

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Music  
REPORT**

**Saint Clare's Comprehensive School  
Manorhamilton, County Leitrim  
Roll number: 81013P**

**Date of inspection: 21 October 2010**



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F  
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N  
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

**REPORT  
ON  
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN MUSIC**

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**SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT**

This report has been written following a subject inspection in St Clare's Comprehensive School, Manorhamilton. 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, deputy principal and with the subject teacher. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

St Clare's Comprehensive School, Manorhamilton, caters for 249 male and 234 female students. Music is available as an optional subject for both the Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate examinations. Music is also available in the school as an optional component of the Transition Year (TY) programme where it is delivered in modular format for half of the academic year. This music module is rotated with Materials Technology Woodwork.

The systems in place to facilitate students' selection of optional subjects for study in both the junior cycle and the senior cycle offer a high level of choice and flexibility to students. In addition, very good support systems are in place to provide relevant subject information to incoming first-year students and students in the first year of the Leaving Certificate programme and to their parents.

Music was established as a curriculum subject in this school in 2006. The music department is staffed by one, fully qualified, specialist teacher who is currently in her second year in this school. Commendably, Music already has a very high profile and is well supported by senior management. It is good to note that the numbers of male and female students selecting Music are very healthy and this is evidence of the very good work done to promote the subject in the school. Timetable provision for Music is in line with the guidelines from the National Council of Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). It is noted that an additional period has been provided to third-year students in each of their optional subjects. There is an appropriate spread of contact time throughout the week with a sufficient number of double periods to accommodate practical work.

In addition to the curricular opportunities, a wide array of extracurricular musical activities is available for students. Music activities on offer include participation in the school choir, liturgical ceremonies, a traditional Irish group and participation in Seachtain na Gaeilge. In 2009, students also participated in *St Clare's got Talent* and in 2008, *The Wizard of Oz*. During this academic

year, students will also participate in *Oliver*. The high level of commitment of the music teacher to these events in conjunction with the very good level of support which is provided by senior management to facilitate these activities is commended.

Budgetary arrangements in the school are supportive of the subject and resources for Music are very good. A very large and spacious classroom which is fully equipped is available to the music department. Facilities for information and communication technology (ICT) are also good. The music teacher has spent considerable time and effort ensuring that the room is very vibrant and attractive for students. Many illustrations of various musical concepts both professionally printed and hand-crafted are on display in the room. This meticulous attention to detail is highly commended.

Management is very supportive of teachers' continuing professional development (CPD). The music teacher has attended annual conferences hosted by the Post-Primary Music Teachers' Association (PPMTA). This affords the teacher opportunities to keep abreast of all information pertaining to music education at second-level and to keep up-to-date with ongoing curricular innovation. In addition, the music teacher has attended in-service provided by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST). The level of interest demonstrated by the music department in continuing professional development is commended.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

Formal planning time is allocated to all subject departments including Music to meet three times per year. The music teacher is also a member of another subject department and sometimes uses this time to attend meetings related to that subject. More often, however, she meets with other similarly sized departments in the school to discuss issues pertaining to Music. The focus of such meetings has included assessment for learning and peer assessment strategies and this is good. Records have been kept by the music teacher of all formal meetings.

A key strength of the planning process in this school is the active involvement of senior management in curriculum planning. In particular, a noteworthy initiative in this school is the requirement that all subject departments engage in self-evaluation and agree strategies for improvement. In addition, each individual teacher reflects on his/her own teaching and learning practices and identifies areas for development. Templates have been provided by school management to support both of these processes. This is very innovative and it is good to note that the music teacher has already made good use of these templates.

The quality of department planning and co-ordination of Music is very high in this school. In addition to the necessary planning to ensure the smooth operation of the musical activities that take place, there is very good planning for the timetabled lessons in Music. Planning documentation that was made available by the music department contains much information about the many organisational practices that are in place for Music in the school and for the acquisition of resources. The TY music programme is broad and is designed to provide students with experience of a wide breadth of musical styles. Common programmes of work have been developed for each year group and these include the expected learning objectives for the delivery of each topic. Individual schemes of work have been developed for all class groups. These schemes outline the topic to be taught, how practical work will be included where appropriate and strategic planning for students with special educational needs. This work is of a particularly high standard and worthy of much praise.

The music department has adopted a 'blocked approach' to the delivery of particular topics in planning the lessons for students in the first year of the Leaving Certificate programme. It should be borne in mind that students should continually encounter all the components of the syllabus where possible. In so doing, care should be taken to ensure that the three music components of Music—listening, composing and performing—continue to be synthesised in lessons. This is recommended.

In keeping with good practice, the music department is provided with an analysis of certificate examination results and a comparison of school achievements to national norms. It is very good that this information is also included in the plan and is used to inform teaching and learning.

Individual preparation for the lessons observed was of a very good quality. All resources used, including audio and ICT, were well chosen and appealed to the students. In many instances, written materials provided to students were designed by the teacher and tailored to meet their needs.

### **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Three lessons were observed during the course of the evaluation, one in junior cycle and two in senior cycle. In all lessons observed, there was a warm and respectful atmosphere where praise was used effectively to acknowledge students' efforts and their contributions to class discussions were valued. Good routines were established in all lessons from the outset.

All lessons were very well structured and suitably paced. The material chosen was very suitable to all students. In senior cycle, students were constantly challenged to develop their music vocabulary and use appropriate music language. Younger students who were less knowledgeable in this regard were encouraged to develop these skills at an appropriate pace.

In all lessons observed, the aims were very clearly stated to the students and in conjunction with the assigned homework towards the end of the lesson, were recorded on the board. In the classes visited, students were engaged and motivated by the content and the manner in which the lesson was delivered.

The standard of teaching in all of the classes visited was very good. From the outset, the teacher established high expectations of her students who in turn rose very competently to these challenges. Teaching and learning strategies were varied. ICT was effectively integrated into all lessons observed. On occasion, students' practical skills were put to very good use in lessons. Other strategies included teacher input, questioning, students working independently on written assignments and discussions. There is scope to include more pair work and group work strategies particularly when students are reluctant to respond in a large class setting. This is recommended. Students were monitored for all activities and where necessary, individual help and support was provided to them.

The quality of learning displayed by students was equally very good. This was evidenced by the standard of analytical information provided by students after listening to Music, the ability to recall extensive quantities of information from previous lessons and to distinguish between different metres, time signatures and note values. Practical activities were incorporated into all lessons observed and generally took the form of clapping exercises.

## **ASSESSMENT**

Music students in this school are assessed regularly through formal house examinations, “mock” certificate examinations for Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate students and class assessments. Parents are made aware of students’ progress through the annual parent-teacher meeting and the student journal. Reports are sent home at regular intervals.

The music department has developed an assessment policy which describes a variety of assessment practices currently in use. Students’ homework and class work is monitored and assessed very frequently and this is good. Music students are assessed through the completion of worksheets, homework assignments and questioning in lessons. Students’ copies and manuscripts are thoroughly corrected and it is good to note that feedback contained lots of helpful comments and words of encouragement for the students. 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.

There is an expectation that students will store all materials and resources provided by the teacher in folders. This practice is consistent across all class groups. This is very good as these materials will function as useful sources for revision. Records of students’ progress and achievement in homework and assessments are kept by the teacher and this is very good practice.

Patterns of achievement in certificate examinations are good.

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

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The systems in place to facilitate students’ selection of optional subjects for study in both the junior cycle and the senior cycle offer a high level of choice and flexibility to students.
- The numbers of male and female students selecting Music is very healthy.
- The music teacher has spent considerable time and effort ensuring that the music room is very vibrant and attractive for students and many illustrations of various musical concepts both professionally printed and hand-crafted are on display.
- Planning for Music is very good in this school and a noteworthy initiative is the requirement that all subject departments and individual teachers undergo self-evaluation and identify strategies for improvement.
- Individual preparation for the lessons observed was of a very good quality.
- The standard of teaching and learning in all of the classes visited was very good.
- Music students in this school are assessed regularly and the music department has developed an assessment policy which describes a variety of assessment practices currently in use.

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

- Students should continually encounter all the components of the syllabus where possible.

A post-evaluation meeting was held with the teacher of Music and with the principal and deputy principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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