

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

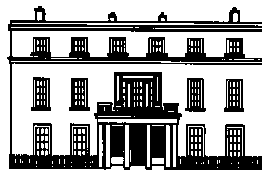
Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Art
REPORT**

**St. Joseph's College
Lucan
County Dublin**

Roll number: 60263V

Date of inspection: 21 January 2010



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | 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 St. Joseph's College, Lucan. 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 principal and subject teachers. 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

The principal is very supportive of the subject and has affirmed its contribution to the academic and personal development of students. The work of the art department personnel is held in high regard, as is their input into the cultural life of the school. Time allocation to Art is satisfactory and access to the subject provides no barrier to uptake by students who wish to include it among the subjects they study. Space allocation is also good. One spacious customised art room has been provided for the art department, with an en suite storage room, and art classes also take place in another somewhat smaller classroom with good natural light.

The budget for Art is satisfactory and the department is supplied with whatever it requires, on request, in accordance with the schools requisition procedure. The school supports a range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities for Art and this greatly enhances both the students' opportunities and the profile of the subject in the whole-school context.

At the time of the inspection the school was shortly to be included in a big development of its facilities linked to training and support.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

A range of planning documents has been devised by the art department, including an overall plan, in outline. These planning documents would be much enhanced, for the further development of the art department's practices, by the inclusion of learning outcomes for the activities and learning assignments listed. It is also recommended that these learning outcomes are used to establish differentiated outcomes for students of different aptitude levels, closely referenced to the topics in the plan.

It is recommended that planning for the teaching and integration of appreciation of art and design be included in the documentation for both junior and senior cycle. While practice in this area is apparent in the day-to-day work of the department, a better focus on the appreciation dimension would be provided by defining and highlighting it in the plan.

In order that the art department develops in new ways in the future using the significant skills and specialisations of the personnel now available and to further reflect the learning possibilities implicit now in art courses and programmes, it is recommended that the art department and management collaborate on a long-term plan for the future development of art and design in the school.

Joint planning among the art teachers in key areas for improvement, notably the use of primary sources and balancing the expressive and creative aspects of the subject with the state examination requirements, in the immediate and medium timeframe is strongly recommended. Great potential and a strong current position exist in the art department for the effective delivery of such learning.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Professional standards of course delivery, communication, and teaching methods are evident in the art department. Students were managed very effectively. There is a wide range of aptitude, motivation and engagement evident in the class groups. Good teaching and learning is taking place in the art department and students benefit by two different styles of delivery .

Class material was delivered in a clear, stimulating way; tasks and activities were well thought out. Good demonstrations of techniques were given, with correct terms and technical language used and explained. Attention was given to the learning needs of individual students as well as to communication with class groups. Some differentiation was evident. A variety of teaching methodologies was used, including active learning and group work. Encouragement and affirmation were given to students. Firm discipline reigned in a friendly and respectful context.

Good charts and learning aids were on display, including reproductions of artefacts from galleries and museums. This is good practice. The students' opportunities for practical art-making are well supported by the budget for materials and by the space, tools and equipment available.

A variety of media in art, design and craft is being presented to students in their art courses. This should be extended in the medium and long term, if opportunity allows, to include crafts and other expertise that the current art department personnel have, but which may not at present be optimally utilised or available to the students.

Third-year students were proceeding with project work for the Junior Certificate examination. In general there was a good work ethic amongst them and many students had developed their project to a considerable degree. Almost all students had based their work on secondary sources. Such uniform reliance on secondary sources is unacceptable as it sets the bar for the experience of making art and for learning and creative development at too low a level, and distorts what the syllabus requires. Some students however had developed their secondary sources with some flair, but there was a sense in general of imitation and replication. This situation has arisen out of high levels of conscientiousness in how the project is presented and managed and is an approach that tries to ensure the best state examination outcome for the students. While this is laudable and well intentioned, it is apparent that the students, in the main, are well capable of working from primary sources, using imaginative strategies to flesh out their project themes. The art department should deliver skills-building experiences in first and second year to equip them to be able to approach their work throughout third year in this way, as the syllabus envisages.

It should be noted that the Junior Certificate syllabus document, rather than the State Examinations Commission assessment requirements and associated marking schemes, is the

guide to modes of, and materials for, Junior Certificate learning. It is recommended that the importance of the syllabus document is now recognised as central to the planning, design and delivery of learning experiences to students.

The learning content and outcomes of support studies should guide students towards fuller personal engagement with, and appreciation of, art and design. A review of previous practice in the support studies area is encouraged, particularly where students have high levels of motivation and aptitude. More emphasis should be placed, from the earliest stages of first year right through to third year, on support studies, conceptualised as the appreciation of art and design at an age-appropriate pitch. This ultimately is likely to enhance students overall performance in the development of their third-year project.

A very well devised and delivered lesson about different styles of fashion illustration and drawing was seen, presented as a PowerPoint illustration, combined with clear, informative commentary about the exceedingly well-chosen imagery. The lesson provided an excellent learning opportunity for students, both for their aesthetic and cultural development but also, because it was designed as a lead-in to a practical drawing assignment, for their artistic learning. Students contributed during this lesson in positive and apposite ways, and the learning environment, good in all the lessons seen, was at its best here. The use of PowerPoint was also seen in a very focussed and valuable history of art lesson. Another lesson seen, based on the work of Klimt, was well developed in concept and in practice. The procedures used in assignments were highly defined but students were given some opportunity to make their own creative or executive decisions. In terms of learning outcomes, it would be valuable in future to increase the level of self-determined decision making for students in such assignments. However, it is recommended that the generic principle and approach of this lesson, because it linked practical artefact making with the wider culture of visual art, should be widely emphasised in junior cycle for support studies and in the later development of aesthetic experience and sensitivity throughout the students' encounter with the visual arts.

It is recommended that the basics of the 'Paint' programme, which is standard on most PCs, are used as a simple and cost-neutral entrée to digital image making for students. The reiteration of assignments and exercises executed in standard art materials during class, using the 'Paint' programme as homework, is recommended. Where it is not possible for the art department to introduce students to this program as a dimension of its habitual approach to image making, management could valuably arrange that first-year and second-year class groups are shown the basic principles of using the 'Paint' programme as part of a programme of computer studies.

ASSESSMENT

Good records are kept of the assessments students undergo in the course of the school year. There is a strong awareness of the assessment criteria in use for Art by the state examinations commission and these have a guiding influence on assessment in the department. There are some collaborative assessment procedures in place for the art department, and this is highly commended.

The use of assessment criteria, based on stated learning outcomes, would make a strongly logical link between what is taught, learned and assessed. It is recommended that such assessment criteria are developed from learning outcomes in a few key areas and thereafter in all areas of the department plan for teaching and learning.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Great support is given by the principal to the art department, and time and budgetary allocations adequately supply the resources necessary for delivery of courses.
- The school supports a range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities for Art and this greatly enhances the students' opportunities and also the profile of the subject in the whole-school context.
- Professional standards of course delivery, communication and teaching methods are evident in the art department. Students are managed very effectively. There is a pleasant and respectful learning environment.
- Good teaching and learning is taking place in the art department and students benefit from the two different approaches taken in the delivery of courses and programmes.
- Attention was given to the learning needs of individual students as well as to communication with class groups.

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

- It is recommended that differentiated learning outcomes be developed for the activities and learning assignments listed in the department plan.
- Joint planning around key areas for improvement, notably the use of primary sources and the finding of a balance between the expressive and creative aspects of art and design learning and the state examination requirements is recommended.
- It is recommended that the importance of the junior cycle syllabus document is now recognised as central to the design and delivery of learning experiences to students.
- It is recommended that there is a renewed emphasis, in planning and delivery, on learning rather than assessment alone. Creativity, imagination and personalised learning need to be further emphasised in the department.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the teachers of Art and the principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.