

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Art  
REPORT**

**Clongowes Wood College  
Clane, Co Kildare**

**Roll number: 61720F**

**Date of inspection: 13 December 2010**



**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS  
AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA** | **DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATION  
AND SCIENCE**

# **REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ART**

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## **SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT**

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Clongowes Wood College. 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 deputy principal and subject teachers. The board of management of the school 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**

Art is very well supported with time, personnel and facilities by the college. A full-time art teacher is employed; at the time of the inspection there was a substitute engaged. Extracurricular and co-curricular activities enhance students' experience of art and design beyond the classroom.

The art department has recently moved into a newly-built art room designed to allow maximum natural light. This customised studio-style space is a splendid resource from which students will benefit from ideal physical conditions to learn art and design skills and experience visual culture.

The new art room amply facilitates all possible school-appropriate art, design and craft activities. A kiln room, a computer room and a storage room as well as a teacher's office are all discrete areas off the main art room.

Maximising the use of the facilities, creating opportunities for student self development and further empowering potential vocational prospects in visual art design and architecture and media are all perspectives the art department, with the aid of management, should engage with to fully exploit the unique potential available in the context of the college.

Access to the subject is good for students of all abilities and aptitudes and differentiation in relation to students with special educational needs (SEN) is established in the delivery of courses.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

Good general planning documents were made available during the inspection. These outlined the art department plan for all courses. In addition, detailed planning for the lessons seen was available. Both were of a good standard and support the delivery of learning experiences. It is recommended that art department planning is further developed and extended through the

addition of more fully focussed learning outcomes for lessons, projects and assignments. These outcomes should also be differentiated for students of differing aptitudes and ability levels.

Very good preparation for a craft class for batik, for a film class and an art history class had been done. Tools and materials were all ready for use by students at the beginning of each lesson and this ensured efficient use of time for the activities that the learning experiences entailed.

The college has many resources that can provide visual stimulation and support for Art, such as a collection of taxidermy-preserved exotic birds in a glass case near the art room door. These, and other resources such as important stained glass windows in the college chapel, are unique and valuable resources that should be habitually used throughout the school year as a basis for lessons. It is recommended that detailed planning is done to utilise such artefacts, for the development of perceptual skills and aesthetic competence and in cross curricular investigation.

There was an emphasis on film and photography in some of the lessons inspected. There is an expertise in these media in the art department and it would be appropriate, given the facilities that exist for careful planning to be undertaken, to maximise the further development of this metier as a strong strand in students' learning opportunities.

In order to avoid any over emphasis on State Examination Commission (SEC) examination criteria which influences the delivery of courses, the syllabus document at Junior Certificate should be the basis of what is taught and the breadth and balance documented therein should be represented in the planning documentation. It is recommended that the art department continue to work directly from the syllabus when planning to ensure that the breadth and balance is achieved at all stages of courses.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

A substitute teacher had confidently taken charge of students' learning at the time of the evaluation. Imaginative and complex learning activities had been undertaken from which the students had benefited. This is very highly commended. Management of students was good and the time available for the lessons was effectively utilised. There was a very good atmosphere for learning in all classes and high levels of co-operation, courtesy and focus on the learning assignments were habitual in all classes from students. Students were articulate and could converse easily about their work and comment appropriately about their experience of the coursework. Participation in group discussions during lessons was high; this was well conducted by the teacher and students made good observations. All this supported students' learning and enhanced their engagement with the topics and themes that arose during the lessons.

There is direct access from the art room into the college grounds, a real advantage for observational learning in the natural environment and this facility should be exploited through planning for appropriate outdoor learning activities that reflect the aims and goals of the art department and of the personal development of individuals aspired to by the college in general. A strand of learning that relates to the *plein-air* tradition in France and Ireland would valuably link in with use of the college environs as a teaching resource, as students can have direct experiences of its characteristics and challenges.

There were several notable instances of students being expertly managed for active teaching and learning methodologies. First-year students were productively working in groups on

concepts for short films that they themselves would make. Storyboarding had been completed and discussion and analysis of these drawings and ideas, along with technical issues related to producing the films, was taking place as a topic of the lesson. A varied range of ideas had been generated in a previous class and as homework. These reflected the dominant interest of the different groups and had been developed as visual storyboards. However, the drawing with which the storyboards were executed, along with other drawings and projects stored in the classroom, revealed that there was a need for students to practise drawing and to achieve more skilful and age-appropriate attainment in this medium. It is recommended that a range of lessons and follow-up work in drawing that can suitably and without disruption be done in the study hall context, is now devised. Reiteration and practice are necessary if students are to benefit from comprehensive instruction given during class, particularly if complex skills are to be further nurtured beyond the basic entry point.

Effective use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) in the art department. Students use the internet for research and some class material is delivered through the medium of computer technology. A very good descriptive and critical account was given of the work of Le Douanier Rousseau, with the aid of a PowerPoint presentation. Students were introduced to a range of concepts in relation to the imagery. Aesthetic and stylistic matters in relation to the oeuvre were well covered. Very good questioning techniques were used to guide students into pathways of engagement with artefacts. All this is good practice. The art department also has provided a catalogue of all art books in the college's library for the classroom to direct students towards book sources of art information, a great practical support, especially for younger learners.

Creativity was strongly evident in the way learning experiences were presented to students. Having visited a Sir John Lavery exhibition as part of an educational trip, fifth-year students were assigned, in groups, to create tableaux based on two paintings from the exhibition. They devised costumes, props, creative lighting effects, and by applying face paints to a volunteer from each group, turned a classmate into the subjects of celebrated Lavery portraits, Michael Collins and Winston Churchill. This exercise, part of history and appreciation of art learning, required an amalgam of artistic, personal and communication skills, far from the comfort zone of textbook-determined art history learning. Excellent work was done in this lesson and higher-order skills came to the fore in the students' actions and thinking. History and appreciation of Art were particularly notable in this regard.

The Transition Year (TY) class had begun an immersion in digital photography through modules provided online by Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art Design and Technology, using 'Digital Creator' software. One of the advantages of the current arrangements for Leaving Certificate Art is that students may take it up *ab initio* in fifth year and study it for the state examination. TY often facilitates such a late adoption of Art as a subject as it can, and should, introduce students to the world of visual art and design through a varied and widely-focussed course. It is recommended that TY be developed in a way that would include course elements of practical art making, drawing and appreciation of art and design culture in order to better empower those students for whom the study of Art might be beneficial in terms of personal development and an advantage in vocational development.

## **ASSESSMENT**

There was good commentary made and feedback given to the students about their efforts during class. Good assessment records were kept. Students were preparing for formal examinations in the days following the inspection. This was well handled, with a combination of reassurance and challenge. Clear information was given as part of the preparation. This is commended as students benefited from the encouragement and help given. Students also benefited from the commentary and individual attention they received during lessons.

For assessment of drawing skills, distinction should be made, especially in first and second year, between creative and technical aspects of the art of drawing; both dimensions should be regularly assessed.

Assessment criteria for assignments, exercise and projects as well as examinations should be derived from the documented learning outcomes that have been defined in planning for the work. It is recommended that the learning outcomes become the basis for assessment criteria so that there is appropriate interconnection between what has been taught, learned and examined.

Students are facilitated to use the art room, during the late evening study sessions once a week, for homework and to pursue project assignments. It is important that students do more homework and practice during the week at times other than this session alone, as it cannot provide the continuity required for deep and effective art and design learning. The evening study arrangement provides the opportunity for third-year students to work under supervision on their SEC project throughout the period assigned for this undertaking. This is good practice as it allows students to benefit from the excellent art room facilities beyond class time.

Regular class tests, end-of-term house examinations and end-of-assignment assessments are the methods used for assessing progress and attainment. Good records are kept and outcomes of tests and assessments are communicated to parents and guardians at key junctures throughout the academic year. It is recommended that the department consider the regular use of some dimension of self assessment for students, perhaps in the form of a self-report questionnaire.

## **SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Excellent facilities have recently been made available to the art department. These resources should in future allow high student attainment in a wide range of art and design media, including 3D and digital technologies.
- Teaching and learning are very good, student engagement in lessons observed was excellent and creativity was strongly evident in the way learning experiences, including use of PowerPoint, were presented to students.
- Access to the college grounds has been well used as a learning resource for drawing lessons and digital photography.
- Students have access to the internet and to the college's library of art and design books for research. The college has excellent resources in its stained glass windows, architectural features and taxidermy collections to support visual art learning.
- Co-curricular and extracurricular activities have been provided to extend students' experience of visual culture beyond the classroom.

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

- It is recommended that the opportunities and challenges of the newly-built art classroom are further planned for, in order that change and progression will be maximised in teaching and learning. Art department planning documents should also be extended and developed to include a focussed and detailed emphasis on expected learning outcomes for assignments, lessons and projects, and should include differentiation.
- Review of the current TY course content arrangements for Art is recommended.

- It is recommended that the learning outcomes defined in the planning documentation should become the basis for assessment criteria that allow continuity and interlinkage between what is taught and learned, and what is assessed and examined.
- More homework and practice assignments, that are designed to be practical for the study-hall context of the college, to empower students' art skills learning and improve attainment and outcomes, are recommended.

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

# **Appendix**

**School response to the report**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

## **Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The school is very pleased with the Art Inspection report. We are particularly pleased it recognised the learning possibilities of the new Art room and its facilities.

The inspection process was a positive experience for the school and the teachers concerned.

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

We welcome the recommendations in the report. Some have already been implemented or are in the process of being implemented. The review of the TY course content has been raised already and should be discussed further in light of the review of the school's review of the entire TY content. As suggested, the learning outcomes in the planning documents will reflect assessment, particularly in the Junior and Leaving Certificate years. Homework and practice assessments are being reviewed in the context of the study hall and its limitations. Already, first and second years are given drawing exercises to complete during supervised study but limitations such as lighting, desk size and access to equipment present challenges and need to be addressed. We wish to convey our gratitude to the Inspectorate for its thorough and complimentary analysis.