

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Music
REPORT**

**Saint Mary's Holy Faith
Glasnevin, Dublin 11
Roll number: 60770P**

Date of inspection: 19 November 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

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in St Mary's Holy Faith, Glasnevin. 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 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 principal, deputy principal and subject teachers. 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 Mary's Holy Faith, Glasnevin, caters for 717 females. Music is available as a compulsory subject for all first-year students. However, the school is currently exploring the feasibility of providing a short, sampling programme instead of the current arrangements that are in place for these students. In all remaining year groups, Music is available as an optional subject for both the Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate examinations.

Transition year (TY) is an optional programme in this school and Music is compulsory within this. Music is delivered in modular format and each module is of eight-week duration. Two bands have been formed and Music is available in each band. A discrete programme of work has been developed for each module. The first, practical skills, is rotated with Japanese, Psychology and Consumer affairs. The second, music appreciation, is rotated with Art, Craft and Fitness for Life. This provision for TY is very good.

The systems in place to facilitate students' selection of optional subjects for study in the second and third year of the junior cycle and in 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 first-year students and students in the first year of the Leaving Certificate programme and to their parents. The full range of subjects available in the school is offered to these students and the school then creates subject bands around students' selections.

The music department comprises two teachers. Commendably, Music has a very high profile and is well supported by senior management. It is good to note that the number of students selecting Music is 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). 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, choral workshops, musical showcase, trips, orchestra and the annual TY play. The high level of commitment of the music teachers to these events in conjunction with the very good level of support which is provided by senior management to facilitate these activities are commended.

Budgetary arrangements in the school are supportive of the subject and resources for Music are very good. A large and spacious classroom which is fully equipped is available to the music department. Facilities for information and communication technology (ICT) are also very good. The music teachers have 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 teachers have attended annual conferences hosted by the Post-Primary Music Teachers' Association (PPMTA). This affords the teachers 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 teachers have attended in-service provided by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), a choral workshop hosted by the Dundalk branch of the PPMTA and Leaving Certificate music workshops. The level of interest demonstrated by the music department in continuing professional development is commended.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The systems that are in the school are very supportive of collaborative planning. Formal planning time is allocated to all subject departments including Music to meet twice each term. Records have been kept by the music teachers of all formal meetings. In addition, the music department also meets very regularly on an informal basis. A key strength of this department is the high level of collaboration that is ongoing and this is to be commended.

One teacher has assumed the position of co-ordinator in a voluntary capacity and this role has been clearly defined. The co-ordinator is meticulous in carrying out this function and consequently, the quality of department planning is very high in this school. Planning documentation that was made available by the music department contains detailed information. This includes a list of topics for completion each term, the many organisational practices that are in place for Music in the school, resources, assessment practices, the integration of project work in TY and planning for students with special educational needs. In addition, some reference was made to the manner in which the three components of Music—listening, composing and performing—are being integrated in lessons.

Detailed lesson plans were presented on the day of the evaluation for most lessons. These included a statement of learning objectives, methodologies and a list of resources. The music department could now build on this very good work and gradually over time include this level of detail for each topic being taught. This would ensure that there is a permanent record of all the high quality practices that are in place.

The TY music programme is broad and is designed to provide students with experience of a wide breadth of musical styles. Two discrete programmes of work have been tailored to suit the needs

of TY students. The first, a music appreciation module, which is designed to introduce students to a wide range of musical styles and the second, a music-skills module, which is designed to encourage students to experience practical music-making activities such as the guitar and keyboard. In addition, these students also participate in the annual TY play.

Individual lesson planning and preparation for the lessons observed were of a very high quality. Good practice was seen whereby student participation and learning was at the core of the lesson. Much attention has been given by teachers to the design of worksheets and handouts tailored and differentiated specifically to suit the students' needs. Other resources used, including audio and ICT, were well chosen and appealed to the students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Three lessons were evaluated during the course of the inspection, one in junior cycle and two in senior cycle. In each, the music teachers created a positive learning environment and good use of humour was evident. There was a very good rapport between the students and the teachers. Students' contributions to class discussions were valued and praise was used effectively to acknowledge their efforts. Throughout, a comfortable and warm atmosphere was maintained. In the lessons visited, a clear statement of the aims and objectives was communicated to the students at the outset and returned to at the end which is in line with good practice.

High quality teaching and learning were observed in all of the lessons visited. This included the use of the *Sound before Symbol* approach for all activities and the inclusion of varied teaching and learning strategies which were stimulating and allowed for active student participation. For instance, particularly innovative approaches were adopted by the teacher in a senior-cycle lesson. Students were required to listen to two contrasting pieces of music, the first by a popular band and the second by a baroque composer. Students identified key features of both pieces with minimum input by the teacher and also identified the characteristics that were common to both extracts. Skilful questioning by the teacher gave students the opportunity to use their critical thinking skills and encouraged them to improve upon the quality of their responses. Information and communication technology (ICT) was used effectively whereby the music was displayed using both graphic and stave notation. The quality of responses given by the students was very good and the level of enjoyment was very apparent.

A second lesson observed in senior cycle was equally successful. The teacher's lesson plan incorporated an appropriate level of student activity including listening, clapping and a game where students had to identify the piece of music by clapping the rhythm. A performing component was also included in the lesson. The teacher adopted a flexible approach to the management of the activity. Students were moved to the piano and this provided a richer experience for them as it enhanced their understanding of correct posture and breathing. The standard of singing was very good. During the evaluation, students who were proficient on their practical instruments were encouraged to accompany the song. Optimising the skills of students in this way is very good practice.

A junior-cycle lesson was also very good. Students were introduced to a wide range of Irish musical instruments on which the teacher performed. Information about each instrument was provided to students. While this was very insightful and enlightening, in this instance, students should be encouraged to discover as much knowledge as possible for themselves prior to any such instruction and this is recommended. As the lesson progressed, opportunities were provided for students to participate actively and the quality of learning was very good. For instance, students

were able to clap correctly to the metre, identify the type of dance music being performed and, during a listening activity, recognise the instruments that were being played.

In all lessons observed, questioning strategies observed throughout the evaluation were varied and there was a good balance between those requiring a specific answer and those which encouraged students to think analytically at a higher cognitive level.

ASSESSMENT

Formal house examinations are held for all students at Christmas and also in the summer for first-year, second-year and fifth-year students. The Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate students sit “mock” certificate examinations in the spring. Reports are issued following all formal assessments. Students are also assessed through the completion of worksheets, homework assignments and questioning in lessons. Practical elements are continuously assessed in the classroom. This process includes assessment under examination conditions at appropriate stages throughout the year. These methods allow for careful monitoring of students’ progress and provide a solid basis to inform preparation for the certificate examinations.

The music teachers provide materials to students on a regular basis. These materials consist of worksheets and handouts and generally take the form of listening and composing assignments. In most classes, there is an expectation that students will store these materials in folders and this practice was seen to be consistent. This is very good as it ensures that the value of these materials is being fully realised. Commendably, regular marking of these folders is also taking place.

An examination of students’ copies and manuscripts indicated that students’ work is being corrected carefully and constructive comments indicating strategies for improvement are provided. This is good practice. Annual parent-teacher meetings take place for all class groups. Patterns of achievement in certificate examinations are very good and this should be kept under review to ensure that each student is reaching her full potential.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Music has a very high profile in the school.
- The uptake of Music in all year groups is very good.
- The quality of planning is very good.
- A wide array of musical activities is available for students.
- High quality teaching and learning was observed during the course of the evaluation.
- Effective use was made of the *Sound before Symbol* approach to music teaching.
- All lessons included a good level of participative strategies for students.
- Patterns of achievement in certificate examinations are very good.

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

- Students should be encouraged where possible to discover as much knowledge for themselves prior to any instruction.

A post-evaluation meeting was held with the teachers of Music, 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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