Subject Inspection of MUSIC
REPORT

Laurel Hill Secondary School
Limerick City
Roll number: 64260M

Date of inspection: 29 March 2011
REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN MUSIC

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

- Very good standards of teaching and learning employing appropriate musical practice, and a positive classroom atmosphere were significant aspects of the lessons observed during the visit.
- Music has a good profile in the school through its range of curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular activities.
- Students were motivated and had a positive attitude towards Music.
- A well-resourced music teaching area exists, and is used appropriately and effectively in an integrated way to support the teaching and learning of Music.
- Planning to date is good with comprehensive long-term and medium schemes of work

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Assessment for Learning (AfL) objectives should be incorporated into lessons to ensure students’ ownership of their own learning.
- Strategic planning for the effective use of the new information and communication technology (ICT) resources to include any suitable training for the teachers should be advanced.
- Subject planning should include consideration of student learning strategies and the inclusion of more active learning methodologies, and could be developed further by documenting planned learning outcomes.
INTRODUCTION
Laurel Hill Secondary School is a girls’ voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of the Faithful Companions of Jesus. The school has a current enrolment of 579. Music is available as an optional subject for both the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations. First year students choose their subjects for Junior Certificate prior to entry. All students have modules of all optional subjects in the compulsory Transition Year programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- A high standard of teaching and learning was evident. A collaborative learning environment allowing constructive and productive peer interaction and purposeful group work was observed, where the teachers guided students through various stages and facilitated a stimulating and challenging music-learning environment.

- The teachers used the students’ strengths to maximise the learning opportunities. The good teaching observed was characterised by engaging and motivating the wide range of abilities of the students through well-structured and varied activities.

- All students were involved in meaningful music-making activities. Effective use was made of the classroom space and, notably, correct posture was insisted upon regardless of levels. Students were very familiar with these procedures and moved around the room appropriately as required by the activity taking place.

- The music teachers created a positive learning environment through effective organisation and management of learning activities. Students responded very well to this positive climate for learning and participated with enthusiasm wherever challenging opportunities were presented. There was a good level of student engagement in lessons seen, and students’ contributions to class discussions were valued, with praise used effectively to acknowledge their efforts. Effective questioning to named students was employed to evaluate prior learning and to reinforce recently learnt subject matter.

- Throughout many lessons student knowledge and experience were used to support learning wherever possible, and this was broadened and expanded through detailed questioning, explanation, clarification and encouragement from the teachers. Information was presented with a high degree of clarity and enthusiasm and very skilful teacher explanation.

- Students’ folders and copybooks were very well organised and generally neat in appearance. These contained a range of materials and coursework, and good organisational habits are established. These are a significant means of support for the less able student. Students’ work is checked regularly by the teachers, both to monitor standards of work completed and to ensure that all relevant work is filed and stored appropriately.

- It is good to note that students frequently receive comments and words of encouragement and guidance on their assessments. In keeping with the philosophy underpinning the principles of AfL, at this stage it would be timely to organise assessment strategies which would help develop students as independent learners and allow them take ownership of their own learning. This could also help build up an awareness of individual students’ musical competencies balanced in terms of examination requirements and overall musical development.
**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- The school authorities are very supportive with regard to provision and whole-school support for the subject. Timetable provision for Music is in line with syllabus guidelines. There is an appropriate class spread of contact time throughout the week along with a sufficient number of double periods in all year groups to facilitate practical work.

- There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities including choirs, an Irish traditional group and an orchestra. This variety helps to raise the profile of Music in the school and is a significant contributor to raising awareness of other school activities.

- A specialist music room which is spacious, bright and acoustically satisfactory provides an effective learning environment and is suitably resourced. This room has desks laid out in traditional style but the lightweight furniture allows for efficient, flexible seating to be set up to deal with all types of music teaching settings. Access to the computer room is also facilitated and plans are underway to enhance the ICT resources by providing a range in the music room.

- The music teachers avail of any opportunities for continuing professional development (CPD) that arise and are members of the Post-Primary Music Teachers’ Association (PPMTA). It is suggested that particular attention is paid to any CPD that arises in the area of ICT given the planned expansion of this area in the music department.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Comprehensive programmes of work, scheduling the topics to be covered, were presented. Subject planning outlining the broad plan for each class group, included a summary of work completed, assessment sheets and worksheets and an organised and comprehensive stock of support material suitable for all levels. There was evidence of long-term curriculum planning for the integration of the three areas of performing, composing and listening, and clear procedures for record keeping and reporting were outlined. It is recommended that the subject plan be expanded to include schemes reflecting a purposeful sequencing of material with suggested learning outcomes and appropriate specific music-teaching methodologies. In addition the inclusion of a section for evaluation and review would be appropriate. This will provide a useful guide for future planning in the subject.

- Strategic planning for the inclusion of the new ICT resources to maximise their effectiveness in the classroom would be in order.

- The majority of students opt for higher level in the certificate examinations and their attainment and achievement are high. Practical elements are continually assessed and students also experience practical assessments similar to those encountered in the certificate examinations. These methods allow for careful monitoring of a student’s progress, provide sound guidelines for performance in the certificate examinations, and are indicative of the commitment of the teachers to helping all students achieve their potential in Music.

- In all lessons observed, clear objectives were evident, there was continuity from previous lessons and appropriate resources and stimuli were utilised. In general, a good level of planning for performing was evident in the prior preparation of relevant materials such as
sheet music, accompaniments, worksheets, and audio and visual resources. This indicates that short-term planning is at a satisfactory level.

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