

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of MUSIC
REPORT**

**Castletroy College
Castletroy, County Limerick
Roll number: 76073G**

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**AN ROINN DEPARTMENT
OIDEACHAIS OF EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA AND SKILLS**

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN MUSIC

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Castletroy College. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Music 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 the teacher, examined students' work, and had discussions with the teacher. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and the 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 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

Music enjoys a high profile in Castletroy College and is available to all students in all years. Students in first year experience subject sampling up to Halloween at which point they make their choices for the Junior Certificate choosing two subjects from Music, Art, Home Economics, Business Studies, Technology, Technical Graphics, Metalwork and Materials Technology (Wood). The optional Transition Year (TY) programme includes a six-week music module in which all students participate on a rotational basis, and an open-choice system operates for the Leaving Certificate. The number of students opting for Music remains consistently high in both junior and senior cycle. For purely logistical reasons, numbers at junior cycle have been capped at thirty. However demand often exceeds this number, with forty students expressing a preference for Music in first year this year for example. This is very positive but should these numbers continue to increase, consideration of a second class group may be necessary in the future. Management is aware of this and is hopeful that any timetabling or resource problems will be surmountable if the situation arises. It is recommended that the ongoing monitoring of these numbers be continued by management and staff. With the exception of the current sixth-year group which has a good gender balance, and in line with national norms, significantly more girls than boys study the subject. Given the profile of Music in the school, further exploration into ways of encouraging a higher uptake by boys is recommended.

Timetabled provision for Music is in line with syllabus guidelines. There is an appropriate class spread of contact time throughout the week along with a sufficient number of double periods to facilitate practical work.

As well as the curricular aspects of the subject and examination preparation, other musical activities take place during the school year. There is a good range of extracurricular activities which helps to raise the profile of Music in the school. There is a choir and an Irish traditional group which rehearse after school on Mondays and Wednesdays, and perform for the many events taking place during the year such as liturgies, fundraising events, talent shows, end-of-year

celebrations and competitions such as Siansa and Limerick Search for a Star. Another highlight in the college's calendar of events is the musical or variety show which alternates with the TY fashion show. Although TY students form the backbone for these events, other students are also invited to participate. A very successful fashion show had just been completed at the time of the evaluation and last January celebrations for the college's tenth anniversary culminated in a variety show which along with present students included past pupils and teachers. At this time the college also launched a compilation CD "Celebrating 10 years of Music and Song" which further reinforces the importance of the arts in school life. Close links with the nearby University of Limerick ensure continuing opportunities for the students to experience a variety of cultural events including the biennial variety show which takes place in the university's concert hall. Through these activities all students have access to some form of music-making, which is welcomed. This consistent participation of the whole-school community is indicative of the standing of and the keen interest in Music in the school and is very positive. The music teacher's commitment to these events and the college's support in facilitating such activities are deserving of the highest praise.

The specialist music room in the college is bright and acoustically satisfactory. A good stock of resources is available, including classroom instruments, guitars, a piano, drum kit, a keyboard, sound system and audio resources, sheet music and texts, and a computer and data projector. There are also choir steps at the back of the room and student computers are positioned along one side of the room. The walls are adorned with posters and charts about music, photographs, and student projects on aspects of Music. These all contribute to a heightened awareness of the subject which is positive. The speakers for the sound system are poorly positioned but as the college is presently upgrading all the technology in every classroom and there are also speakers for the data projector, it is recommended that some thought be put into streamlining all the audio and technological resources in the music room. This could include channelling all the sound through one speaker system which could be linked to all the technological resources in the room with the speakers positioned correctly and controlled from one primary source. Strategic development of the information and communication technology (ICT) resources in the music room coupled with regular maintenance would do much to enhance the quality of teaching and learning currently in the college.

The music room has double tables laid out in long rows. These tables are quite cumbersome and take up all the available space thus restricting mobility and minimising opportunities for a fluid learning environment. Many opportunities for effective learning are lost as the students and teacher are restricted in the ways in which they can interact in the classroom setting. It is recommended that an examination of the existing space and furniture is given some consideration. A simple solution would be to replace the double tables with single tables if resources allow. As these tables are lighter, this arrangement would facilitate a flexible learning environment where performing, composing and listening activities could be undertaken with minimal upheaval.

The commitment to the music teacher's continuing professional development (CPD) is very good. The music teacher is a member of the Post-Primary Music Teachers' Association (PPMTA) and attendance at its meetings affords the teacher the opportunity to keep abreast of all information pertaining to music education at post-primary level, to keep up to date with ongoing curricular innovation and to network with other music teachers. In addition, the teacher avails of any ongoing training courses which contribute to overall continuing professional development (CPD) and has attended the series of in-service programmes for Music organised by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (formerly the Second Level Support Service).

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Very good progress has been made in the development of the music department plan. The current plan contains a mission statement for the department and aims and objectives for music education in the school. It also includes organisational details, planning for students with additional educational needs, and general long-term and medium-term plans for all year groups. A comprehensive curriculum policy was presented which included programmes of work for all groups. These were relevant to the different syllabuses and the requirements of the examinations, and took into account the level and the ability of the students in question. Comprehensive documentation containing a detailed breakdown of the content to be covered, the corresponding learning outcomes to be achieved, the resources and some methodologies employed to support the teaching of topics and the revision and assessment modes used by teacher was presented. This is very good practice.

In order to enhance the effective planning that has already been undertaken, it is recommended that planning for all year groups be expanded to include schemes reflecting a purposeful sequencing of material with suggested learning outcomes that go beyond fulfilling the requirements of the certificate examinations and include some broader aspects in terms of musical competencies. Inclusion of appropriate specific music teaching methodologies would also be in order. In addition, it is recommended that future planning includes consideration of student learning strategies and of ways of encouraging students to reflect on their learning. It would also be important to ensure that all programmes and schemes of work are working documents that are regularly reviewed.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

In all lessons observed, a secure, enthusiastic, work-orientated atmosphere prevailed. Material was presented in a coherent manner and the purpose of each lesson was clearly established from the outset. High expectations of attainment and behaviour were set. A warm, friendly rapport prevailed between the students and the teacher at all times. There was a good level of student engagement in lessons seen, and students' contributions to class discussions were valued, with praise used effectively to acknowledge their efforts.

The teaching observed employed many strategies to engage the students and include them in all aspects of the learning process. Materials were well prepared and student knowledge and experience were used to support learning wherever possible, with some notable examples including accomplished student demonstrations and accompaniments. The good teaching seen was characterised by engaging and motivating the wide range of abilities of the students through well-structured and varied activities. Good learning was seen through listening and analysis, trial and error, and progressive refinement in all activities. These approaches contributed to the quality of learning which is very positive.

All lessons observed had an aural focus and some elements of performing which included singing, recorder and ensembles. The performing was at a suitable standard for the levels visited and all classes seen were on target with the syllabus requirements. Some of these lessons involved some aspects of rehearsal where students learned new material by rote and refined and reinforced this learning over time with performances noticeably improving as the lessons progressed. Total student participation in all these ensembles and supportive and assured accompaniments by the

teacher, enhanced the quality of these performances. Whole-class performances of the music provided convincing evidence that most students are capable of maintaining their own part in group music-making. Observation of students' practical work, at all stages, showed that whilst many were challenged, few students were unable to cope with the demands of the music. The lessons were also open-ended enough to allow students' opinions to impact on the musical interpretation of these performances. This focus on building the role of Music as a subject and giving students the opportunity to take part in and enjoy practical music-making is entirely appropriate. Furthermore, the variety of repertoire to which the students are exposed not only extends the range of their musical experience but is also highly effective in developing critical listening skills and ensures that students are suitably prepared for many aspects of the certificate examinations.

The resources available in the music room are used to very good effect and contribute to an effective learning environment. It is recommended however, that ways in which ICT could be used more effectively in a music-teaching setting be explored, as it would greatly enhance learning. Not only could these resources be used to build up a stock of more student-friendly resources and handouts but would also allow for a more efficient use of teacher time in the long term. Strategic use of the data projector could also minimise photocopying as a significant amount of material could be displayed appropriately rather than distributed to each individual student. This could enhance student engagement and also allow for more appropriate student posture when singing or performing on instruments for example, as the required visual stimuli could be displayed in a more effective way.

The curricular areas of performing and listening were linked appropriately at all times. However, opportunities to include the integration of composing were often overlooked. It is recommended that greater consideration be given to the manner in which the three areas of performing, composing and listening could be integrated in musically-focussed ways in all lessons.

ASSESSMENT

In all lessons observed, students were generally confident and capable, and performed to a good standard. Students' folders, copybooks and manuscripts mostly showed evidence of good organisation, were generally neat in appearance, and contained detailed information sheets, coursework, and worksheets. Some students notate Music in their copybooks by ruling their own staves. Careful monitoring of student work in this area is recommended, especially with junior classes, to ensure the students are actually using manuscripts when notating Music.

In addition to regular assessments at Christmas and summer, and the mock examinations for Junior and Leaving Certificate students in the spring, formative assessment takes place in a variety of ways. Homework, which includes written, aural and practical work, is given on a regular basis and complements and consolidates the activities undertaken during lessons. Other examples of formative assessment include questioning in class, and completion of worksheets and projects. Practical elements are continually assessed and students also experience practical assessments similar to those encountered in the certificate examinations. These methods allow for careful monitoring of a student's progress, provide sound guidelines for performance in the certificate examinations, and are indicative of the commitment of the teacher to helping all students achieve their potential in Music. Castletroy College is committed to the principles that underpin Assessment for Learning. In this light, it is recommended that the teacher includes written comments in addition to marks or grades when monitoring the work of students. Regular constructive feedback enables better learning by informing students about their own individual

progress. This could also help build up an awareness of individual students' musical competencies balanced in terms of examination requirements and overall musical development.

Parents are kept informed of their children's progress using the school journal and biannual school reports. Regular parent-teacher meetings take place for all class groups which also provide a forum for parents to discuss any concerns or difficulties students may be having. There is also a willingness on the part of staff to meet parents at any stage if they have concerns about their son's or daughter's progress.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Music has a high profile in the school, is available to all students on an optional basis and is well-supported by in-school management.
- Good standards of teaching and learning, a positive attitude towards Music and a warm classroom atmosphere were significant aspects of the lessons seen during the visit.
- A well-resourced music teaching area exists in the school, and is used appropriately to support the teaching and learning of Music.
- Student involvement in extracurricular musical activities also impacts greatly on their musical development. The wide-ranging activities available to the students enrich and complement the curricular music in the school.

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

- Planning for all year groups should be expanded to include schemes reflecting a purposeful sequencing of material with suggested learning outcomes that include some broad aspects in terms of musical competencies.
- All programmes and schemes of work should be working documents that are regularly reviewed.
- Consideration should be given to the manner in which the three areas of performing, composing and listening could be integrated in musically-focussed ways in all lessons.
- Ways in which ICT could be used more effectively in a music-teaching setting should be explored

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