and meet the academic, pastoral and spiritual needs of the pupils very well. A particular feature is the very strong sense of collegiality that pervades the work of the entire school.

The quality of provision for SEN is outstanding.

The pupils with SEN develop their personal, social and learning skills, develop self-confidence and take increasing responsibility for their own learning through an inclusive and supportive ethos. There are very effective links between the staff with responsibility for SEN, pastoral care and guidance; in particular, the SENCO provides good information, advice and resources across the school based on a detailed knowledge of, and concern for, the pupils. She has created very good links with external services and parents and has identified appropriate areas for further development.

4.2 The quality of the care, guidance and support of pupils is outstanding

KEY FINDINGS

The pupils are encouraged to engage purposefully with one another, to seek solutions and to develop resilience when faced with challenging situations. They respond considerately to, and are respectful of, their teachers and peers. Pupil behaviour is exemplary with a well-embedded code of conduct resulting in the absence of the need for any formal, tiered system of sanctions within the school.

The Year 8, 11 and 13 pupils settle well, through the transitions from key stage to key stage, as a result of the effective induction programmes and the support received from staff, the school council and from peer mentors.

The pupils benefit from the wide-range of opportunities available to them to accept responsibility, work independently, and participate in extra-curricular activities designed to meet specific interests. The school's annual contributions to local and global charities are outstanding.

The Vice-principal with responsibility for pastoral care provides outstanding intuitive and strategic leadership. She is very well supported by a dedicated and energetic team of year heads, form tutors and other key personnel. Professional relationships throughout the school are excellent.

The school gives very good attention to promoting healthy eating and physical activity, thereby encouraging the pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles.

4.3 The curricular provision for the pupils is very good.

At KS3, the curriculum is suitably broad and balanced. At KS4 and at post-16 the school has made very good progress in recent years in extending the curriculum offered, for example, by widening the range of appropriate courses to meet the needs and aspirations of the pupils. Currently, 17% percent of the sixth-form pupils take GCE A level courses provided as part of a collaborative arrangement with another school. The school has identified appropriately the need to increase further the range of applied courses available to the pupils.

The provision for CEIAG is outstanding.

The pupils enjoy excellent access to good quality CEIAG information and benefit greatly from the very good careers advice and guidance. At KS4, Learning for Life and Work is integrated within the taught CEIAG programme to ensure cohesive and progressive provision for the pupils from years 8 to 14. The pupils display a sound understanding of

career pathways and of the opportunities available for further study, often informed by their own research. The school has excellent links with local employers and the wider community which are used effectively to develop the pupils' skills and interests and to inform their choice of careers.

5. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.1 The leadership and management are outstanding

KEY FINDINGS

The Principal provides outstanding leadership to the whole school community. She leads by example; inspiring very high levels of confidence and respect amongst the staff and the pupils and promoting in them a sense of their own worth and a respect for others. She has a clear strategic vision for the school which is communicated effectively to all staff. Her strong personal and professional attributes are complemented well by those of her Vice-principal.

The SMT has undergone significant change over the past two years. As a consequence many of the roles and responsibilities have been redistributed to the individual team members. All of the SMT are enthusiastic and committed to developing the work of the school and have undertaken these new roles effectively. The inspection has identified examples of outstanding leadership at middle management level. Nevertheless, the SDP has prioritised additional capacity-building for the SMT and for further development of the role of all of the middle managers within the school.

The SDP processes of self-evaluation for improvement, informed by advice from a range of external agencies, are excellent. The current SDP meets fully the requirements of the School Development Plan Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005. A significant strength is the extent to which the SMT consults with all of the stakeholders; as a consequence the areas for development identified have the potential to improve the provision in the school still further. The specific action plans generated from the SDP are, in general, well-constructed but would benefit, in some instances, from having targets that are specific and measurable.

Comprehensive arrangements are in place for safeguarding children which reflect the guidance issued by the Department of Education (DE).

Given the findings of the inspection, the school meets the needs and expectations of the school community most effectively.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 In most of the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is outstanding; the quality of pastoral care is also outstanding. The school has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

- 1.1 i. School: Sacred Heart Grammar v. Date of Inspection: W/C 26/03/12
 ii. School Reference Number: 542-0076 vi. Area of Study: Standard Inspection
 iii. Age Range: 11-18
 iv. Status: Voluntary

1.2 Intake/Enrolment

School Year	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Year 8 Intake	119	122	120	123	120
Total enrolment	839	838	836	846	846

1.3 Attendance

Year 2010/11	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Average 2010/11	NI Average 2009/10
% Attendance	96.8	95.9	94.9	94.7	95.7	94	93	95	95

- 1.4 i. Total Number of Teachers: 51.289
- iii. Contact ratio (percentage of timetabled time in direct class contact): 0.704
- ii. PTR (Pupil/Teacher Ratio): 16.495
- Number of Teachers involved in Area of study (Focused only): 20

Year 2011/12	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	TOTAL
Enrolment Girls	120	123	118	121	117	121	126	846
Enrolment: Total	120	123	118	121	117	121	126	846
PTR	18.445	19.82	17.963	15.964	14.701	15.264	15.055	

- 1.5 Staying On Rate (2009/10) (Current year 13/14 as proportion of year 12 from 1/2 years previously)

Year 13	102.4	NI Av Year 13	93.9
Year 14	96.7	NI Av Year 14	86.9

1.6 Leavers' Destinations

2009/10	Year 12	NI%	Year 13/14	NI%
Total Number of Leavers	3		116	
Another School	33%	30.7	0%	1.7
Employment	33%	3	5%	3.6
Full-time Further Education	33%	54.1	2%	10.2
Full-time Higher Education	N/A	N/A	93%	80.6
Full-time Training	0%	6.5	0%	0.5
Seeking Employment/Unemployed	0%	0.7	0%	1.3
Unknown/Long Term Sick/Pregnant	0%	4.9	0%	2

GCSE EXAMINATION RESULTS

HEADLINE STANDARDS

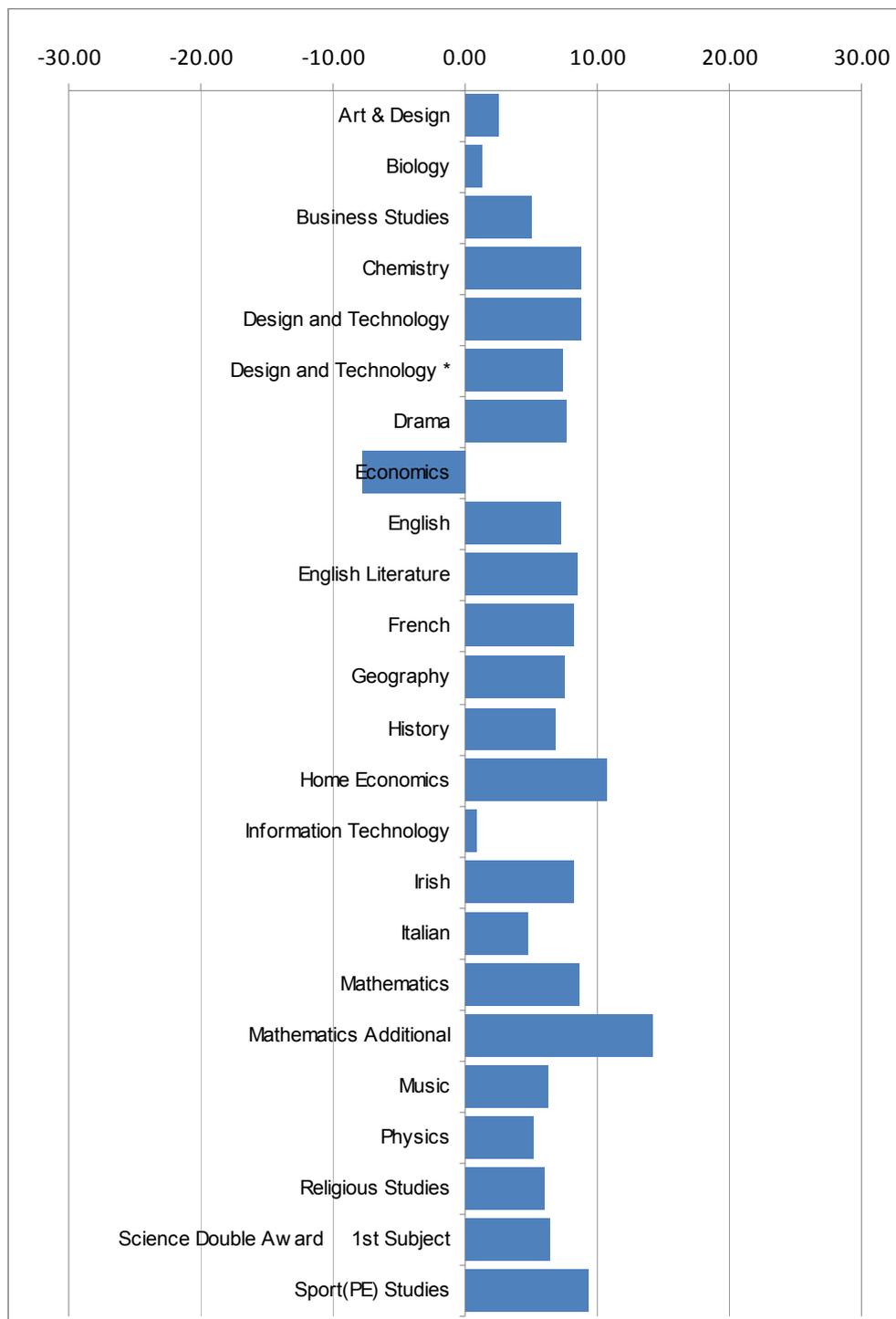
NB: The NI average for similar selective schools of pupils obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects including English and mathematics in 2011 is 90.4%

Data on Year 12 (Key Stage 4) performance

	2009	2010	2011
Percentage of Year 12 taking GCSE & Equivalentents in at least 7 subjects	99.17	98.37	98.37
Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects including English and Mathematics	98.33	97.56	97.56
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Percentage of Year 12 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 7 subjects	98.33	97.56	97.56
<i>Comparison with the NI average for similar schools in the same FSME category</i>	<i>Well above average</i>	<i>Well above average</i>	<i>Well above average</i>

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

TABLE 2 shows the **3 year average performance of each individual subject at GCSE Grades A*-B**, compared with the corresponding Northern Ireland average



GCE (A2) EXAMINATION RESULTS

HEADLINE STANDARDS

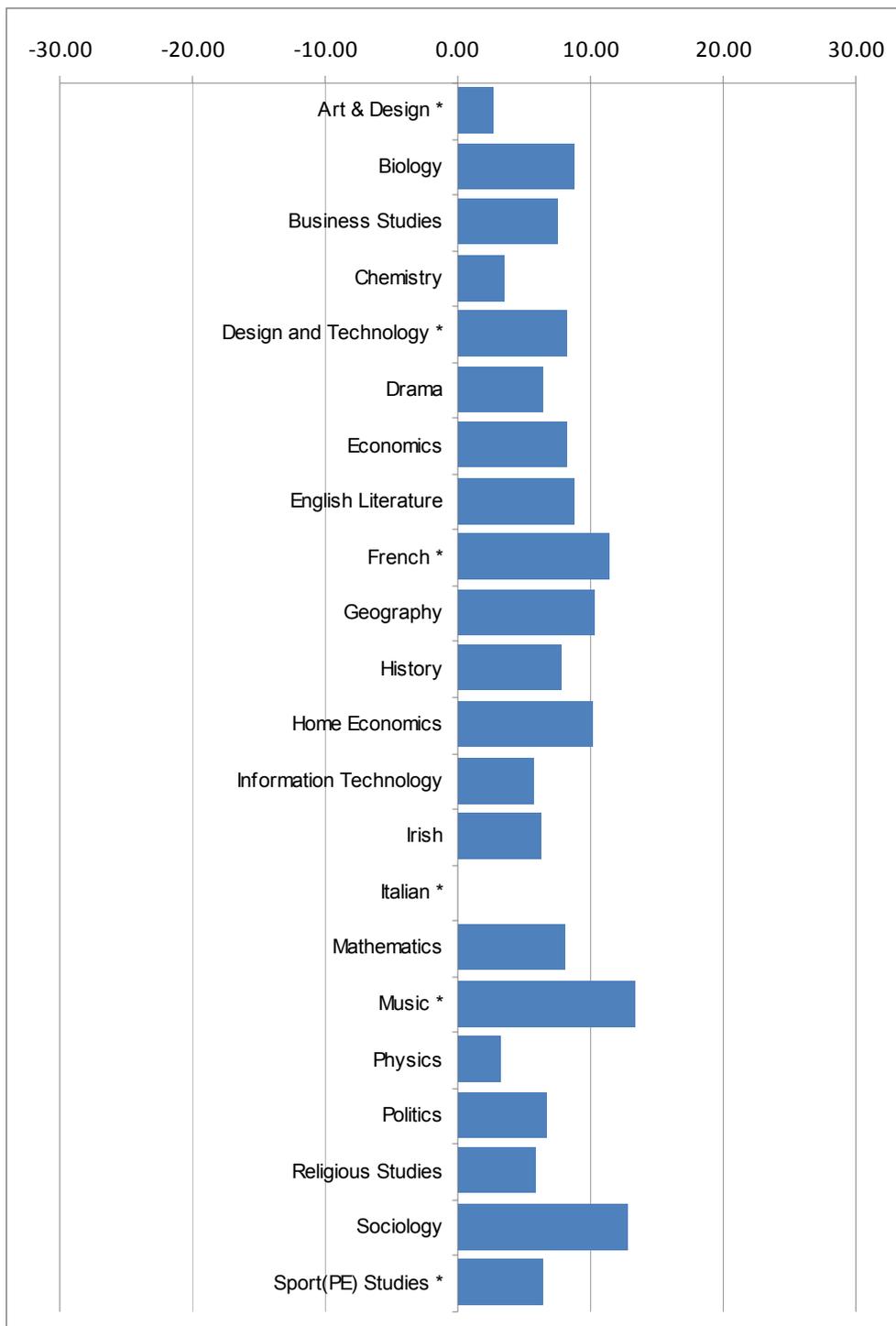
NB: The NI averages in 2011 for all schools of pupils entered for A2 level or equivalent: who achieve 3 or more grades A*-C = 76.5%

Data on Year 14 (A2) performance

	2009	2010	2011
Percentage of Year 14 taking A2 levels & Equivalents in at least 3 subjects	99.6	98.3	95.68
Percentage of Year 14 obtaining Grades C or above in at least 3 A2 levels	90	90.68	79.31
<i>Comparison with the NI average for similar schools in the same FSM category</i>	<i>Well above average</i>	<i>Well above average</i>	<i>Above average</i>

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

TABLE 4 shows the 3 year average performance of each individual subject at GCE 'A' Level Grades A*-C, compared with the corresponding Northern Ireland average



SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE AREAS UNDER FOCUS

The quality of the provision in English is outstanding.

The strengths include the:

- excellent engagement, the high quality of relationships and the mutual respect between the pupils and the teachers;
- richness of the learning experiences in language and literature, both in the formal curriculum and through extra-curricular enrichment;
- consistently very good and outstanding quality of the teaching practices observed;
- beneficial application of assessment for learning methods;
- examination results attained by the pupils in English at KS3, in GCSE English and English Literature and in A level English Literature which are all consistently above the NI average; and
- the outstanding leadership provided by the head of English together with the professionalism, collegiality and commitment of all of the teachers to continue to develop and improve their planning for learning and teaching.

The provision in history is good.

The strengths include the:

- very good working relationships between the teachers and pupils, characterised by the high expectations displayed by both pupils and staff;
- high standards attained by the pupils in public examinations;
- very good or outstanding quality of the teaching in two-thirds of the lessons observed;
- quality of the pupils' extended responses in class discussions and the high levels of critical thinking shown by the pupils as a result of the effective questioning by the teachers;
- ability of the pupils to empathise with the past and to transfer their learning to other contexts; and
- the excellent strategic vision by the recently-appointed head of department to bring about improvement with the support of the staff.

The area for improvement is:

- to review the departmental planning to ensure greater consistency in the quality of the learning experiences of all of the pupils at KS3.

The quality of the provision in chemistry in years 8-14 and in KS3 science is good.

The strengths include the:

- very good or outstanding teaching observed in just over half of the lessons, characterised particularly by activities where individuals or groups of pupils had frequent opportunities to demonstrate initiative and independence;
- very good or outstanding standards achieved in public examinations;
- good quality of the self-evaluative reports on KS3 science, biology, chemistry and physics produced for the inspection, including the sound start made on the use of quantitative and benchmarked data to track the standards which the pupils attain;
- excellent leadership of the head of chemistry who, during the time since her appointment, has identified appropriate priorities for action in the medium and longer term; and
- the detailed and accurate record of a wide range of scientific work, including the frequent use of ICT and investigative and experimental work, in a majority of the classes, with nearly all of the pupils attaining good to very good standards in a range of practical skills.

The areas for improvement are:

- the need to improve the quality of teaching and standards attained in a significant minority of the chemistry classes; and
- the need to disseminate the very good or outstanding practice already existing across all of the science department through the heads of chemistry, physics and biology working more effectively as a team to identify and disseminate improvements within a strengthened self-evaluative culture.

SCOPE AND METHOD OF THE INSPECTION

The standard inspection of Sacred Heart Grammar School focused on achievements and standards, learning and teaching, curriculum provision and on leadership and management across the school as a whole. The key questions and quality indicators which guide inspection and self-evaluation in these three aspects 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. Specialist inspectors paid particular attention to English, history, chemistry and KS3 science providing detailed oral feedback to the teachers in these areas. Detailed findings are reported in Annex 3.

The inspection also focused on the provision for pastoral care and the arrangements for child protection; the provision for pupils requiring additional support with their learning and their inclusion in all aspects of school life and on progress towards the Entitlement Framework.

The arrangements for the inspection included:

- the opportunity for the parents, teaching and support staff to complete a confidential questionnaire to the inspection;
- meetings with representatives from the governors; and
- meetings with groups of pupils from years 8, 10, 12, 13 and 14.

Questionnaire	Number issued	Number returned	Percentage returned	Number with comments
Parents	170	88	51.8	54
Teachers	54	50	92.6	20
Support Staff	50	36	72.0	6

Source: Returns from questionnaires to DE.

The returns from questionnaires sent to the teachers and the parents were positive in almost all respects; a small number of teachers and parents commented on specific matters which included limitations in communications and a few parents were concerned about the arrangements for pupils who became ill during the school day and the provision for careers education. The ETI reported to the Principal and representatives of the governors areas of concern emerging from the questionnaires and, where appropriate, these have been commented on within the report. All of the pupils with whom discussions were held during the inspection were confident, mature and considerate in their engagement with others. They valued fully the strong sense of community and caring ethos within the school and are aware of what to do if they have any concerns about their safety or well-being. The very few issues raised by the pupils have been shared with the Principal.

ACCOMMODATION

- The specialist accommodation for home economics and science is not in accordance with the Building Handbook Regulations.

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