Subject Inspection of Art
REPORT

Saint Attracta’s Community School
Tubbercurry, County Sligo
Roll number: 91512Q

Date of inspection: 4 November 2009
SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Saint Attracta’s Community School. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Art and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over one day during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and teacher, examined students’ work, and had discussions with the teacher. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and the teacher’s written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and the subject teacher. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Saint Attracta’s Community School has an enrolment of 291 males and 255 females. The school offers the following programmes: the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. Art is an optional subject on all of these programmes except the TY programme where there is a compulsory art module.

The art department is staffed by one specialist art teacher. This member of staff is very committed to providing a positive experience of art education for students. In order to benefit from the continuing professional development opportunities available for art educators at post-primary level consideration should be given to obtaining membership of the Art Teachers’ Association of Ireland.

Timetabling for Art is good, with appropriate time periods being provided to facilitate practical lessons. Art is compulsory for TY students. TY students are provided with double periods for Art which gives students a very good opportunity to experience the subject in its fullness. Some TY students choose to study Art for the full year whilst the remainder are required to participate in an art module which lasts approximately half the year.

Access to the subject is good. At the beginning of both junior cycle and senior cycle, students are asked to make their subject choices from an open menu of optional subjects. Arrangements are made by school management to ensure that students and their parents are fully informed of the implications of subject choice decisions. Students who have not previously studied Art, Craft and Design at junior cycle are supported in taking Art for senior cycle if they wish to do so. This is good practice.
The uptake of Art is low at both junior cycle and senior cycle relative to the numbers of students attending the school. Uptake levels should be monitored over time and efforts should be made to establish if there are any particular reasons as to why the subject is not in greater demand. This may reveal steps that should be taken to improve the take-up of Art in the school.

One purpose-built art room is provided for students of Art. This room is bright and spacious and includes wet and dry spaces for making work as well as adequate storage. The room is also well supplied with a wide range of resources and equipment to deliver the various art syllabuses. The room is well maintained and overall, it is a very good space for teaching and learning in Art.

The art room is also used to display students’ work. Both completed works and work in progress are regularly displayed. This helps to inspire students and to develop confidence in their artistic abilities. To further this process, it is suggested that certain works which display achievement in terms of effort and effect should be displayed using a high quality of presentation. For example, two-dimensional work should be displayed using appropriately coloured card or paper and three-dimensional work could be placed against a fabric background or on a plinth to emphasis its quality. An ‘artist of the month’ scheme could work well using these presentation techniques to help raise the profile of the subject amongst students.

Requests for consumable materials are made by the subject co-ordinator to senior management. This system appears to be working well. On the day of the evaluation sufficient materials were available to students.

A range of information and communications technology (ICT) resources is provided for the art department in the form of five desk-top computers and a digital projector. These items are very useful for teaching and learning in Art. It is noted that ICT was used during the lessons observed. This is good practice. However, there is scope for greater use of the ICT resources available. For example, digital imaging can be used to generate a bank of stimulus material and students’ completed work. There is also scope to use ICT as a resource in teaching the history and appreciation of art.

The art department makes a very significant contribution to the daily life of the school. The art department also gives very generously of its time in creating artefacts to support school events. These include sets and props for school musicals and Christmas concerts, creating posters and banners for liturgical events and the development of artefacts for Halloween parades. Extracurricular and co-curricular activities are also provided for students to enhance their experience of art and design. This wide range of activities includes taking students to see galleries, museums and historic sites as well as arranging the display of students’ work in the school for special events.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

School management provides time for planning for each subject department on an annual basis. In addition to this time, subject development planning in Art is given regular time and attention by the art department during the year. The administration and organisation of the art department has been well developed. This is good work.

To date curricular planning in Art has resulted in the identification of lists of topics and activities to be covered with year groups. This, in itself, is not sufficient to provide a directional guide for teaching and learning during the year. It is recommended that these lists be developed to include
specified learning outcomes for students for each year of the relevant art course. Learning outcomes should be linked to appropriate methodologies and set into a timeframe. Best practice would suggest that learning outcomes should also be used to guide the evaluation of students’ work on a regular basis. Such planning is necessary to ensure that teaching and learning is achieved and maintained, particularly in a mixed-ability setting. It is recommended that this work be approached in incremental stages, beginning with curriculum planning for first-year and fifth-year art lessons.

TY students are provided with a programme for Art which includes pottery, the development of stage sets and posters. In addition, drawing and painting are addressed. These plans are educationally sound but do not take advantage of the potential of TY for introducing more innovative topics to students. It is recommended that lessons be introduced to students which will expose them to concepts such as film and contemporary culture. This is a good way to help students analyse and respond to art works. Those students who have not studied Art, Craft and Design at junior cycle would benefit from having lessons which would introduce some form of art appreciation as well as the more practical lessons currently being provided.

**TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Three lessons were evaluated during the school visit; two in junior cycle and one in senior cycle. The ideas underpinning the lessons observed were good. They were educationally sound, in keeping with syllabus requirements and appropriate to the developmental stages of the students. For example, students in one of the lessons observed were making a dish for sweets or snacks decorated in a method of their own choosing.

Students in all of the lessons observed seemed happy and relaxed. The interactions observed in the classroom were generally pleasant and respectful. However, in some classes not all students were attentive and on task. This had negative effects on their class work and on their progress. Inattentiveness should be challenged in all cases. It is recommended that classroom management be reviewed to focus on strategies which encourage all students to listen when group instruction is being given. The teacher might find it helpful to use proximity management and voice control in order to refocus students when necessary.

Routines were used to begin the lesson and focus students. Generally these were good. These routines included calling the roll and encouraging students to organise their work spaces and materials. In order to firmly establish the lesson atmosphere, it is recommended that the teacher identifies clear learning outcomes to be achieved in lessons and communicates them to students. This would also help to maintain an appropriate pace of work and ensure progress throughout the lesson.

A variety of communication methods was used in the lessons observed. These included use of ICT and teacher voice. However, there is significant scope to clarify and enhance communication in the classroom. Oral communication during lessons was pleasant but, often, too soft spoken to be fully effective. The use of voice to enhance teacher presence is recommended. This includes giving instructions in a loud, clear and confident manner. Tone of voice can also be used to emphasise the importance of aspects of the lesson. It is further recommended that important information should be given from one point in the room as a matter of routine. This would signal to students the requirement to be attentive and differentiate this type of communication from those that take place between the teacher and individual students.
ICT was used during the lessons evaluated to display information. However, this resource is underused at present. ICT could be used to display the learning outcomes at the beginning of lessons, for example. This could be used during lessons as a reminder to students of their focus. Stimulus material in the form of digital imagery could also be prepared and displayed using ICT in lessons to help inspire and enthuse students.

The teaching methodology used in all of the three lessons involved a lot of monitoring and working with individual students as opposed to teaching and directing the class as a whole group. As a result, individual students had to wait their turn for direction. This approach is more suited to the senior students and has limited potential with some of the more junior class groups. It is recommended that the main teaching method should be group instruction and those individuals and small groups requiring extra help should be supported as necessary around this.

During one of the lessons a demonstration of generating lettering using imagery was carried out. The quality of the work carried out was very good. However, not all students were engaged. It is recommended that, when preparing for demonstrations, steps are taken to ensure that all students are engaged. This may involve holding a series of demonstrations for smaller groups. Demonstrations using work prepared in advance may also be useful.

In a senior-cycle craftwork lesson, some students were making posters. The process used by them in developing their work was of limited educational value. It did not, for example, focus students on the need to make accurate studies, possibly from life, before going on to use those studies to develop their final piece. It is recommended that students be given very clear guidelines on the poster-making process, which should include, research, development and realisation of their finished poster. Students should be encouraged to study stimulus material from life where possible and direct observation should be used to record visual phenomenon in a range of materials using carefully chosen approaches. These studies should then be developed to create imagery and graphic lettering for posters.

In general students are progressing to varying degrees in terms of two-dimensional work. Some of the students’ drawings observed were very good. The use of paint is still an area for development for a number of students.

Students at all levels of development are skilled in the production of ceramic artefacts. The ceramic artefacts observed during the evaluation were bold and strong. Ceramics is regularly taught to students and the art department makes good use of the kiln to give students a thorough and authentic experience of the craft. This is very good.

**ASSESSMENT**

During the school year summative and formative assessments take place in the art department. Formative assessment during practical assignments is used to encourage students to find ways of improving their work and performance. Formal summative tests take place at midterm, Christmas and at the end of the summer term. However, more frequent assessment is required to focus students on the need for consistent application to their work. This assessment should be a combination of formal assessment conducted by the teacher and critical evaluation, peer review and self review. It is further suggested that targets be provided for students, perhaps on a monthly basis, to ensure that they develop an expectation of ongoing progress for themselves.
A good variety of assessment methods is used, including the assessment of practical work, portfolio assessment, classroom activities and homework. Students are informed of their progress through school reports and oral feedback. Parents are kept well informed of their children’s progress through school reports, the students’ journal and parent-teacher meetings.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The art department has strong aspirations for a very positive experience of art education for students.
- Whole-school support for Art is very good.
- The art department makes a very significant contribution to the daily life of the school and provides a wide range of extracurricular and co-curricular activities for students of Art.
- The administration and organisation of the art department has been well developed.
- The interactions between students and between students and teachers were generally pleasant and respectful.
- The ideas underpinning the lessons observed were good.
- Students at all levels of development are skilled in the production of ceramic artefacts.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- The lists of topics planned for students should be developed to include specified learning outcomes for students for each year of the relevant art course.
- There is significant scope to clarify and enhance communication in the classroom; this should include better use of voice to enhance teacher presence.
- Stimulus material in the form of digital imagery should be prepared and displayed using ICT in lessons to help inspire and enthuse students.
- Group instruction should be used as the main teaching methodology and those individuals and small groups requiring extra help should be helped as necessary around this.
- Students should be given very clear guidelines on the steps needed in their work to achieve the particular lesson’s intended learning outcomes.
- More frequent assessment is required to focus students on the need for consistent effort in their application to their work.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the teacher of Art and with the principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

Published September 2010
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management welcomes this report and expresses it’s appreciation to the inspector. The Board would like to thank the teacher for contributing to the process. It welcomes, in particular, the positive comments in relation to teaching and learning.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

Many of the recommendations have already been implemented or are being worked on with a view to their early implementation.