

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Art
REPORT

Mount Carmel Secondary School
King's Inns Street, Dublin 1
Roll number: 60853T

Date of inspection: 5 May 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
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**REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ART**

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Mount Carmel Secondary School, King's Inns Street, conducted as part of a whole-school evaluation. 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 teacher, examined students' work, and had discussions with the teacher. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and 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.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Mount Carmel Secondary School has an enrolment of 299 females. The school offers the following programmes: the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. Art is an optional subject on all of these programmes, except the TY programme on which Art is compulsory.

The art department is staffed by one specialist art teacher. In recent times the art department has set about enhancing the profile of the subject in the school. The strategies chosen to achieve this include the improvement of facilities in the art room, the development of a photography club and the display of students' work around the school. The latter, in particular, has been very effective and is very beneficial for students. Evidence of the success of these strategies can be found in the numbers of students taking the subject at both junior cycle and senior cycle which indicate that Art is now a very popular subject at the school.

Students' access to the subject is good. In first year, all students are provided with a two-week module of Art which is designed to enable students experience the subject. This is a good way of helping students to make informed subject choice decisions. Following this module, students make their selections for study for the Junior Certificate. It is good to note that at this time, and again at the beginning of senior cycle, students are asked to make their subject choices from a range of optional subjects. Arrangements are made by school management to ensure that students and their parents are fully informed of the consequences of subject choice decisions. This is good.

Timetabling for Art is good, with appropriate time periods being provided to facilitate practical lessons. TY students are provided with a treble period for Art for the duration of the TY programme which gives them a very good opportunity to experience the subject.

The art department is accommodated in a large bright room with good natural light. The room has ample storage space for materials and students' work and secure storage is also available. This room is being developed as the opportunity presents. For example, new desks and stools for students have been obtained. During the evaluation, plans to refurbish the sinks and workspaces around the walls were voiced. This is good progress. To make best use of the space as an educational display area for Art, consideration should also be given to painting the walls white.

It was unclear at the time of the evaluation if the kiln was operable. This is a very important resource for teaching and learning in Art. It is recommended that an examination of the kiln be organised to establish if it is working. If the kiln requires repair, school management should consider restoring it. If the kiln is found to be ready for use, this expensive piece of equipment should be made available to students in the coming year.

Requests for consumable materials are made by the art teacher to senior management. This system appears to be working well. On the day of the evaluation sufficient materials were available to students.

A significant level of information and communications technology (ICT) has been invested in the art department. The school is a member of the Dublin Inner City Schools Computerisation (DISC) project which has supported the art department in providing very good opportunities for students to use ICT in their art work. ICT facilities in the art department include a networked desktop computer and printer, five digital cameras and one digital video camera. In addition, the school has access to subject-related software, for example, animation software. It is evident that the ICT provided to date is being used very well to enhance and enable teaching and learning in Art and that the art department is availing of the good level of ICT expertise available to it. As opportunity presents, senior management should consider provision of a dedicated digital projector for the art department. This piece of equipment would enable the display of images in colour for students, a facility which has high potential to positively influence teaching and learning in Art at the school.

The art department provides a wide range of extracurricular and co-curricular activities for students. These activities include the design and execution of artefacts for fashion shows, school musicals and other school events such as open evenings. The art department also supports and encourages students to participate in art competitions and festivals. For example, students in junior cycle have been involved in illustrating a book which was then professionally published. Such work helps students to understand how their skills can be used outside of the classroom setting and is therefore important. The art department also supports the work of other subject departments. For example, the school's JCSP *Make A Book* project was significantly enhanced by adding a multimedia dimension to the exhibition and by making related artefacts with students. This is very good work.

The communal areas of the school are used to display students' work. This is an effective way of developing the profile of Art in the school and also helps to build students' confidence in their artistic abilities. This good work should be extended. In the future, consideration could be given to celebrating the work of individual students who have excelled in their efforts or achievement. The work of these students could be presented, labelled and exhibited in an area of the school which is frequented by students, staff and visitors.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Time is formally provided each year by school management for planning. The organisation and administration of the art department is very good. As this is a single teacher department, it is recommended that the art teacher consider obtaining membership of the Art Teachers' Association of Ireland in order to benefit from the support and professional networking opportunities provided by such an organisation. Membership would also provide access to the continuing professional development opportunities which the association makes available to art educators at post-primary level.

The curricular plans observed during the evaluation have been organised using key learning outcomes. This is good practice. These plans show that a well considered range of skills, crafts and disciplines is provided for students at both junior cycle and senior cycle.

During the evaluation, a senior-cycle lesson was observed in which some students were preparing material for posters for the craftwork section of a Leaving Certificate examination paper. The students' approach to this work was to envisage a poster and to create it. Whilst this approach has some merit, in order for students to maximise their potential for success it is important that they fully explore the research and development section of the question. It is recommended that students be encouraged to carefully choose their stimulus material and from this to carry out a series of studies in line, tone and colour in a variety of media. Students should then develop and realise their ideas for their poster from these studies. It is recommended that the most recent chief examiner's report be referred to when planning to teach this section of the syllabus. Further information can be accessed on the State Examinations Commission website (www.examinations.ie).

The school has a good TY plan which includes the use of ICT in image manipulation as well as film studies. This is very good practice as it facilitates the learning of new skills by all of the students in the group regardless of whether they have studied Art in junior cycle. The art department intends to develop this aspect of the TY programme by providing a more focussed module of digital image manipulation for half of the academic year in 2010-2011. This is good work.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Three lessons were evaluated: two in junior cycle and one in senior cycle. The atmosphere in lessons, including the interactions between teacher and students, was positive. It was clear that students were happy to be present and all of them were enjoying their experience in the art room.

The quality of teaching and learning in Art, as observed during this inspection, varied from lesson to lesson. Where it was good, a number of effective practices were evident. For example in one of the lessons the learning objective was written on the board for the whole class group to see. This approach helped students to understand what is expected of them during the lesson. It was also noted that where good demonstrations were used, students were clear about the steps they had to take. Another very positive feature of some of the lessons observed was the way in which key words and terminology were reinforced. This was particularly good for students with language difficulties.

However, these practices were not consistently applied across the three lessons. It is recommended that the learning objective of each lesson be clearly explained and emphasised to all students in the group at the outset. In two of the lessons evaluated, not enough time was spent explaining to students exactly what was required. This contributed to issues in these lessons as students in these groups were over-relaxed and easily distracted. When students are preparing for the certificate examinations a more focussed approach to the tasks involved is required. It is recommended that the playing of the radio and any other element which distracts students from their work should be avoided in order to preserve a good working atmosphere. To further support the working atmosphere, it is recommended that a review of classroom management be carried out to establish strategies to help students to remain focussed on their work. For example, seating should be assigned to students; this is particularly important where students tend to be easily distracted by their peers.

During the two practical lessons observed, demonstrations were not provided for students. Descriptions of the tasks at hand were outlined to students but, at times, students did not understand what they were expected to do. It is essential that demonstrations are used to show all students how to progress their practical work. In light of the fact that some of the students in the lessons observed have significant English language difficulties, the use of demonstration is even more important. During these lessons, two visual aids were displayed at the top of the classroom for each lesson. This is a good strategy as students need visual stimulation and visual prompts to help develop their work. To gain maximum advantage from visual aids it is suggested that they be regularly referred to in lessons. It is also suggested that illustrations of the various stages of processes should be displayed so that students can clearly see as well as hear what the work is expected to look like.

Some good practice in reinforcing key words and terms was observed in a lesson on the history and appreciation of art. Students were shown technical words and asked how they related to the Sistine Chapel. While this is generally a good teaching and learning strategy, the significant number of students in the art classes visited did not have English as their first language would have benefited from some additional supports. To deepen their learning and to improve communication, it is recommended that key words and concepts be displayed in the art room alongside a visual description of their meaning. Students should then be encouraged to refer to them in their discussions.

The main teaching methodology used during this evaluation was single tuition for each individual student in the class group. This is not an effective teaching approach where students are prone to distraction, as most students have to wait too long for instruction. Also, similar messages and instructions have to be repeated to each student by the teacher and this is not a good use of teaching time. Teaching students as individuals rather than in groups can also result in an over-dependence on the teacher. It is recommended that instructions be given to the whole group in every lesson. This is the best way of managing a large group of students in order to achieve economical and effective teaching and learning. The whole group can benefit from learning how to co-operate by working with and sharing the available resources and also by sharing ideas. During work-in-progress students can then be guided and supported as necessary on an individual basis or in smaller groups. It is also recommended that general instruction be given from one point in the room so that students become familiar with giving their full attention when general instruction is in progress.

It was noted in a junior-cycle life drawing lesson that students were not confident in their ability to observe and record. In an effort to support them, the teacher drew parts of the images on their sheets for them. Whilst this can be useful in particular contexts, it can have the negative

consequence of students becoming more dependent on their teacher's observations and decisions rather than their own. Towards the end of the year when students are practising for the certificate examinations, it is very important that they learn to rely on their own perceptions in order to achieve to their potential. In this regard life drawing lessons should be planned for students during the year to help them develop the skills of looking and recording. When approaching the examinations, these skills should be practised in examination type conditions so that students have the most authentic experience possible. This enables students to be as confident as possible and to have a realistic expectation of the examination.

During one of the lessons an evaluation sheet was used with students. Evaluation of completed work is a very good learning strategy and its use should be extended. However, it was clear that in this case, some students did not fully understand the words on the sheet or the concepts they represented. To gain maximum benefit from such a strategy the evaluation should be lead by the teacher who should use students' work to identify what was successful and what was problematic.

The work displayed around the art room, on the corridors and in students' portfolios showed that good learning is taking place in some areas of the syllabuses. For example, some very fine block-print work and still lifes in pencil and pastel were observed. Some other experimental work was also observed where students had explored the qualities of particular media to very good effect.

A sample of senior students' note books was observed during the evaluation. These documents showed that the history and appreciation of art is being regularly addressed and is progressing well. The quality of the work, which included sketches, diagrams and notes, showed that students are achieving to their potential in this area. The work in these notebooks is regularly assessed by the teacher who grades the work and writes formative comments. Comments written on students' work were very affirming of their efforts.

ASSESSMENT

A variety of assessment methods is used, including peer-assessment, self-assessment, and assessment of practical work, and homework. Formal summative tests take place at the end of the first term and at the end of the summer term. Students are also assessed on their work-in-progress throughout the year. Some profiling of students' work takes place. This tends to focus on students' written work at senior cycle. It is very important that records of students' progress at all levels are maintained so that accurate tracking of students' progress can take place and be communicated to students and their parents. It is recommended that a system of recording students' achievements and efforts in Art be established for all year groups. This system should require regular monitoring and recording of both written and practical work. It is further suggested that the core components of the various syllabuses such as drawing, development and use of media be specified in these records.

Students are informed of their progress through school reports, comments on work in progress and regular oral feedback. Parents are kept informed of their children's progress through school reports, the student journal and parent-teacher meetings.

It is noted that students' results in the certificate examinations are not analysed. It is suggested that this be done each year and that the analysis be used to inform planning for teaching and learning in subsequent years.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The art department has been successful in significantly enhancing the profile of Art in the school in recent years.
- Whole-school support for Art is very good.
- A large bright room is provided for Art and this facility continues to be developed.
- The art department uses the ICT facilities provided very well to enhance teaching and learning.
- The art department provides a wide range of extracurricular and co-curricular activities for students.
- Students are provided with lessons in a wide range of skills, crafts and disciplines.
- The lesson programmes developed for TY are good.
- The history and appreciation of art is being regularly addressed and is progressing well.

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

- Students preparing for the Leaving Certificate Examination should be encouraged to carefully choose their stimulus material and from this to carry out a series of studies in line, tone and colour in a variety of media. Students should then develop and realise their ideas for their poster from these studies.
- Seating should be assigned to all students and the use of radio in lessons should be avoided.
- Learning objectives and instructions should be shared with the whole group in every lesson.
- Demonstrations by teachers should be used routinely to show students how to progress practical work.
- A system of recording students' achievements and efforts should be established for all year groups.

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