

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Technical Graphics and
Design and Communication Graphics**

REPORT

**Meánscoil na mBráithre Criostaí
James' Street, Kilkenny
Roll number: 61550G**

Date of inspection: 11 November 2009



REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN TECHNICAL GRAPHICS AND
DESIGN AND COMMUNICATION GRAPHICS

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Meánscoil na mBráithre Criostaí, Kilkenny. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Technical Graphics (TG) and Design and Communication Graphics (DCG) and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of these subjects 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 teachers, examined students' work, and had discussions with the teachers. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and the teachers' written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and the 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

Meánscoil na mBráithre Criostaí, Kilkenny, provides TG and DCG as optional subjects in its junior and senior cycle curriculums. Student uptake of the subjects is very good, with more than one class group studying the subject in a number of year groups. It is also laudable that the inclusion of a DCG module in the school's Transition Year (TY) programme was a direct result of requests from TY students. This recognition of the student voice in the school is commended.

The time allocated to TG in junior cycle, three class periods per week, is less than ideal. The allocation of four class periods per week to DCG in senior cycle should also be increased if possible. Senior management should endeavour to increase these allocations to four periods per week in junior cycle and five periods per week in senior cycle, in line with common practice. These increases would help to ensure that students are given appropriate time to complete the syllabus and to further develop their drawing skills.

The facilities provided to the subject department to teach graphics subjects are good. A specialist classroom is used for almost all graphics lessons. This room is enabled for information and communication technology (ICT) and appropriate for the teaching and learning of graphics subjects. On occasion a materials technology (wood) room is utilised when the specialist room is unavailable. This room, while not ideal, is adequate as cross-curricular links may be made quite easily and common resources can be identified and utilised with ease.

The subject department has not only availed of the recent continuing professional development (CPD) courses provided by the Technology Subjects Support Service (t⁴) but has made extremely

good use of the resources made available to it in the promotion and delivery of the revised DCG syllabus. This is commended.

Students make their optional subject choices prior to entry in first year. Optional subject bands are formed based on students' preferences as is best practice. This has resulted in subject bands varying from year to year. To assist students and parents at this time there are a number of supports provided, including: information evenings, meetings with the school's guidance counsellor and relevant information from specialist subject teachers. During TY, DCG is offered on a modular basis, providing all students with an opportunity to sample the subject before choosing their leaving certificate subjects. Senior management should consider extending this type of sampling programme to first-year students to further develop the supports that are already in place in order to help them make informed choices about optional subjects.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Subject department planning occurs during formal planning meetings facilitated by school management and through regular informal meetings of the subject department. The proceedings at these meetings are recorded and provide a valuable record of decisions made and any duties that may arise from such decisions. The role of subject department co-ordinator is rotated among all members of the subject department on an annual basis. The co-ordinator convenes meetings and is centrally involved with the maintenance and procurement of resources and equipment. This system allows all members of the subject department to gain the experience of subject co-ordination while also ensuring that important duties are fulfilled. This distributed leadership is commended.

Individual subject department plans for TG and DCG have been developed. These plans include subject organisational information, examples of specific cross-curricular links and a list of teaching methodologies utilised in graphics lessons. This information is replicated in both the TG and DCG plans. In order to streamline the planning structures within the subject department, these plans should be consolidated into one distinct file. This would help to develop a more coherent approach to planning for both graphics subjects in the school, while also facilitating regular review. Once this has been achieved, the subject department, in collaboration with the learning support team, should begin to identify interventions to accommodate students with specific additional educational needs.

The quality of curricular planning among members of the subject department is good. Plans for each programme have been developed and these plans allow individual teachers to deliver various aspects of the curriculum within specified common timeframes. This planning is commended. The curricular plan for TY is an area that should be further refined by identifying a number of teaching and learning strategies that could be incorporated into lessons to make students' learning experiences more experiential. Possible methodologies could include using peer and self-assessment techniques, student presentations and class discussions to scaffold students' learning.

Teachers' individual planning for lessons was exemplary in all instances. Resources and teaching aids were prepared in advance of each lesson observed and these resources were introduced at appropriate times during lessons. The subject department has also begun to collate and collect teachers' accumulated electronic resources including parametric models, presentations and online content. These resources are then easily accessible on each teacher's individual external hard drive. This ongoing initiative is highly commended.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The quality of graphics teaching observed during the course of the evaluation was very good. All lessons were characterised by a similar structure built on a brief introduction, including recapitulation of previous work, followed by teacher and student activity and a distinct lesson conclusion.

A variety of good quality demonstration media were used throughout the inspection. Blackboard drawings and sketches were clear and accurate and in some cases these sketches were further enhanced through the use of coloured chalk to reinforce students' understanding of various line types. ICT was also used to good effect in order to supplement the teaching and learning experience in all lessons. These resources were used judiciously and always to highlight a key point. Using ICT resources in this effective manner is commended.

Good quality questioning techniques were employed during the lessons observed. In many lessons, students were given adequate time to reflect on and formulate their opinions before they were asked to answer. This technique helped to ensure that all students remained focused on the problem. Considerable time was also given to students to answer questions posed. This strategy helped teachers to ascertain individual students' understanding. Some students were given the opportunity to get involved in demonstrations at the blackboard. This had a number of positive effects and created an active and participatory environment where learning was an inclusive process.

Classroom management was very good in all lesson observed. Lessons were structured and organised, thereby ensuring that students became accustomed to an orderly learning environment. Teachers circulated the classrooms and monitored all students' progress and students responded to this atmosphere by participating fully in lessons and maintaining an admirable work ethic.

The specialist graphics room has a wide variety of posters, pictures, photographs and samples of exemplary student work on display. During one lesson, students offered their work to be considered for 'drawing of the week'. This initiative is most worthwhile as it allows teachers to give positive affirmation to students deserving of praise.

Students demonstrated a good level of learning during the lessons observed. This was indicated through their questions and answers, their class work and their portfolio work. A high proportion of students attempt higher level at junior cycle in the certificate examinations and generally achieve very well at their chosen level. At senior cycle the proportion is less. However, their results indicate that students achieve according to their levels of ability.

ASSESSMENT

Formal examinations are held in the school on a biannual basis. Common assessment procedures are implemented where appropriate. In some instances, these assessments consist of a terminal examination combined with an additional portfolio assessment. This good practice should be extended throughout the department, especially at senior cycle, as it helps students to prepare for the assessment model used for the DCG syllabus in the certificate examinations.

While there was a considerable focus on providing students with usable oral and written formative feedback, the area of students' drafting and presentation techniques remains an area

that is still in need of further improvement. Having recognised this as an area for development the subject department should now devise common strategies aimed at improving this aspect of graphics education throughout the school.

Assessment for learning (AfL) techniques were used in some lessons observed. In one junior cycle lesson, students were asked to identify the key learning outcomes of the lesson. This had the effect of highlighting the lesson's key objective and also helped the teacher to assess the success of the lesson. The further development and implementation of additional AfL strategies within the subject department should be considered in order to continue the development and progression of graphics education in the school.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The quality of graphics teaching in the school is very good
- An appropriate graphics subject is offered to students in all programmes in Meánscoil na mBráithre Criostaí, Kilkenny
- The quality of resources and facilities at the subject department's disposal is very good
- Uptake of all graphics subjects in the school is very good
- A number of improvements in the delivery of graphics subjects in the school can be directly attributed to teachers' engagement in CPD
- Good quality agreed curricular plans have been devised for all year groups

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

- School management should increase the time allocated to TG at junior cycle and DCG at senior cycle in line with common practice
- The subject department should further develop the graphics subject plan by consolidating the TG and DCG plans into one and augment the section that details the supports for students with additional educational needs
- The subject department should identify a common approach aimed at further improving students' drafting and presentation techniques

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the teachers of TG and DCG 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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