An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Art
REPORT

Saint Mary’s College
Ballysadare, County Sligo
Roll number: 65130E

Date of inspection: 26 February 2010
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ART

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Saint Mary’s College, Ballysadare. 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 subject teacher. 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

St Mary’s College has an enrolment of 222 males and 136 girls. The school offers the following programmes: the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational programme (LCVP). Art is an optional subject on all of these programmes except for the TY programme. In 2009/10 Art was provided as a module over five weeks in the third term. School management indicated during the evaluation that it is hoped to include Art on the TY timetable for 2010/11. This is to be encouraged as Art is very well placed to fit the aspirations and intentions of the TY programme. Timetabling for Art is generally very good with double periods being provided where possible to facilitate practical lessons.

The art department is very well established and plays an important role in the daily life of the school. One specialist art teacher is responsible for the department in the school. This teacher participates in relevant professional development courses and accesses the subject-specific support available through membership of the Art Teachers’ Association of Ireland. This is good work.

All art lessons are taught to mixed-ability groups. Students choose Art from an open menu of subjects at both junior cycle and senior cycle. Students and their parents are well-informed by the school of the consequences of students’ subject choices. This is good practice. The numbers of students taking Art in both junior cycle and senior cycle are good.

The art department is very well-organised and maintained. A dedicated purpose-built room has been allocated to the department. This facility has been developed into a very positive setting for teaching and learning in Art. Students’ work, relevant exemplars and collections of interesting objects are used to create a visually stimulating and inspiring environment for students. The allocation of an annual budget for Art facilitates planning for materials and equipment. This works well and during the evaluation it was evident that students had sufficient materials to complete their work.
Currently there is no ICT equipment in the art room. Whilst it is acknowledged that access to ICT is available to the art department by booking the school’s computer room, audio visual room and portable laptop and projector, this situation is not ideal. Direct and regular access to ICT in the art room has the potential to significantly enhance teaching and learning in the subject. It is recommended that, as the opportunity presents, a dedicated computer and digital projector should be assigned to the art room to allow the art department immediate access to images and information as required.

The art department also has a kiln in situ in the art classroom. At the time of the evaluation it was not clear that the kiln was in full working order. Consideration should be given to investigating if the kiln can be used in the future as the production of ceramic artefacts using authentic firing clay is a very positive experience for art students at all stages of their development.

The wide range of extracurricular activities provided by the art department reflects the department’s high level of dedication and commitment to students at the school. The range of activities available includes the design of the school’s annual year book; ‘Art Days’ which incorporate both the visual and performing arts; providing students’ mini-companies with graphic design; and the design and execution of banners, posters and decoration of the school building for important school events. Students of Art hold a large public exhibition of their art work each year. This exhibition is an excellent forum for students to show their work and to learn about curating a display. In addition, students from the school have achieved very significant levels of success in local and national art competitions. All of this good work supports students’ confidence in their abilities and helps students to understand how the skills that they have acquired in Art can be applied to life outside of the classroom.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

Time is made available by senior management for subject department planning at the beginning and at the end of each academic year. This time has been used well by the art department. The ‘Art Department Plan’ clearly sets out the arrangements in place to provide an organised and positive art education for students at the school. Curricular planning is addressed in detail for each year group using a system which identifies the topics, themes and skills to be explored. Consideration should be given to developing this good work further by linking these to intended learning outcomes for students.

All of the activities in the art department are informed by the wish to provide students with a positive experience of the subject. During the evaluation it was found that students were very interested in their subject and had a very good understanding how art, craft and design is used in daily life. The ideas for lessons outlined in the department plan were very good and lesson observation indicated that they captured students’ interest and enthusiasm. This is very good work which helps students to develop a genuine interest in the subject.

The art department plans for a very good range of topics, crafts and disciplines for students. As the opportunity presents it is suggested that some new crafts such as print be included in the learning plans. In this way the art department can expand the range of learning experiences provided to students over time.
TEACHING AND LEARNING

The quality of teaching and learning in the two junior-cycle lessons and one senior-cycle lesson visited was very good. It is obvious from the work carried out by students that they have a keen interest in the subject and have acquired a good level of skill relative to their ages and abilities.

The atmosphere in the lessons observed was positive, encouraging and very conducive to work. Respect characterised all of the interactions in the classroom. Students in the lessons observed were found to be very pleasant, confident and diligent in their work.

Classroom management and the structure of lessons were also very good. Routines such as roll call helped students to settle into work. In each of the practical lessons students helped to set out and tidy away their materials and work. This is good practice. Lessons were divided into clear, logical, stages so that routes for progress were easy for every student to follow. For example, in a junior-cycle drawing lesson, students were encouraged to look, to identify, to record, and then to evaluate. This is a very good strategy. Further to this, students were encouraged to work intensely on each step for lengths of time specified by the teacher. This helped them to follow the steps whilst maintaining their work rate.

The delivery of information by the teacher was very pleasant, unambiguous and informative. At all times there was an awareness of the need to communicate to students using correctly pitched language and terminology. Visual images were chosen very carefully to illustrate ideas and concepts. These images were appropriate as well as being of general interest to the students. The attention to detail in this area contributed significantly to the success of students’ work. The demonstrations carried out were also very good in that, as well as being very clear, they also provided motivation and inspiration for students.

Careful monitoring by the teacher ensured that all students remained on task. Differentiation was built into the practical lessons very well so that students of all levels were appropriately challenged. Opportunities were also taken to help those students who required extra support. This is a very good way of promoting students’ progress.

The planning documentation examined indicated that the history and appreciation of art is seamlessly integrated into lessons at junior cycle. This was also evident during lesson observation. Notes on relevant examples from art history are recorded in students’ notebooks and this is very useful. In a design lesson, students were asked to discuss the type of material from art history that they would consider good support studies and where they might find images and information. This work was then assigned as homework which gave students a good opportunity to explore whether their ideas worked. This approach is entirely in keeping with the spirit of the syllabus.

During the evaluation a stimulating senior-cycle history of art lesson was observed. This lesson was very well planned and included very relevant details such as social aspects of the period which helped students to fully understand the intentions of the artist. Questions were asked to promote the sharing of ideas and to prompt further analysis of relevant images. These questions were stimulating and referred to the students’ own life experiences and knowledge bases in order to support them in making accurate assertions. Generally, the questions were directed at the full class group. It is suggested that questions should be targeted at individual students so that all students will have an opportunity to respond positively. It was noted during the evaluation that
overall, students were sufficiently informed to be able to conduct good discussions about the period and to use the correct terminology. This represents a very good approach to the teaching and learning of art history and appreciation.

Recapitulation was used in each of the lessons observed to ensure that students had a clear understanding of the concepts and terminology to be acquired. In two of the practical lessons this was combined with an examination of the class group’s work. In essence this amounted to a critical evaluation which discussed the task and how well it was achieved using students’ work as evidence. This is very good work.

Students’ class work observed during the evaluation showed that students have attained a very high standard of observational drawing. This work was carefully observed and very expressive. It was noted that the subject matter chosen by students to draw was of a particularly high standard. This helped them to produce very good studies and is an excellent basis on which to develop more realised projects.

The evidence provided during the evaluation showed that students are receiving a very good art education in this school. In addition to students having a good understanding of the subject they were also found to be enthusiastic about and interested in Art. Throughout their junior-cycle and senior-cycle art courses, students are exposed to a variety of educational experiences which include a good range of media and disciplines. Notwithstanding the recommendation made in a previous paragraph about the kiln, a range of inventive three-dimensional work is being achieved.

In summary, the students’ work available showed that they are progressing very well across the ability spectrum.

**ASSESSMENT**

A range of assessment methods is used in the art department. These include formal tests at Christmas and summer as well as continual assessment throughout the year. The methods used to monitor students work are varied to maximise students’ potential for self-assessment. 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 ensure that it would be successful. Homework and assessments are carefully recorded by the teacher to provide a comprehensive profile of students’ progress. This information is communicated to students during class time and to their parents at parent-teacher meetings and using the students’ journal. This is good work.

**SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Art plays an important role in the daily life of the school. This includes a wide range of extracurricular and co-curricular activities.
- Whole-school support for Art is good.
- The art room has been developed into a very good learning environment.
- Planning, including curricular planning for lessons, is very good and takes account of students’ interest and motivations.
• The atmosphere in the lessons observed was positive, encouraging and very conducive to work.
• The communication of information in the classroom was of a very high standard.
• Students are receiving a very good art education and are progressing well relative to their abilities.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:
• A dedicated computer and digital projector should be assigned to the art room as opportunity presents.
• Learning outcomes should be included in the curricular learning plans as they develop.

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.

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