

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Art
REPORT

Belvedere College S.J.
Great Denmark Street, Dublin 1
Roll number: 60520P

Date of inspection: 5 February 2010



A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ART

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Belvedere College. 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 teachers, examined students' work, and had discussions with the teachers. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and teachers' written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and subject teachers. 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

Belvedere College has an enrolment of 975 males. The school offers the following programmes: the Junior Certificate, a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme, and the established Leaving Certificate. Art is an optional subject on all of these programmes.

Whole-school support for the subject is very good. This includes the provision of appropriate periods for Art on the timetable such as double periods. The school provides an annual budget for equipment and materials which ensures that students have what is required to complete their work in the subject.

Students making subject choice decisions are provided with an open choice of optional subjects in junior cycle and senior cycle. This represents best practice. The school makes thorough arrangements so that students and their parents are provided with sufficient information to make accurate subject choices.

The art department is staffed by four specialist art teachers. It is good to note that these teachers regularly engage in continuous professional development regarding visual art and general education. This is very supportive of the work in the classroom and is encouraged. The school's art department is co-ordinated on a rotating basis. This good practice facilitates the building of capacity and the art education team's professional development. The role of co-ordinator involves meeting with senior management in relation to subject improvement planning and reviewing assessment and achievement. Time for art department meetings are provided at the beginning of term at staff meetings. Minutes of these meetings were made available during the evaluation. More frequent informal meetings are also held to address the on-going work of the department. This is good practice.

Each art teacher has been allocated one of the four art rooms in the school. These rooms are not purpose-built. Teachers in the art department have identified the individual potential of the rooms and have added facilities for students of Art as appropriate. These include studio spaces and the addition of exhibition space for exemplars. This is very good work and is encouraged. The art rooms are tidy and very well-organised and teachers are commended for their diligence to this part of their work. Some of the rooms are, however, dark and in need of repainting. It is recommended that they be repainted white as the opportunity presents.

Art enjoys a very positive profile in the school. The art department has a very good policy of celebrating students' achievements in Art by exhibiting work in the art rooms and in a purpose-built display area in a communal part of the school as well as on the school's website. This is a very good way for the whole school community to appreciate students' work and also allows students of Art to fully experience the curation of an exhibition. It is noted that all of the work displayed was presented to a very high standard. This high quality presentation contributes to the general appearance of the work, is very good art educational practice and supports students' confidence in their abilities.

The art department has access to a range of information and communications technology (ICT) equipment including Moodle, the internet, digital projectors, printers, colour photocopier and audio visual equipment. In the one art room where there is no digital projector, consideration should be given to installing one as the opportunity presents. A digital projector in this room would be a most useful resource in the teaching and learning of Art. In addition to the ICT facilities available to students, the school has a well-stocked library. This is very useful for the research-based nature of the subject.

A wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities are provided for students. This includes the design and execution of artefacts to celebrate and support school events such as TY exhibitions, graduation evenings, musicals and plays. The art department is heavily involved in the design and production of images for the 'Belvederian,' the school's yearbook. The art department also facilitates students in creating more permanent pieces for the school in collaboration with professional artists. This allows students to see at first hand how their designs can be realised in materials such as stained glass. The school also invites practising artists to give lectures and workshops at the school which offers students the opportunity to see how artists work in 'real life'. The art department has an on-going tradition of students choosing to pursue art at third level. This is an indication of the high levels of interest and enthusiasm for the subject that students develop in the school.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

During the evaluation an art department plan was presented. It is good practice that the art department has developed a mission statement specifically for their work. Amongst other aims it aspires to nurture the creative spirit of each individual and to encourage students to investigate, question, document and interpret the world around them. During the evaluation the inspector noted that students had a very positive attitude to the subject and that they were very aware of the influence of art, craft and design in their environment. Students were able to discuss these matters in a confident and capable manner with a genuine enthusiasm for the subject.

The art department plan also includes useful documents on classroom management, the contents of lesson plans and notes on teaching. The schemes of work presented for each year group broadly outlined the learning activities planned for students. It is plain from the evidence

provided in the classroom that teachers plan in more detail for their teaching work than is recorded in the art department plan. It is recommended that as the plan develops this more detailed planning should be reflected in the document and that learning outcomes should be clearly stated for each learning activity. It is further suggested that this work should begin with planning for Art in senior cycle. Upon completion, the plan should be available to the whole art team for reference. This more detailed approach to planning should then be extended to include plans for the TY programme and Art in junior cycle.

The art department developed a subject improvement plan for 2009/10. The individual areas for development were divided into short-term and longer-term plans for the subject and were entirely in the spirit of extending art education opportunities for students. During the evaluation it was noted that a number of these plans such as developing the art link on the school's website had been implemented. This is very good work which illustrates the reflective approach adopted by the art teachers to their subject.

During the evaluation the art department described their plans to introduce authentic firing ceramics to the school. The provision of this equipment will enable the art department to offer an invaluable learning experience to students that cannot be replicated by any other means. This would be a very welcome addition to the repertoire of art educational experiences offered to students and represents good long term planning.

The TY plan for Art contains a commendably wide range of valuable learning experiences for students. In addition to the regular art experiences in two dimensions and three dimensions such as drawing, painting, print and construction, students at Belvedere College also have the opportunity to design and make a working guitar and also to design and make silver jewellery. These are very valuable learning experiences for students which include forward planning, perseverance and the acquisition of very high levels of skills. The work observed during the evaluation shows that students achieve very high levels of proficiency in their chosen areas. As students of Art in the school are very much aware of the influence of art, craft and design on their daily lives, it is suggested that a module of contemporary art appreciation be developed for the TY programme. Suggestions for this could include a review of contemporary culture with specific reference as to how visual culture is used in the media.

One of the plans for the TY group focussed on the development of design and execution skills using synthetic clay. It was noted that this plan was too long. The same level of progress could be made in a shorter time. The plan should be reviewed and steps should be taken to ensure that the work is of appropriate duration and challenge.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

One lesson in junior cycle and two lessons in senior cycle were visited as part of this evaluation. These lessons included topics such as art history and appreciation as well practical lessons. The quality of teaching and learning during this inspection was found to be very good.

The atmosphere in lessons was good and in some lessons very good. The majority of students were enthused by their work and all students were well-behaved. Students were encouraged and affirmed regularly during lessons. The very positive classroom environment provided by the art department facilitated and encouraged students to openly discuss and express their ideas about their work. This is very good practice.

Communication by teachers in the lessons observed was very good. The good practice of sharing the learning outcome was observed in all of the lessons. High quality demonstrations were used to illustrate points, to explain concepts and to show students what to do next. For example, in one of the lessons, the teacher had brought in a collection of jewellery from which students could identify examples of filigree and other metalwork techniques to be studied. Encouraging students to be observant in this way is a very good strategy. Teachers' verbal delivery of information and instruction was pleasant and informative. This helped to keep students focussed and also helped to maintain a good sense of achievement as they progressed through each stage of lessons. In all cases teachers shared very high quality information relevant to the topics being studied.

In one of the senior cycle lessons observed, the majority of students found the assigned task too easy. As the lesson progressed, the level of challenge increased so as to allow students to be more appropriately challenged, however, the pace remained slow. It is important that students are sufficiently challenged from the outset so that the lesson progresses at a suitable pace and so that students experience an appropriate sense of achievement.

In all of the lessons observed, the structures of lessons were conducive to a progressive and ordered learning environment. Elements such as roll call and the implementation of classroom routines set the scene for each lesson. Where necessary, students were asked to relocate in the classroom so that they had the necessary space to carry out their work. This is good.

The main teaching methodology used was group tuition. Differentiation was addressed by supporting students and small groups as the work progressed. This is good practice.

The students' work observed during the evaluation showed that students are acquiring a good level of skills in a very wide range of disciplines. Observational drawing including line and tone is strong across all year groups and is a particular strength of the students' work at senior cycle. In general the students' completed artwork is quite expressive and it is clear from the visual references used that the expressive qualities of the work are important to the students. Particularly at senior cycle, the work is reflective of the developmental stages of the students, their interests and personalities. This indicates that students are confident to use their visual skills to communicate and is very much in the spirit of good art education practice.

Whilst it was clear that generally students are very adept at understanding and manipulating imagery, there is scope for students to develop their use of graphic typography in poster making. There is a need to review the process by which posters are made so that students have further scope to explore the visual potential of the words being used. The reports of the chief examiners in Art as published periodically by the State Examinations Commission should be consulted to help students achieve to their potential in this area.

Very good imaginative work, clearly inspired by art history, was observed in students' folders across all levels of development. This is a very good way of familiarising students with important artefacts from art history and is a very appropriate way for students to develop their personal interests in this area of the syllabuses.

A very good range of three-dimensional works created by students was observed during the evaluation. A wide variety of materials is available to students. This allows students more flexibility to choose materials appropriate to the desired outcome and finish. The subject matter chosen by students is very eclectic. This shows that students are being made aware of a very wide range of influences and is good practice.

ASSESSMENT

A range of assessment methods are used in the art department. These include formal tests at mid-term, Christmas, Easter and summer as well as continual assessment through out the year. The methods used to monitor students' work are varied to maximise students' potential for self-assessment. Students' progress and achievement is communicated to students during class time and to their parents at parent- teacher meetings and using the students' journal. This is good work. Consideration should be given to establishing agreement among the art teachers regarding how frequently students' progress should be recorded.

Some good assessment work sheets have been developed for students. In one of the lessons visited a teacher-generated examination paper was used with students. This is a very good way to assess learning and the use of specifically designed examination papers is encouraged.

The art department reports that students' academic achievements are celebrated using a merit system. There is a specific award for excellence in visual art. This is very good practice. The art department also monitors students' achievement in the certificate examinations in order to identify trends and to inform planning. This is good work.

Homework was assigned to students in all of the lessons observed. In each case the homework was appropriate and clearly explained to students to maximise its educational potential. Homework and assessments are carefully recorded by the teachers to provide a comprehensive profile of students' progress.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Whole-school support for the subject is very good.
- Teachers have managed and enhanced the facilities available to them for Art very effectively.
- Art enjoys a very positive profile in the school and a wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities is provided for students of Art.
- The art department devised a very good plan for progress for the year 2009/2010 and has successfully implemented a number of developments.
- The quality of teaching and learning during this inspection was found to be good.
- The very positive classroom environment provided in the art department encouraged students to openly discuss and express their ideas about their work.
- The students' work observed during the evaluation showed that students are acquiring a good level of skills in a very wide range of disciplines. Students also displayed a very positive attitude towards the subject.
- Some very good assessment practices are in place to monitor students' progress.

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

- A digital projector should be installed in the art room without one, as the opportunity presents.

- The art department plan should better reflect the detailed planning for lessons that takes place and as the plan develops learning outcomes should be included.
- The current plan for TY ceramics using synthetic clay should be reviewed.
- There is a need to review the process by which posters are made so that students have further scope to explore the visual potential of the words being used.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the teachers 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.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

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

A digital projector has been purchased and will be installed this term.

The key recommendations from the Inspection Report are reflected in the Subject Improvement Plan for 2010/11.