Subject Inspection of Art
REPORT

Mercy College
Coolock, Dublin 5
Roll number: 60871V

Date of inspection: 3 February 2010
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ART

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Mercy College, Coolock. 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 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

Mercy College, Coolock, has an enrolment of 414 female students. The school offers the following programmes, the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). Art is an optional subject on all of these programmes, except in first year where it is compulsory.

The art department is staffed by three specialist art teachers. At the time of the evaluation, two of the members of the art department had responsibility for the majority of classes in Art whilst the third teacher had responsibility for a small number of classes. It was clear that the art department is very committed to providing a positive experience of art education for the students in the school. The art teachers have entered into a number of collaborative projects with the art education department of a third-level institute. This is a very good way of ensuring that new methodologies and ideas are brought into the classroom to benefit students. Members of the art department have also undertaken to engage in significant continuing professional development (CPD) for art educators. This is very good work. Notwithstanding this, consideration could also be given to obtaining membership of the Art Teachers’ Association of Ireland in order to benefit from the CPD opportunities available for art educators at post-primary level.

Timetabling for Art is very good, with appropriate time periods being provided to facilitate practical lessons. TY students are provided with two double periods for Art for the duration of the TY programme which gives them a very good opportunity to experience the subject.

The numbers of students taking the subject at junior cycle and senior cycle are good. At the end of first year, students choose two subjects from a range including Art, Home Economics, Music and Science. At 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 consequences of subject choice decisions. This is good practice.

A list of required consumable materials is prepared by the art department each year and submitted to senior management for procurement. This system appears to be working very well. On the day of the evaluation sufficient materials were available to students. Evidence was provided to show that members of the art department take great care to provide a wide range of materials and equipment for students.

The art department is accommodated in two fully equipped art rooms. These rooms are very well maintained and organised. The art department has succeeded in developing them into very good learning environments for Art. Exceptionally attractive displays of both students’ work and appropriate exemplars are provided in the rooms to both stimulate and inspire students.

The art department is well-equipped in terms of information and communications technology (ICT). In one of the art rooms there is an interactive white board and in the other a digital projector. It is very good practice that ICT with the capabilities of displaying images is available to enhance the teaching and learning of this visual subject. Consideration could be given to installing blackout curtains so that students could better see the images projected. During the evaluation evidence was provided to show that the ICT facilities are being used to good effect in teaching and learning.

The communal areas of the school are used to display students’ art work in both two and three dimensions. This serves to maintain the high profile of the subject in the school and also helps to build student’s confidence in their artistic abilities. At the time of the evaluation the art teachers indicated that they intended to change the displays. It is good to regularly vary the art works displayed as this can lead to greater awareness among the school community of the ongoing learning achieved by students in the art department.

The art department also provides a wide range of extracurricular and co-curricular activities for students. This includes ongoing collaboration with the business department in the creation of products for the school’s ‘Trade Fair’ and other events. Students from the art department are also provided with opportunities to visit museums galleries and other sites of artistic and heritage interest.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

Planning time is provided to subject departments by senior management each term. The meetings of the art department held at this time are minuted. They include an annual review of the previous year’s plan. This is good work. A lot of additional planning work is undertaken by the art department. This is informal and takes place in the teachers’ own time. A commitment shared by all members of the art department to provide a high quality art education for students ensures that a high level of collaboration takes place.

Members of the art department have carried out a lot of good work in planning for the department and the administration of the department. This has resulted in the development of a substantial subject department plan which was made available during the evaluation. In keeping with good practice, this document provides a record of the operational arrangements of the department and also includes curricular plans for learning for each year group.
The students’ work produced as a result of the implementation of these plans shows that additional planning is necessary to promote further student success. For example, in some cases, students are relying too much on secondary sources for their research. In other cases the quality of development of students’ ideas leaves scope for further work. It is essential that students are made aware of the need to work with good quality primary source material. When planning for lessons in design and craft, consideration should be given to how students can be taken through the various stages of definition of the brief, investigation, imagination, devising, producing and evaluation. Students should be encouraged to evaluate their work at each stage. It is recommended that a full review of curricular planning should take place to take these issues into account. It is also recommended that the various programmes be planned for in their entirety to ensure that each year group builds on the skills learnt in the previous year. The use of learning outcomes for students is recommended to help develop these plans.

Planning for resources and the preparation of work and materials for lessons was of a very high standard. It was also noted that the finish and presentation of work is promoted. This is very good practice and is encouraged.

**TEACHING AND LEARNING**

One junior-cycle lesson and one senior-cycle lesson were observed as part of this evaluation. The quality of teaching and learning in Art, as observed during this inspection, was of a good standard.

Classroom management in the lessons observed was very good. The structures put in place by the teachers such as roll call and checking of homework supported students who were at all times focussed and engaged in their work. Teachers’ monitoring of students work during lessons helped to promote a good sense of pace and progression. The atmosphere in the lessons observed was very positive and characterised by mutual respect for all. The rapport between teachers and students was very good. At all times students behaviour was pleasant and courteous. It is clear from the behaviour of students that they feel secure and affirmed whilst engaged in their learning.

Communication of information in the lessons observed was of a very high quality. The language used was clear and unambiguous. This helped students to understand clearly the concepts being addressed. The visual aids used to show students how to proceed in their practical work were of a very good standard. The demonstrations observed during the evaluation were very well prepared and executed. These demonstrations were a significant contributing factor to the successful work completed by students. For example, a demonstration was used to show students where features fit on the human head. This was carried out in a way which encouraged students to rely on their observances as opposed to asking them to internalise a schema. To encourage students to have confidence in their own observations is very good practice.

In one of the lessons observed, students were making drawings from plants. It was noted that all of the drawings produced in this lesson were of a very high standard. Some students chose to challenge themselves by drawing the whole plant from different angles. This shows that students have a very good understanding of how to make good analytical drawings and is a very good basis for further project work.

A short critique of the work completed by students was carried out in both of the lessons. This is a good strategy which enables students to check their progress. In both of the lessons students
were responsive and confident. To further this work it is suggested that students should be asked to discuss the learning outcome and to establish what work has been successful and what work requires further development. In this way students will have an opportunity to discuss their work with more focus whilst using the appropriate terminology.

In discussions with students it was noted that they appeared to have a limited knowledge of art history and appreciation. To ensure that students have the opportunity to become familiar with appreciating and forming opinions about important art and design it is recommended that art history and appreciation be introduced to students from first year. It is further recommended that these opportunities should be provided as discrete lessons as well as being integrated into practical lessons.

From the evidence provided in students' finished work and work in progress it was clear that students are acquiring a range of skills in the appropriate disciplines. It was noted that the quality of drawing observed during the evaluation was good. However, for students to achieve to their potential some alternative plans must be implemented in the classroom. The recommendations outlined in the planning and preparation section of this report will help in this regard.

ASSESSMENT

The school has a homework policy and this is implemented by the art department. Homework was given in one 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 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. Good profiling 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, classroom activities and homework. Students are informed of their progress through school reports, comments and marks on their work and regular oral feedback. Parents are kept informed of their children’s progress through school reports, parent-teacher meetings, the students’ journal and updates on general work are also featured in the school’s newsletter.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Whole-school provision for Art is very good.
- Art enjoys a very good reputation in the school.
- Students at the school benefit from the art department’s commitment to continuing professional development in art education.
The art department is accommodated in rooms which are very attractive and stimulating learning environments.

ICT facilities are being used to good effect in teaching and learning.

During the evaluation students’ behaviour was pleasant and courteous.

The quality of teaching and learning as observed during the evaluation was of a good standard.

Good assessment practices are in place to keep students and their parents informed of their progress.

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

- A full review of curricular planning in Art should take place with a view to improving students’ performance.
- Art history and appreciation should be introduced to students from first year.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the teachers 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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Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management wishes to congratulate the members of the Art department on this excellent report. Art is a very valued part of the Mercy College community and its importance and positive impact on all is reflected in this document.

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

Art history and appreciation will be incorporated into the first year.