An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of MUSIC
REPORT

Saint Anne’s Community College
Killaloe, County Clare
Roll number: 70901K

Date of inspection: 30 March 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN MUSIC

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal, deputy principal and teachers</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

• There is a very good quality of teaching and learning of Music.

• High standards of class-based music performance were very much in evidence.

• Music teaching and learning has a central focus which is balanced in terms of overall musical development and the requirements of the certificate examinations.

• The high proportion of girls taking Music indicates a significant gender imbalance in the uptake.

• A well-equipped music room exists but storage space is inadequate.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• Strategies to increase the uptake of Music by boys should be explored.

• The proper storage of resources and musical instruments should be addressed.

• The training needs of music teachers should be assessed to ensure optimum use of the newly-acquired technological resources.

• A five-year plan for the development of the music department taking cognisance of context factors should be developed.
INTRODUCTION

St Anne’s Community College is a co-educational vocational school under the auspices of Co. Clare Vocational Education Committee. The school has a current enrolment of 518 students. Music is available as an optional subject for both the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations. All option bands are generated from student preference and first-year students choose their subjects for Junior Certificate prior to entry. All students have a half-year module of Music in the optional Transition Year programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good. Examples of appropriate music methodological practice were observed in all lessons visited with well-prepared materials, a consistent aural focus and teaching that was supportive of all students. Strategies linking aspects of the curriculum were utilised to very good effect with the areas of performing, composing and listening integrated in musically-focussed ways.

- The music teachers created a positive learning environment through effective organisation and management of learning activities. A good range of teaching strategies to promote the students’ own self-learning skills were seen. Incidences of very successful lessons involving purposeful peer-peer interaction and a high degree of collaborative learning were also witnessed. Students reacted well to this mode of learning and were very familiar with the procedures used. The ease in which they used expressive and technical language to analyse what they heard or had learned was very much in evidence.

- A very good level of student engagement was seen in lessons with all students involved in meaningful music-making activities. Repertoire chosen for performance was suitable for the age levels concerned, while the approaches chosen contributed to the quality of learning. This focus on building the role of Music and giving students the opportunity to take part in and enjoy practical music-making is entirely appropriate. This resulted in attentive, interested, and motivated students who participated very well in the learning process. Whole-class performances of the music provided convincing evidence that most students are capable of maintaining their own part in group music-making. Observation of students’ practical work, at all stages, showed that whilst many were challenged, few students were unable to cope with the demands of the music.

- Differentiated teaching was observed where groups of students practised with their teacher for the impending practical examinations, while others worked on other coursework. A collaborative atmosphere ensued, where through refinement, performance, assessment and encouragement, students prepared for their practical examinations and good standards of performance obtained, coupled with appropriate and supportive accompaniments by the teacher where required.

- Some student folders and manuscripts showed evidence of good organisation and were generally neat in appearance, while others were haphazard and contained loose sheets and handouts. Careful monitoring of student materials is recommended as valuable supplementary information and work will invariably go astray if not documented properly. It is also important to check the accuracy of the students’ handwritten notes as many examples seen contained significant spelling errors.
SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is good provision for Music along with a variety of co-curricular and extracurricular music activities. Timetable provision is in line with syllabus guidelines with a sufficient number of double periods in all year groups to facilitate practical work. There is generally an appropriate spread of contact time during the week with one exception. Although it is acknowledged that this does not always happen, the exploration of ways in which this could be avoided is advised in order to minimise lengthy gaps between lessons.

- Despite an almost balanced gender breakdown in the school, the proportion of girls taking Music is significantly higher. This gender imbalance is regrettable and thus it is recommended that strategies be put in place to encourage a higher uptake of Music by boys.

- A specialist music room which is a good size and acoustically satisfactory exists. It is very well-equipped but unfortunately has extremely limited storage facilities. This has implications not only on the quality of the learning environment but also on the security and maintenance of the many valuable resources in the room. Consideration of the best ways in which this could be addressed is recommended.

- There has been some development in information and communication technology (ICT) resources for the music room and plans are underway to install an interactive whiteboard for the forthcoming academic year.

- The music teachers are members of the Post-Primary Music Teachers’ Association (PPMTA) and attendance at its meetings allows them to keep abreast of all information pertaining to music education at second level and to keep up-to-date with ongoing curricular innovation. It has been recognised that some training will be required to implement the new technological resources. It is recommended that this be pursued as soon as is practicable. The PPMTA internet forum could provide some useful information in this regard.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- A good level of planning for the development of Music exists. The subject department plan outlines in general terms the content to be covered with each year group. It is recommended that short-term schemes of work be included in the subject plan. These schemes of work should provide greater detail on the content taught, outline shorter timeframes and the corresponding methodologies, assessment modes and learning outcomes to be attained.

- It would be timely if a five-year development plan for the music department was instigated at this stage. This could include planning for resources with a particular emphasis on technology, curricular plans to include the role of ICT in teaching and learning, and strategies which could be put in place in order to address the gender imbalance.

- Another area for development would be the inclusion of a review section in the subject plan. This section would assist the subject department when analysing the strengths and challenges facing the subject within the school.
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.