An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Music
REPORT

Holy Child Secondary School,
Killiney, County Dublin
Roll number: 60250M

Date of inspection: 3 November 2010
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN MUSIC

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Holy Child Secondary School, Killiney. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Music 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 the 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 evaluation; the board chose to accept the report without response.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Holy Child Killiney, a private voluntary secondary school, caters for 330 female students. Music is available as an optional component for both the Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate examinations. Transition year (TY) is a compulsory programme but the school adopts a flexible approach if any student wishes to opt out. Music is an optional component within this programme.

The systems in place to facilitate students’ selection of optional subjects for study in both the junior cycle and the senior cycle have changed this year and now offer a high level of choice and flexibility to students. In addition, very good support systems are in place to provide relevant subject information to incoming first-year students and fifth-year students and to their parents.

The numbers of students selecting Music in this school have increased in the last number of years and the uptake is very good. The music department is staffed by one, fully qualified, specialist teacher. Music has a very high profile in this school and is well supported by senior management. Timetable provision for Music is in line with the guidelines from the National Council of Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). There is an appropriate spread of contact time throughout the week with a sufficient number of double periods to accommodate practical work.

In addition to the curricular opportunities, a wide array of extra-curricular musical activities is available for students. These include musical contributions by different year groups for celebratory assemblies, considered to be significant events in the life of the school. Students also perform in liturgical ceremonies, the annual musical and Seachtain na Gaeilge. Students’ musical experiences are also enhanced through visits to the National Concert Hall (NCH). The school supports the work of the music teacher by reducing her timetabled hours in order to provide some compensation for the additional hours given after school by the teacher. This support is noteworthy. The work of the music teacher in facilitating these activities is highly commended.
Budgetary arrangements in the school are supportive of the subject and resources for Music are very good. Illustrations of musical features both hand crafted and professionally printed are displayed in this room. In addition, the walls outside of the music room are vibrant and contain many photographs of past events. The music teacher also has access to the school concert hall and chapel for choral and other activities. The music department is appropriately equipped but the addition of tuned percussion instruments will enhance this provision. Information and communications (ICT) technology is satisfactory here. The music room houses one computer and data projector. The music teacher can also access the computer room where music software has been installed. In this school, music technology has not yet been made available to students as an option in the practical component of the certificate examinations and this is now recommended.

Management is very supportive of teachers’ continuing professional development. The music teacher is a member of the Post-Primary Music Teachers’ Association (PPMTA) whose conferences offer teachers opportunities to keep abreast of all information pertaining to music education at second-level and to keep up-to-date with ongoing curricular innovation. At the time of the evaluation, the music teacher was scheduled to attend the in-service course hosted by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) The Creative use of Singing in the Classroom.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Formal planning time is allocated to all subject departments including Music to meet four times per year. The music teacher meets with other small subject departments on one of these occasions and informally with the principal throughout the year. Good use could now be made of the remaining three opportunities to advance the recommendations regarding planning made below.

The school has developed a very insightful document entitled Reviewing a Subject Area to facilitate all subject departments in their planning and evaluation. The music department has made some use of this document and is strongly encouraged to progress this work.

The quality of department planning and co-ordination of Music is good in this school. In addition to the necessary planning to ensure the smooth operation of the musical activities that take place, there is good planning for the timetabled lessons in Music. Planning documentation made available by the music department contains a good level of information including the many organisational practices that are in place for Music in the school. In addition, broad, content-based programmes of work have been developed for each year group. These are in line with syllabus requirements. However, notwithstanding that the inspection took place early in the school year, it was noted that Irish music and un-prescribed listening elements had not yet been delivered in fifth year. It is important that all components of the music syllabus are taught in an integrated manner throughout the year and this is recommended.

In order to progress the good planning work completed to date, there is a need for the music teacher to develop the plans for each year group further. These year plans should reflect all of the teaching and learning practices that are ongoing in the department so that they can direct teaching into the future. On that basis, the following recommendations are being made. Content should, where appropriate, be linked to the intended learning outcomes, methodologies and modes of assessment that will be used to determine the extent of the learning. It is important to indicate how the three components of Music—listening, composing and performing—are being synthesised into lessons and to record any other student participative strategies which are currently in use in lessons. The inclusion of an estimated timeframe for the completion of topics
is also advised. As a start, the manner in which topics are currently being delivered should be tracked. This information would make a significant contribution to the further development of individual year plans.

The TY music programme is broad and is designed to provide students with a breadth of musical experiences. In addition to the taught programme, all TY students participate in the annual musical production in the spring. Following this, students study ballroom dancing, set dancing, drumming and guitar. Many of these activities are facilitated by external tutors.

Preparation for the lessons observed was good. All resources including audio and ICT were ready for immediate inclusion into lessons. The increased use of ICT both as a teaching tool and for the creation of resources is recommended.

**TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Three lessons were observed during the course of the evaluation, one choir lesson in junior cycle and two lessons in senior cycle. In all lessons, there was a respectful atmosphere where praise was used effectively to acknowledge students’ efforts and their contributions to class discussions were valued. Good routines were established in all lessons from the outset.

The quality of teaching in all lessons observed was good. In the choir lesson, students were well disciplined and had developed good routines for choral singing. These included appropriate posture and good warm-up routines. The standard of choral singing was very good and this was well matched with the high level of enthusiasm from all students for all activities. It was reported that these students on occasion also engage with more challenging music requiring a greater level of harmonic awareness. This is important given the ability level of these students.

In music lessons, good efforts were made to synthesise the components of Music. For instance, in one lesson, students studied a prescribed work through listening and performing. Aspects of the music were then used for a composing activity. This is good practice. In a second lesson, students engaged with their prescribed work through listening, written and oral activities and by singing some of the key harmonic components. Students were also given the opportunity to practise performing rhythms through a series of clapping activities. Students were very competent in this regard. Given the level of instrumental expertise that already exists among many students, it is recommended that they be afforded the opportunity to assume a more active role in lessons. For instance, students could perform melodies during a composing lesson instead of the teacher.

In the majority of lessons observed, links were constantly being made between the activity of the lesson and the certificate examinations as the principle reason for engaging with the activity. This is unnecessary in the context of the lessons observed because it underestimated the interest students had in the subject. It is very important that students are afforded the opportunity to develop their knowledge, skills and enjoyment of Music without frequent references to the certificate examinations and this should be noted.

The quality of learning displayed by the students was good. This was evidenced by the level of analytical information provided by the students on their prescribed works, the ability to clap rhythms which were quite challenging and the ability to recall information from previous lessons. Good progress has also been made regarding the development of students’ aural and composing abilities.
ASSESSMENT

Formal house examinations are held for first-year, second-year and fifth-year students at Christmas and summer. ‘Mock’ certificate examinations are held for Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate students in the spring. Reports are issued following these assessments. In addition, all students receive progress reports in October and February. TY students are continually assessed and they receive three reports per year. Parents are made aware of students’ progress through the annual parent-teacher meeting and the student journal. This is very good monitoring and reporting on students’ progress.

Students’ composing homework is monitored by the teacher and written comments are provided. This is good as it provides the students with constructive feedback on their work. However, it is important that students’ work in other aspects of the course is taken up from time-to-time and marked in order to further help them to progress in their work. A record of all work should be kept by the teacher in order to build a profile on each student. These are recommended.

There is an expectation that students will store all materials and resources by the teacher in folders. This practice was not seen to be consistent across all class groups visited. It is recommended that the music teacher require all students to store materials in folders. These materials will function as useful sources for revision. In addition, folders should be monitored and assessed regularly.

In keeping with good practice, the music teacher is provided with an analysis of certificate examination results by senior management. Notwithstanding current outcomes in these examinations, levels of achievement should be kept under review to ensure that each student is reaching their full potential.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

• The systems in place to facilitate students’ selection of optional subjects for study in both the junior cycle and the senior cycle offer a high level of choice and flexibility to students.
• The numbers of students selecting Music in this school has increased in the last number of years.
• Music has a very high profile in this school and is well supported by senior management.
• Budgetary arrangements in the school are supportive of the subject and resources for Music are very good.
• Management is very supportive of teachers’ continuing professional development.
• The quality of teaching in all lessons observed was good.

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

• All components of the music syllabus should be taught in an integrated manner throughout the year.
• There is a need for the music teacher to develop the plan for each year group further.
• Students’ written work in other aspects of the music curriculum should be taken up from time-to-time in order to further help them to progress in their work. A record of all such work should be kept by the teacher in order to build a profile on each student.

A post-evaluation meeting was held with the teacher of Music 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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