

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Music
REPORT

St Joseph's Secondary School
Miltown Malbay, County Clare
Roll number: 62010C

Date of inspection: 18 October 2011



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 MUSIC**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	18 October 2011
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- All lessons were characterised by a warm atmosphere and mutual respect.
- There is a good range of resources, including information and communication technology, (ICT) most of which is used effectively.
- Significant efforts have been made to promote Music as a curricular subject.
- There is a considerable gender imbalance with no boys currently studying Music for the certificate examinations.
- There is good subject department planning which is regularly reviewed.
- The challenge of teaching fifth and sixty year music students in one group is being handled well.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Efforts should be made to ensure that performing, composing and listening are integrated in every lesson.
 - The 'sound before symbol' approach should be consistently utilised to allow students experience a more meaningful exploration of the parameters of music.
 - A collaborative learning environment which allows for more peer-to-peer interaction and fewer teacher-led activities is recommended in all lessons.
 - Ways to address the significant gender imbalance should be explored.
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INTRODUCTION

St Joseph's Secondary School is a co-educational voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of the Catholic Education, An Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). The school has a current enrolment of 242 students. Music is available as an optional subject for both the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations with option bands generated from student preference for both programmes. All students study Music in the optional Transition Year (TY) programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- There was a good rapport between the students and the teacher in a secure, enthusiastic and work-orientated atmosphere. Students are motivated, demonstrate an interest in the subject and during the evaluation participated very well in the learning process.
- Questioning to named students was observed and was used to draw on students' previous knowledge of a topic and aid the introduction of and subsequent broadening of that topic. Questioning, which ascertained the level of student retention in terms of the more cognitive areas of musical understanding, was also observed. Frequently, appropriate links were made with the musical features that the students outlined when answering these questions. This is good practice.
- When new material was being introduced, the teacher mostly relied on clear explanations and description. These activities were almost exclusively teacher-led with few opportunities being provided where students were responsible for generating active participation. It is recommended that these strategies be expanded in order to minimise teacher-led activities and to encourage students towards more self-directed and autonomous learning. A more collaborative learning environment, which would allow for more peer-to-peer interaction and fewer teacher-led activities in lessons, is thus recommended.
- In conjunction with the above, when new concepts and content were introduced, there was also a tendency to approach concepts by providing all the information first and then introducing the sounds. It is recommended that the 'sound before symbol' approach be explored to allow students experience a more meaningful exploration of the parameters of music.
- Although the coursework is well addressed, it is recommended that more integration of the three elements of the syllabus be developed to ensure a better balance between performing, listening and composing. This would ensure that opportunities to reinforce musical concepts and to encourage students to think musically are never wasted.
- In the main, the available resources were used appropriately in an integrated way to support the teaching and learning of music. It is recommended that ways in which ICT resources could be used even more effectively as teaching tools be explored. This is particularly true of strategies which would allow for more interactive engagement by the students.
- Some good use of assessment for learning (AfL) strategies was observed during the evaluation. Students' work is checked regularly by the teacher, both to monitor standards of work completed and to ensure that all relevant work is filed and stored appropriately. It

was good to note that constructive comments were provided to enable better learning and improvement.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- While extracurricular music activities have always remained strong, Music as a subject declined in recent years. A concerted effort was made by all members of the school community to promote Music and noticeable progress has been made in its re-establishment on the school's curriculum.
- Although numbers are small, the department is growing and the awareness of music as a subject is being constantly heightened. This is positive, but despite an almost balanced gender breakdown in the school, the proportion of girls taking Music is significantly higher. At present, the only boys studying Music are in the TY group where the subject is compulsory. This gender imbalance is regrettable and thus further exploration into ways of encouraging a higher uptake of Music by boys is recommended.
- Given the school's location there is an understandably strong tradition of Irish traditional music which permeates all aspects of music education in a positive way. This, along with the attractive range of extracurricular activities available to the students, raises the profile of Music and it also complements the curricular activity going on in the school.
- Timetabled provision for Music is in line with syllabus guidelines and there is an appropriate spread of contact time for individual class groups throughout the week. It is good that there are a sufficient number of double periods in all year groups to facilitate practical work.
- The department has a newly refurbished room which is well resourced. However, it does have an awkward design in that it is very long and narrow. The layout of the room should be carefully planned and designed in order to maximise the available space and to ensure flexibility for a range of music teaching and learning settings.
- The music teacher has availed of some opportunities for continuing professional development and is a member of the Post-Primary Music Teachers' Association. Attendance at its meetings allows the teacher to keep abreast of all information pertaining to music education at second level, to keep up to date with ongoing curricular innovation and to network with other music teachers thus preventing professional isolation.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- There is evidence of very good planning for the development of Music. Extensive work has gone into the creation of a comprehensive subject department folder for Music
- It is clear that much thought has been given to surmounting the challenge of combining the fifth-year and sixth-year students into one class group. Planning to optimise the learning opportunities for both groups is thorough and effective.
- It was also good to note that a review procedure has been built into these plans.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and subject teacher at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management of the school 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.

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 the 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

The Board will implement the recommendations of the report.