

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Art
REPORT**

**O’Fiaich College
Dundalk, County Louth
Roll number: 71770D**

Date of inspection: 19 November 2009



AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION 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 O’Fiaich 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 deputy 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

O’Fiaich College has an enrolment of 621 males and 443 females. The school offers a wide range of programmes to cater for the diverse needs of its students. Art is an optional subject on all programmes, including the optional Transition Year (TY) programme in senior cycle. The school also provides a wide range of Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses, including Art Portfolio, Graphic Design and Photography courses. Provision in relation to these PLC courses is included in the evidence base in this evaluation.

The art department is very well established in the school. There are seven specialist art teachers working in the department and collaboration is a very positive feature of their work. This helps to enhance the experience of art students in the school and is very good practice. The members of art teaching team presented as committed and enthusiastic about their work. This approach was found to underpin all of the activities of the department.

The art department has identified continuing personal development (CPD) as a priority. A very good level of personal study has been undertaken by teachers in the art department resulting in a high level of expertise in art education available to the school. Some of the art teachers are members of the Art Teachers Association of Ireland which ensures that they can avail of the subject-specific CPD provided and that they are regularly updated regarding current issues in contemporary art education. In addition management has facilitated a number of in-school CPD events for all members of the teaching staff. All of this is good practice.

Exhibitions of students’ work are on display around the school. This approach ensures that students’ achievements in art are widely recognised and contributes to the high profile of the art department in the school.

Timetabling for Art is good, with appropriate time periods being provided to facilitate practical lessons. Access for students to the subject is also good. At the beginning of both junior cycle and senior cycle, students are asked to make their subject choices from an open menu of optional subjects. Arrangements are made by school management to ensure that students and their parents are fully informed of the implications of subject choice decisions. The uptake of Art is very healthy at both junior cycle and senior cycle.

The art department is based in four rooms, two of which are relatively small. In one, limitations on space mean that there is insufficient storage and students cannot move freely when doing their work. Senior management indicated that there are plans in place to expand the space available for Art and action in this regard is recommended. Despite the space limitations, the teachers of Art are commended for their care in managing the rooms. A visually stimulating and welcoming environment has been created through displays of artefacts, inspirational subject matter and images and students' work in all of the art rooms.

The art department is very well furnished with the specialist equipment required to complete the various courses on offer. For example, students taking the PLC photography course have access to a range of cameras and specialist printers.

Senior management has made available a very significant level of information and communications technology (ICT) to the art department. This includes computer laptops, digital projectors, internet access and e-portal software. Relevant art-related software is also available. Evidence presented during the evaluation showed that the digital resources available are used to very good effect. ICT is used as an instrument for making art as well as a valuable resource for enhancing teaching and learning. There is a lot of expertise in image manipulation available in the art department. This expertise and software is shared between the post-primary and the PLC parts of the school. For example, a member of staff who usually works with PLC students has taken the TY students for a module on digital image manipulation. All of this is good work.

The art department's budget is determined at the outset of the year. Materials are obtained through the co-ordinator who contacts senior management. During the evaluation there were sufficient materials available for students.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

One senior art teacher is head of department. This duty is associated with a post of responsibility. The work of the head of department includes the mentoring of new teachers, co-ordination of meetings and ensuring that policies and plans are devised, evaluated and updated. To date this work has been carried out very well. It is recommended in the interests of building capacity that arrangements are made so that the post of co-coordinator is rotated amongst all of the teachers in the art department.

Members of the art department hold two formal planning meetings each term. Informal meetings are also regularly held. During the evaluation, minutes of the formal meetings were made available to the inspector. These provided evidence of reflective practice within the department, evaluations of programmes of work and development of new ideas and plans. All of this is very good practice.

The art department's commitment to planning has resulted in the development of a very fine set of curricular plans for each year group. These plans are based on a very solid interpretation of the syllabuses. They reflect best practice in that learning objectives are used as the framework on which to base teaching and learning activities. The plans were sufficiently detailed to provide informative and useful guidance and direction for teachers. For example, where appropriate, criteria for assessment and related questions for students were outlined. All of the plans were linked to timeframes and highlighted assignments due for students. The administration and layout of the plans were clear and logical. This is very good practice. It is suggested that some short term and 'once-off' lessons should be planned for junior-cycle classes. These would provide teachers with flexible ways of responding to students' appetite for novelty and the limitations on their levels of concentration at this stage in their development.

Assignment briefs for the PLC art and design courses are of a very high quality. Those examined during the evaluation described the 'what, why, and how' of the assigned tasks clearly and in an attractive manner using carefully chosen imagery. These documents were designed to encourage students to follow a productive route without being too prescriptive and are highly commended. Briefs and lesson materials for Art are made available to students in the school using an e-portal system. This is very good practice.

Students in some of the PLC groups are preparing for further study in art and design. O'Fiaich College provides good support to these students through links with institutes such as the West Wales School of the Arts.

In addition to the regular work of the art department a number of extracurricular and co-curricular activities are planned for. These activities offer students opportunities to practise and exhibit their artistic skills. Trips to artistic and heritage sites, decoration of the school for events such as graduation, and collaboration with other departments around, for example, Intercultural Week, are just some of the opportunities made available. Students in the post-primary school are given the opportunity to view the work of their older peers on the PLC courses. An exhibition of the PLC students' work is held each year to this effect. This good planning by the art department helps to encourage and inspire the efforts of both sets of students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Three lessons were evaluated; one lesson in junior cycle, one lesson in senior cycle and a PLC lesson. The quality of teaching and learning in Art, as observed during this inspection, was of a very good standard.

Preparation for lessons was very good as was the structure of lessons. All lessons began with roll call and an introduction to the lesson's topic. This good practice helps to settle students and prepare them for work. Recapitulation of previous lessons was also undertaken to help students put their new knowledge in context. Where appropriate, students help with the set up and tidying away of lesson materials. This is good practice.

The rapport between students and teachers was very good in the lessons evaluated. All of the students observed were very well behaved, content and engaged in their work. On the few occasions where students showed signs of becoming distracted they were confidently and kindly redirected to their particular tasks. During lessons, teachers' enthusiasm for the subject coupled with their high levels of energy contributed to a strong sense of purpose which helped to motivate

students. Students in all groups were appropriately affirmed and this clearly contributed to their sense of achievement.

A variety of methodologies was used during the evaluation. This included demonstration, breakdown of the steps involved in tasks and reviews of the work in progress. In the lessons evaluated, these methodologies were carefully chosen and were very successful.

The pitch of lessons was appropriate to the abilities of the students across the ability spectrum. Concepts were illustrated and information provided through information sheets, notes, handouts, and worksheets, illustrations on boards, demonstrations and discussions. The quality of these teacher-generated communications was very good. For example, handouts were very attractively designed using colour and imagery appropriate to the developmental stages of the students involved. This type of support for students' learning is very good practice.

The teachers' delivery was pleasant and clear. It was noted during lessons that teachers' use of terminology in lessons is appropriate and unambiguous. This helps students to better understand facts and concepts. During the lessons observed, students were encouraged to use subject-specific terminology and to voice opinions. This is very good work as it helps students to become more confident in their use of the relevant vocabulary and also helps them to better assess and evaluate work.

Students in all of the lessons evaluated were confident to answer and ask questions. It was noted that students for whom English was not their first language were also encouraged to speak and to answer questions. The use of carefully targeted and probing questions allowed students to be appropriately challenged. This is very good practice.

Commendably, subject matter in lessons was carefully chosen to support students' motivation. In a senior-cycle lesson, students had been taken to see an exhibition of graffiti in the locality which was used as stimulus material for graphic design. This was further supported in the classroom by showing students the work of Banksy. In one of the PLC lessons, drawings from the notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci were used in a discussion around high quality analytical studies and also to provide a historical context for students before they made personal analytical studies. This is a very good strategy which supports the integrated nature of the syllabuses.

A critical evaluation of students' work was held in one lesson. All students were encouraged to discuss and evaluate the work with the guidance of the teacher who kept the discussion focussed on the specific learning outcomes. The use of this strategy is commended as it provides students with a model for better evaluating their work and progress. This good work should be extended to all year groups when possible.

The art department has high aspirations for all the art students in the school and this has helped to develop a culture which is characterised by a focus on success. The work presented indicated that students were encouraged to recognise and aspire to best practices in the use of materials and techniques in each area. It was evident during the evaluation that a high quality of finish is prioritised by the art department. This is very good practice.

A wide variety of high quality students' finished work was available during the evaluation. This included very high quality artefacts in two dimensions and three dimensions in disciplines such as graphic design, sculpture, construction, clay work, painting, printing, and photography. The finished work observed, as well as students' work in progress, showed that students are achieving to their potential. Students in the various class groups are at very different points along the ability

and motivation spectrums but teachers are making very successful efforts to ensure that all of these students are achieving in accordance with their abilities.

ASSESSMENT

The school has a homework policy which is implemented by the art teachers. Homework was given in two of the lessons observed. This homework was of appropriate duration and supportive of the topics being addressed in the lessons. During the lesson, previous homework exercises were returned to students. Comments written on the homework were informative for students and very affirming of their efforts. During a senior-cycle lesson, students' notebooks' were examined by the inspector and they indicate that students are progressing well.

Students on the PLC course are very well informed about their required assignments. Early in the year they are provided with a list of submission dates along with information on the projects that they will be working on for the academic year. This is very useful for students to help them plan their work.

During the school year, summative and formative assessments take place in the art department. Formative assessment during practical assignments is used to encourage students to find routes to improve their work and performance. Formal summative tests take place at Christmas and at the end of the summer term. Students are also assessed on their work throughout the year. Very good profiling and documentation of students' work including homework ensures that accurate tracking of students' progress is maintained.

A variety of assessment methods is used, including peer-assessment, self-assessment, and assessment of practical work, portfolio work, classroom activities and homework. Some of this assessment work is very detailed and carefully designed to be supportive of students in their various stages of development. Students are informed of their progress through school reports, comments on two-dimensional work and regular oral feedback. Parents are kept informed of their children's progress through school reports, the students' journal and parent-teacher meetings. In addition to this, students' achievements are celebrated by rewards, notes that are sent home and at prize-giving events in the school. All of this is good work which helps to encourage students and improve performance levels.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The art department enjoys a high profile in the school; it is very well supported by senior management and is staffed by a committed and enthusiastic team.
- The art department is very well furnished with the specialist equipment required to complete the various courses on offer including a very significant level of information and communications technology (ICT).
- The art department's commitment to planning has resulted in the development of a very fine set of curricular plans for each year group.

- High quality art and design briefs are made available to students in the school using an e-portal system.
- O’Fiaich College supports students who are preparing for further study in art and design by linking with appropriate third-level institutes.
- In addition to the regular work of the art department a number of extracurricular and co-curricular activities are planned for and implemented.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Art, as observed during this inspection, was of a very good standard.
- All of the students observed during lessons were very well behaved, content and engaged in their work and the rapport between students and teachers was very good.
- The quality of the teacher-generated communications observed during lessons was very good.
- Students in the lessons observed were confident to answer and ask questions indicating the supportive learning environment provided for them.
- Students’ work observed during the evaluation was of a very high quality and showed that students across the ability spectrum are achieving well.
- The art department carefully plans for the assessment of students’ work. Assessment methods are designed to be supportive of students’ progress and allow for the different developmental stages of students.

No key recommendations are made.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the teachers of Art and with the deputy 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

The Art Department and Management of O’Fiaich College and O’Fiaich Institute of Further Education welcome the extremely positive comments of this comprehensive subject report. The Inspector is complemented for the professional way the evaluation was carried out and for the support to our school community.

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

Although there are no recommendations included in the report, the Art Department of O’Fiaich College and O’Fiaich Institute of Further Education continues to pursue an active and progressive philosophy of development in order to provide the very best teaching and learning environment for students.