Subject Inspection of Art
REPORT

Templemichael College
Longford

Roll number: 71730O

Date of inspection: 12 October 2010.
SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Templemichael College, Longford. 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

The work of the two-person art department is appreciated and lauded by management for the support and stimulation it gives to students’ personal development and progress, and the academic and vocational opportunities it provides. This year a defined budget has been made available which provides enhanced support for artistic learning activities and enables the development of new strategies for teaching and learning. The art department personnel work in a very professional, cohesive and co-operative way.

There is good access to the subject for students of all abilities. The spatial facilities support the subject’s needs. There are two art rooms. There is a good range of equipment for a variety of crafts, including a kiln, available to the department. In addition to Junior and Leaving Certificate courses, the art department runs a range of post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses in visual art and design, one in interior design and the other in portfolio preparation for aspiring art college entrants. They share the same working space as the second-level students and are timetabled throughout the school week within the same schedule. As a result, the PLC presence has a valuable cultural dimension for the post-primary students as there is diversity and interest in the busy two-tiered visual learning environment of the art department. Furthermore, specialist personnel who assist the permanent art department staff in pottery, photography and woodcarving also work with Junior Certificate students, made possible due to funding from the Junior Certificate School Programme. All this is very positive and shows that there is good overarching vision in the use of available resources. Therefore, the environment is a rich and varied one for visual arts learning and it benefits all students in the post-primary programmes the school offers.

Co-curricular and extracurricular activities for art learning are strongly supported by management and various trips are a standard feature of the learning agenda planned for students of Art. Management have also facilitated engagement with community events, for example the art department contributes to designing a float in the Longford St. Patrick’s Day parade, and have
been successful in winning awards for this work. Many students have been successful in local and national art and design competitions. These are valued by the school as they enhance the school's profile in the locality and catchment area, and are publicised as part of the school's holistic focus. The art department has a strong presence within the school; student artefacts are displayed in the social areas, and the department contributes design to public and communal occasions for the school community. Furthermore, the PLC course participants designed and executed decorative schemes for the student toilets, and were assisted in this work by the post-primary students; again this was made possible with the support of management and represents the opportunities which the school creates for broad, integrated and participative art and design learning. The PLC course has an excellent track record of success, particularly for portfolio preparation and has, last year, empowered eighteen students to progress to third level or further art and design education courses.

There is a choice between Science and Art for junior cycle. At present all third-year students take Art. In senior cycle the subject options are Biology, Art and Engineering.

Templemichael College receives the supports normal to a Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) designated school. Junior Certificate School Programme work practices are used in first-year and second-year art classes.

The art department has a strong profile in the local community as well as throughout the school. Last year it organised a big exhibition of students’ work in the town centre, with a formal opening ceremony, which brought wide local notice to the students’ artistic achievements.

**Planning and Preparation**

There is competent practice in planning and preparation in the art department. Use of time was well planned for in the documentation seen, with every class period available throughout the school year for each year group assigned with a learning topic or activity. This is good practice and ensures that it is possible to utilise and monitor the effective use of temporal resources available.

Planning documentation was available for classes taught on the day of the inspection and, in addition, year-group plans for post-primary classes were also available for the art department as a whole. A template was used to structure the planning document for each year group. On learning outcomes, statements were short and cryptic. These could valuably be extended and developed. It is recommended that the planning document is enhanced by the development and inclusion of clearer and more extensive learning outcomes. It is recommended that the emphasis on differentiation in teaching and learning be furthered through the development of learning outcomes for students. This should further enhance good classroom practice whereby students are given individual attention from time to time during teaching and learning.

Integration of the contribution of visiting artists into the work on the art department is well catered for in planning and preparation. The consistency and focus of the work done to date in the art department is the outcome of shared planning and good co-ordination of the personnel.
Teaching and Learning

Classes are mixed ability. Students sample throughout all of first year, and have one double class a week. There is an opportunity thus for these students to be able to attain a good breath and balance in their art and design learning. It was apparent that the first years were being well grounded in basics skills. The emphasis on expressiveness and creativity, as well as the high levels of engagement with artistic and aesthetic learning, ensures that there is an opportunity for students to develop personally as individuals, an important outcome of all art education. Impressive though this is, it is recommended that the emphasis on expressiveness and creativity is consciously further developed through planning and practice, and that differentiation of the needs of students should be further planned for in relation to the self-expressive and personal-development elements of learning.

The first year lesson seen was extremely good. A PowerPoint presentation was used to present a range of materials that stimulated commentary and discussion from the students. A great deal of thought and effort had clearly gone into the assembly of the imagery presented to students for discussion. The students were au fait with some of the imagery drawn from cinema and popular culture. As a motivational treat, a showing of one of the films was promised, when the assignment was over. This had a motivating and enthusing effect for the group and is one of many examples seen of the ways the subject is made attractive and presented in a learner-friendly manner. As the film had a key connection with the assignment theme, it was a very good strategy to build on and intensify the learning and experiential context of the lesson.

A very good Leaving Certificate life-drawing class focussed on the techniques Degas used for drawing the figure from life and the class worked in a similar manner, with outline and pastels. This was both conceptually excellent and well done in practical terms with the medium-size class group of students. This lesson demonstrated a very sound grasp of how the artist’s technique determined how the visual style of his drawing was achieved and revealed the close links between process and style in a way easily experienced and understood by students as part of their experience of learning how to draw. The presentation and delivery of this lesson was of the highest quality.

Senior cycle classes tended to be small. Students in these classes, therefore, have the advantage of getting a lot of individual attention. In addition, it provides an optimal footing for differentiation and allows students an enhanced degree of personal choice or self-selected direction in assignments.

A junior cycle lesson adroitly tapped into the culture and atmosphere of Halloween. This lesson was underpinned by a rich, varied and appropriate PowerPoint presentation of images designed to focus, motivate and inspire. The students revealed marked sophistication in relation to film and media, and the art department must be complemented highly on the way this facet of popular culture from students’ own experience was utilised in generating a most powerful learning situation. The hard-working students in this group stayed on task throughout. There was a wide range of aptitude, motivation, English as an additional language (EAL) needs, and special educational needs (SEN) requirements evident in the class group. Attention was paid, in the delivery of the class and in the supervision and management of student work, to the needs of individuals and subgroups within the whole. This sensitivity was apparent in all the lessons delivered by the art department personnel.
Teaching and learning are very well managed in the art department and there is a creative and focussed ambience which is greatly to the advantage of the students’ attainment potential in art and design.

ASSESSMENT

Regular assessment takes place during the school year and is a support to students’ learning and progression. A variety of appropriate assessment procedures is in use in the art department: continuous assessment based on class work, regular classroom tests and end-of-term examinations. There are written examinations for the history and appreciation of art component of the Leaving Certificate programme. Student work is monitored daily during the Junior Certificate project. Continual assessment is carried out throughout the year on practical and written work for all classes. There are systematic records of students’ assessment and examination results. End-of-term and end-of-year results are communicated to parents and guardians. Regular parent-teacher meetings are held and the art department provides discussion, feedback and advice at these.

It is recommended that the art department use the Assessment for Learning (Afl) section of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) website as a resource for further development and differentiation of assessment practice, and prepare a strategy for utilising some of the key principles outlined there. The use of some devices, such as self-report questionnaires, whereby students are facilitated to engage in some self assessment that would enhance and extend the art department’s well-established good overall practice in the assessment aspect of their work, is also recommended.

Homework assignments are set and monitored. It is important that the type of homework set is challenging and that, for junior cycle, this always goes beyond collecting materials and sources for project work.

Some use of information and communication technology (ICT) as homework from time to time is recommended, if available at home. Reiteration of lessons and classroom assignments as homework, particularly of the art element and the concepts and perceptual aspects of these, in the Paint programme, which is a default on most personal computers, would link learning already undertaken with ICT and challenge the students in a new way with the same material.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The work of the two-person art department is appreciated by and lauded by management for the support and stimulation it gives to students’ personal development and progress, and the academic and vocational opportunities it provides.
- Co-curricular and extracurricular activities for art learning are strongly supported by management and various art-education trips are a standard feature of the learning agenda planned for students of art and design.
- Management has facilitated art department engagement with community events, and students have exhibited their work publicly in Longford town centre.
- Commendably, there is good access to the subject for students of all abilities.
- The art department personnel work in a very professional, cohesive and co-operative way.
• There is a good range of equipment for a variety of crafts, including a kiln, available to the department; students benefit from this variety.
• In addition to Junior and Leaving Certificate courses, the art department runs successful PLC courses in visual art and design, one in interior design and the other in portfolio preparation for aspiring art college entrants.
• The art and design learning environment is a rich and varied one and the PLC presence benefits students in the post-primary programmes whatever their aptitude or motivation.
• Teaching and learning are very well managed in the art department and there is a creative and focussed ambience which is greatly to the advantage of the students’ potential attainment in art and design.
• ICT was expertly and creatively used to present materials, delineate concepts and encourage discussion in the lessons inspected.

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 planning document is enhanced by the development and inclusion of clearer and more extensive learning outcomes.
• It is recommended that the emphasis on differentiation in teaching and learning be furthered through the development of learning outcomes for students.
• It is recommended that the art department use the Afl section of the NCCA website as a resource for development and differentiation of assessment practice, and prepare a strategy for utilising some of the key principles outlined there.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the teachers 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 Board of Management of the College congratulates the Art Department on its continued excellent work as recognised in this report. This report gives comprehensive over view of the work of the Art Department and commends the creative and focussed ambience in the school. The report recognises the professional, cohesive and co-operative way the teachers work together. The Board would also like to thank the Inspectorate for the professional and positive manner displayed prior to and during the Inspection.

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

The Art Department is committed to implementing the recommendations contained in this report. It has now included the AFL Section of the NCCA website as a resource and is preparing a strategy for utilising the key principles outlined there.