Subject Inspection of Art
REPORT

Pobalscoil Chloich Cheannfhaola
Falcarragh, County Donegal
Roll number: 91408V

Date of inspection: 15 October 2009
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ART

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Pobalscoil Chloich Cheannfhaola. 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 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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Pobalscoil Chloich Cheannfhaola has an enrolment of 256 males and 273 females. The school offers the fullest range of curricular programmes available: the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), an optional Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. Art is an optional subject on all of these programmes except for the TY programme where Art is a compulsory module.

The art department is currently staffed by one specialist art teacher who is very committed to providing a positive experience of art education for students at the school. In particular the inspector noted the art department’s attention to promoting the achievement of less able students. Continuing professional development opportunities in art education are made available to the art department staff through membership of the Art Teachers’ Association of Ireland. This is good practice.

The art teacher makes good use of time provided by school management each term to plan for students’ learning. This time is also used for meetings with the TY team and the JCSP team as necessary. This is good work.

Timetabling for Art is good, with double periods being provided to facilitate practical lessons. For example, students on the LCA programme are allocated two double periods for Art. TY students are provided with either a double period or two single periods for Art for the duration of the TY programme. This gives TY students a good opportunity to experience the subject.

Students’ access to Art is 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. Those students who choose to study Art at senior cycle
and who have not studied it in junior cycle receive particular support and encouragement. Students of Art are generally assigned to mixed-ability class groups which is good practice. The proportions of students taking Art are slightly below the national averages at junior cycle and senior cycle. It is suggested that the uptake of Art be monitored to ensure that a downward trend does not develop.

The art department is accommodated in a very large purpose-built art room. This includes access to a kiln and clay-related equipment. Part of the room is devoted to storage of visual aids and students’ work. This is a good use of space. A large display unit for students’ artefacts has been constructed in another area of the art room. Items in this unit can be viewed by the school community from the corridor outside the art room. This helps to maintain the profile of the subject in the school and also contributes to students’ confidence in their artistic abilities.

The art department monitors health and safety in the art room and has endeavoured to improve the room over time. For example, the kiln is now enclosed by a cage. This is good work.

Requests for consumable materials are made as required by the subject co-ordinator to senior management. This system appears to be working well. On the day of the evaluation sufficient materials were available to students.

The information and communications technology (ICT) most regularly used by the art department is situated in the school’s library. Whilst this situation is not ideal, the art department makes very good use of this resource. At the time of the evaluation there were two obsolete computers in situ in the art room. It is recommended that these computers be removed and that a computer and a digital projector be obtained for the art department as soon as funding presents. As broadband is available in the school, this equipment should be linked to the internet. The installation of this equipment, combined with the expertise in ICT available in the art department, has the potential to significantly enhance teaching and learning in Art at the school. Senior management indicated at the time of the evaluation that investment in ICT for the art department was imminent.

**Planning and Preparation**

The art department provides a range of opportunities for students at all levels to engage in a broad range of topics, crafts and disciplines. This includes batik, block-print making, book crafts, calligraphy, fabric printing, modelling, casting, packaging, pottery, puppetry, mosaic and glass painting. This is very good practice as it allows students the opportunity to develop a wide variety of skills and facilitates completion of a range of finished products.

An art department plan was presented during the evaluation. This very useful document clearly sets out the policies and procedures which govern the art department. The art department is very much aware of the need to support students’ achievement in Art. To achieve this, the department has developed a programme of work for all year groups, which is a good strategy. However, some of the plans are overly influenced by the requirements of the certificate examinations. For example, first-year students are provided with a set of activities and tasks based on a theme for the year. This focuses students too early in junior cycle on the requirements for the certificate examination and can lead to student fatigue. It is possible to achieve the required level of examination readiness by basing students’ lessons on sets of skills or learning outcomes and by changing the theme or subject matter very regularly.
The plans for senior cycle are similarly reliant on the requirements for the certificate examinations. It is recommended that this should be addressed. This can be achieved by rebalancing the programmes of work planned for students by using learning outcomes to focus lessons on the development of skills. For example, when students are learning about the creation of lettering, encouragement and priority should be given to primary or secondary sources, the development of lettering from the source material and execution of the finished design. It is important that students freely practise these skills before they have to use them within the confines of the certificate examination. In this way students can experiment and exhibit flair thus producing more confident work. The process of developing the learning plans in this way could be implemented gradually. The art department could begin this work with a revised plan for a particular year group.

Students at all levels of ability and development can find it difficult to understand and appreciate the western canon of art. It is suggested that specific lessons on the history and appreciation of art be introduced to all students from first year. This should facilitate the development of students’ appreciation of works of art and also familiarise students at an earlier stage with subject-specific terminology.

The programme of work for TY includes a range of topics and tasks including the production of greetings cards and mural design and execution. The TY programme is designed to support various cross-curricular activities for TY students in the school. This is good work. As some of the students taking Art in TY have not studied Art before and others will not continue to study it for the Leaving Certificate, the range of experience and ability coming into the TY art group is very mixed. It is good that students have the opportunity to experience ‘making art’ in varying scales and contexts. Consideration could also be given to including a series of lessons based on developing critical observation skills and appreciation skills amongst these students.

In addition to the art department plan, a range of other teacher-generated materials and documents is used to record the details of lessons and to monitor and reflect on the progress of class groups. This attention to detail is good practice. The art department has collected a very large array of visual and written information relating to teaching and learning in Art. This collection covers a broad range of topics including two-dimensional work, three-dimensional work and the history and appreciation of art. This information is well organised and most useful when planning programmes of work for students.

The art department plans for extracurricular and co-curricular activities to enhance students’ achievement. This good work includes trips to galleries, museums and relevant heritage sites for students of Art. In addition, the art department supports the work of other departments by helping the JCSP students with their ‘Make a Book’ projects, by helping the LCA students with various projects and by encouraging students to enter local and national competitions. The art department also helps to support whole-school activities such as anti-bullying campaigns and the school’s drama and liturgical events throughout the year. All of this work offers students genuine opportunities to use their artistic skills in authentic situations. This is good practice.

**TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Three lessons were evaluated; two in junior cycle and one in senior cycle. A variety of topics and tasks was addressed and undertaken during the lessons observed. The quality of teaching and learning in Art, as observed during this inspection, was of a good standard.
Generally students were very well behaved and fully engaged in all lessons. A concern for the welfare of students was confirmed during all of the activities observed during lessons. Interactions between the teacher and students were pleasant, encouraging and supportive. In particular, the teacher’s excellent rapport with less able students helped them to engage and to persist with more challenging tasks.

The preparation for lessons was of a good standard. All materials required were available and within easy reach of both students and teacher. The structure of lessons was very good and supportive of progress. Roll calls, a sharing of learning intentions, recapitulation of previous lessons, assignment of homework and clean up were carried out in each lesson to good effect. Familiarity with the structure of lessons created an expectation of progress amongst students which encouraged good pace. Where necessary students were involved in the preparation and tidy-up of their working areas; they did this with ease and efficiency. This is good practice and supports independent learning.

During the lessons evaluated, the communication of information to students was clear, purposeful and pleasant. A variety of methods including visual aids was used to help students understand concepts and ideas. Visual aids with motivating subject matter were carefully chosen so as to maximise educational value for students. For example a group of boys was shown a painting of a rally car in a race to show how their personal interests can be channelled into a finished piece of artwork. In another lesson students were impressed when a painting created by the teacher was used as a visual aid. This is very good practice.

The main teaching methodology used during the evaluation was group demonstration. Very effective demonstrations were used, for example, how to use watercolour pencil to record images and how to mix colours for particular effects. The instructions given during these demonstrations were accurate and clear and helpful comments were also made about the work in general. This helped to maintain the interest of all students. Students were monitored at all times during lessons and individual students were helped as issues were raised. This is very good work.

Critical evaluation sessions were used during some of the lessons evaluated. This is an excellent strategy to promote the development of informed opinion. Where these worked best students had a clear understanding of the target skills to be addressed and were able to evaluate whether a piece of work had been successful or not. Where this was less successful students were somewhat unclear about the aim of the task. It is recommended that where critiques are being introduced to students that the discussion should be focussed on very definite evaluation criteria. During the lessons evaluated, questioning techniques were used for a variety of reasons including supporting recall, encouraging attention and promoting focus. This is good work. The development of these techniques will help to maximise the potential of this learning strategy.

A lesson based on the history and appreciation of art was observed as part of the evaluation. Students had a good knowledge of the target period including relevant social and historical contexts. Evidence was provided in students’ copies and notebooks to show that this part of the syllabus was progressing well. Very good quality teacher-generated notes were used in this lesson but their potential to support learning was limited by the quality of the associated images, which were monochrome photocopies. It is recommended that, when the appropriate ICT is installed in the art room, the relevant information should be presented with the associated images using a digital projector.
ASSESSMENT

Homework was given in the lessons observed. This homework was of appropriate duration and supportive of the topics being addressed in the lessons. The homework assigned to students is regularly recorded and assessed. Students’ attendance and behaviour is also monitored and recorded during each lesson. This is good 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 mid-term, Christmas and at the end of the summer term. Students are also assessed on their work throughout the year to help to keep them motivated. Accurate tracking of students’ progress is maintained.

A variety of assessment methods is used in the art department, including peer-assessment, self-assessment, group assessment of practical work, classroom activities and homework. Fifth-year students make a presentation to their peers as part of the assessment process. This is very good practice.

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 student journal and parent-teacher meetings.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

• Whole-school support for Art is very good.
• The art department provides a range of opportunities for students at all levels to engage in a wide range of topics, crafts and disciplines.
• A detailed programme of work has been developed for all year groups.
• The art department plans for a wide range of extracurricular and co-curricular activities to enhance students’ experiences and achievements in Art.
• The quality of teaching and learning in Art observed during this inspection was of a good standard.
• Generally students were very well behaved and fully engaged in the lessons evaluated. Interactions between the teacher and students were pleasant, encouraging and supportive.
• The communication of information to students was clear, purposeful and pleasant. Visual aids and demonstrations were used well.
• The structure of lessons was very good and supportive of progress.
• Accurate tracking of students’ academic progress, behaviour and attendance is maintained.

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

• The obsolete computers in the art room should be removed and a computer and a digital projector be obtained for the art department as soon as funding presents.
• The requirements for certificate examinations should be introduced later in junior cycle and in senior cycle so as to encourage students’ experimentation and flair.
• In the future, the programmes of work for students should be based on the development of skills using lesson outcomes.
• Where critiques are being introduced to students the discussion should be focussed on very definite evaluation criteria.

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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