

An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Art
REPORT**

**Coláiste Iognáid Rís
Naas
Co. Kildare**

Roll number: 61710C

Date of inspection: 26 November 2010



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ART

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Coláiste Iognáid Rís, Naas. 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 of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

A month before the art inspection, the art department had moved back into a purpose-built room on the top floor of the new multilevel school extension. This room has a customised 3D area, complete with kiln. There is superb natural light and the room is spacious, with ample worktops and sinks. This accommodation provides excellent physical conditions for teaching and learning. A ceiling-mounted projection facility and a computer and projection screen have been included in the new room and management has arranged that help and familiarisation with the information and communication technology (ICT) equipment is available in the school when needed. All this has already had a positive effect on the range and quality of the students' learning opportunities. It is recommended that some thought now be given to planning for the maximisation of the new art facilities, as these all should be focussed on the personal artistic development and academic advancement of all students who have taken up Art as a curricular option.

Access to the subject is good. Students with special needs are taught in an integrated mixed-ability context. Timetabling for the subject is supportive of the courses taught. The principal recognises that Art, because it is materials and equipment dependant, to be properly run and educationally valuable, needs adequate levels of funding and this has been the fortunate condition of the school's art department to date. It is commendable that the effectiveness of the subject has been so well nurtured in this regard, and the careful specification of the needs of the art department is evident in the design and fit out of the new facility.

Co-curricular and extracurricular activities enhance the classroom experiences of the art students. The art department has developed a relationship with local art galleries and the students are always welcome as a result to view works on show there, an excellent opportunity for them to develop their aesthetic awareness and a strong support to their artistic growth. Academic attainment in Art, as demonstrated by the state examinations, has reflected well on the whole-school support given to the subject.

Art department staff are readily released from classroom duties and suitable substitutes employed in order to facilitate staff to attend inservice courses.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The art department has a documented subject plan. This is effective for managing the topics, media and assignments that are covered in the delivery of courses. Separate lesson plans were provided for the classes seen during the inspection. In the planning for course delivery for all year groups, it is recommended that more elaborated learning outcomes are devised and added to the documents. Learning outcomes should be differentiated for students of differing aptitude and motivation levels. In planning for assessment, these learning outcomes should be the basis for assessment criteria

Because class-contact time is limited for Transition Year (TY) students, careful planning for TY homework on a term-by-term basis should be developed, so that time-consuming activities, such as calligraphy, lettering, collage, or 3D, can be initiated in class and continued as a long-term task that is designed to be completed over several weeks at home.

Planning for in-depth appreciation of art and design should aim to get TY students to work pro-actively using texts and imagery, from historical and contemporary sources. Review of the current TY plan, with an emphasis on streamlining it in relation to skills development and learning outcomes, is recommended.

First-year planning should frontload an emphasis on appreciation of art and design. Planning overall for junior cycle needs to move away from over-emphasis on secondary sources and work from imagination, observation and primary sources should be re-established as the norm. Working from observation on one hand, and imagination on the other, should be more heavily weighted in planning the year's work, and the manipulation of secondary sources given less space and emphasis in the students' process of ideas generation, image development and artefact making.

Planning for the specific use of ICT should be integrated into the documentation as the department's expertise in it grows. Strategies for encouraging students to engage with the world of art and design through ICT could valuably be devised, in order that their learning opportunities are maximised in a broad and balanced way.

The new kiln provided recently will shortly be commissioned and it is recommended that it be used initially for the firing of small modelled pieces, without glaze, until the skills for standard pottery techniques are, over time, developed. The potential of the kiln to diversify the students' experience and practice of sculpture should be planned for so that these possibilities have at least been trialled in the current school year.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Already the surroundings provided by the newly-built art room have enhanced the students' learning experience, which is being consciously exploited by the art department to create a good and vibrant learning environment. The Wicklow hills are now seen from the room and the teacher has been drawing attention to the play of light on these, and comparisons made with the paintings

of Paul Henry. This is very good practice. It is recommended that such enriching approaches are further linked into the students own artefact-making assignments over the long term.

All aspects of the learning environment are good. Students get individual attention as well as very organised and competent group teaching. Good communication was apparent throughout the lessons and in informal conversations before and after the class periods between teacher and students. A caring, and supportive ambience typifies the art department's approach to course delivery, and a consciousness of students' strengths and challenges is to the fore in teacher-student interaction. The physical surroundings were tidy and well managed, as were the storage and archiving of artefacts, portfolios, resources and materials. A small library of books was available in the classroom, and this allows recourse to visual-art culture during work on assignments and exercises and for planning projects.

The full transition into the new art room is not yet complete: when it is, it is recommended that strategies are implemented for bringing visual-arts imagery and culture more prevalently to the fore, to provide a more integrated focus on this aspect of art and design learning that aims to extend the breath and balance of students' experience of these central dimensions of art education.

The sixth-year history of art lesson was delivered verbally and students had their text books open and took notes in their copybooks as the class progressed, in a detailed and conscientious way. The topic was Irish high crosses; the students displayed a good grasp of the stylistic evolution of these. It is recommended that the new potential of the department's ICT is used in a habitual and focussed way for delivering history of art, allowing for a visually rich approach to be added to the current verbal one. It is further recommended that there would be a focus on high crosses in the Naas hinterland. There is also a need to get students of higher aptitude to extend their repertoire of the experience of artefacts beyond the textbook. Finding ways of using ICT to encourage some increased increment of self-directed learning is recommended, as a motivational tool for enhanced personal engagement for all abilities. During this lesson, students participated in the discussion in a positive and engaged way.

The appreciation of art course component could valuably be introduced to students at the start of fifth year to allow a basis for engagement with visual culture that would support their learning of the more overtly historical material later on. It is recommended that the sequencing of the art-history component is reviewed and that the appreciation component is delivered in a focussed way during the earlier part of fifth year in order that the skills of perception and aesthetic sensitivity are developed in advance, as a basis for learning the overtly historical material later in the course. A list of key technical words and other vocabulary, specific to the history and appreciation course, should be prepared and displayed as these are encountered in the lessons during the school year, so that these can be revised and reviewed regularly by the whole class group. Similarly, a timeline should also be prepared and displayed, if possible with an input by the students, in order that students get a feeling for the occurrence of the artists, architects and styles within the chronology of the centuries.

As a general principle, the art department should move forward by seeking to change practices around the use of secondary sources in both junior and senior cycles, and it is recommended that strategies are now devised for this purpose. Good painting was seen in the third-year class and the skills and confidence students had attained in this demanding medium is commended.

As many of the students who elect for the TY programme have not studied art before and have therefore a limited exposure to it, skills building in artistic and aesthetic matters needs to be seen

as a key aim. TY students should receive more intense exposure to art media, drawing media and techniques, and a broadly-based grounding in visual culture. Learning outcomes for the above components of the course should be devised.

TY is offered as a year-long course, not a module, for two class period a week. It is recognised that the time allocated is tight, especially where skills need to be developed. While the time every week is limited, cumulatively over the whole year, TY students have significant exposure to Art and therefore it is a good opportunity to develop art and design skills and sensitivity, both cultural and perceptual. The development of graphic confidence in several media should be an overall aim of the year, along with development of appreciation of art and design skills. Through these dimensions of the subject, students' perceptual skills should be an unconscious focus of attention in the delivery of their learning assignments.

For junior cycle students, support studies should be conceptualised, for the purpose of developing current practice in the art department, as the appreciation of art and design at an age-appropriate level. From early in first year, in-class and homework assignments need to further build on this element of their learning programme.

The first-year scrapbooks and second-year archives revealed that the many exercises around the art elements had been done; this is commendable and has given students a basic introduction to the structural elements of art making. This formal introduction should be supported by a range of assignments that direct the students to creativity through a range of expressive and imaginative approaches to these art elements

ASSESSMENT

Skilful questioning was used in the history of art lesson to ascertain recall from previous related lessons. In order to further develop this good approach, it is recommended that the *Assessment for Learning* (AfL) materials on the website of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) are used. Too early a recourse to the State Examinations Commission (SEC) examination papers and marking schemes is to be avoided in the earlier part of the courses taught, in favour of a strong emphasis on formative assessment.

There is a good culture of homework, and these assignments are commented upon, marked and graded. The development of long-term home-work practices has been discussed above and should be considered as a development of existing conscientious practice.

Formal assessments take place throughout the school at key times in the school year and the results of these are communicated to parents and guardians. Good records of outcomes are kept in the art department as are all assessments and marks given for class tests and assignments. It is recommended that some form of easily operated self assessment is devised for use by students themselves, as discussed during the inspection.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- A customised art room has been recently provided in the school's newly built multi-storey block and this has already had a positive impact on the quality and range of students' learning opportunities.

- The art department is well supported by management, and its contribution to the academic and cultural life of the school, along with the personal development opportunities it provides to students of all aptitudes, is recognised.
- The art department is highly organised and effectively run. There is a good learning atmosphere, and students' effort and achievements are affirmed. Students with special needs are taught in an integrated mixed-ability context.
- Good painting was seen in the third-year class and the skills and confidence students had attained in this demanding medium is commended.
- Delivery of courses is underpinned by a well-organised and ordered physical environment.
- All aspects of the learning environment are good and students get individual attention as well as very organised and competent group teaching.

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

- Review of the current TY plan, with an emphasis on streamlining it in relation to skills development and learning outcomes, is recommended.
- Planning for the specific use of ICT should be integrated into the documentation as the department's expertise in it grows.
- It is recommended that the new potential of the department's ICT is used in a habitual and focussed way for delivering history of art, allowing for a visually rich approach to be added to the current verbal one.
- As a general principle, the art department should plan for and change practices around the use of secondary sources in both junior and senior cycles. It is recommended that strategies are now devised for this purpose.

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