An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Art
REPORT

St. Joseph’s Secondary School
Rochfordbridge, Co. Westmeath

Roll number: 63310T

Date of inspection: 25 November 2010
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ART

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in St. Joseph’s Secondary School, Rochfordbridge. 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 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

The subject is appreciated for the academic and self-developmental opportunities it has provided for many years, the subject being long established in the school.

The department has a good whole-school profile due to the display of student artefacts in the social areas of the school and its generous contribution and long-term involvement in the public community events and dramatic school shows during the academic year.

Due to the healthy school enrolment and the popularity of art as a subject for examination, space in the art room is at a premium. The art room just about accommodates the large numbers of students that study Art. Display space in the art room is very limited and it is suggested that the walls and cupboard doors are reassessed as display areas to showcase new and in-progress work by current students rather than as archives of old artefacts.

Time and budget for the subject are, at present, adequate and the principal is well aware that the relationship of the practical aspects to provision of materials and equipment of the subject define its overall success as a learning vehicle for students. Access to the subject is good and there are no barriers that prevent students from taking it as an optional subject. Commendably, some students take Art up after junior cycle not having studied it in any depth before. There are good practical arrangements for student access to the subject and there are inclusive procedures for students of all aptitudes. Students with special educational needs are accommodated and partake of the subject in an equitable way.

Students are encouraged to participate in competitions in art and design at a local and national level. Overall, the arrangements made by the school support and nurture the subject in a very effective and positive way.

The work of the art department is noted by management for the support and structure it gives to students’ personal development and progress in visual art and design, and for the academic and vocational opportunities it provides in both junior and senior cycles.
Space and specialist equipment for crafts is limited. It is recommended that the potential information and communications technology (ICT) contribution to enriching students’ experience of the subject is further developed as opportunity and resources allow.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Planning is competent and this is reflected in the range and quality of the activities and assignments that are presented to students. Planning documentation was available for classes taught on the day of the inspection and, in addition, year group plans for classes were also available. Statements relating to learning outcomes were short. To augment and extend the competent practice that the planning documentation represents, the inclusion of learning outcomes for all planned assignments and activities is strongly recommended.

Differentiation for the various aptitude levels amongst the students is also a desirable characteristic of course delivery. There were elements of differentiation seen, particularly in the way students were given individual advice and attention. It is recommended that this is further developed through elaboration and enrichment of the planning documentation. Differentiation of the needs of students, particularly those of high aptitude and motivation and, in contrast, the students who are much less capable and engaged, should be further planned for in relation to the self-expressive and personal-development elements of learning. It is recommended that the emphasis on differentiation in teaching and learning be furthered through the development of these learning outcomes for students. These adjustments should further enhance the very good classroom practice seen during the inspection.

There was a well-prepared array of materials and tools available for the classes seen. This is commended since pre-arrangement of these essentials is important for effective time management in the practical aspects of the subject.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Effective teaching and learning was encountered during the inspection. 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. The students were enthusiastic, engaged and on-task throughout the classes. A wide range of skills attainment was evident in the mixed-ability class groupings. Group work and independent research are part of the culture of the art department, and this has very positive outcomes in the quality and characteristics of the students’ artefacts.

Archival work and some State Examinations Commission (SEC) projects from previous years showed that there was good technical, imaginative and expressive use of fine art and craft mediums in the art department. This is very good practice. It is recommended that, in order to build on this good practice, current practices are reviewed in the light of the junior cycle syllabus document for Art, Craft and Design to achieve an optimal skill-set for students. There is some breadth and balance in the way the art curricula are covered in the art department. It should be noted that there is ample additional opportunity for students to further develop personal artistic choices and strengths through the variety of activities offered in the syllabus; it is recommended that the potential breadth and balance there is fully delivered in reality to students.

Despite the restriction of space and facilities, learning in three-dimensional media has a good profile. On the day of the inspection, the fifth year students were working in groups on life-size costumes, which they had designed themselves and were executing painstakingly. There
was a high level of creativity and self expression in these artefacts, which is impressive. This expressive quality was also seen in the work of all other classes inspected. There is a very good work ethic in the way that the students proceeded with their work, which was technically challenging in some instances; in this they demonstrated that they had developed the necessary concentration and skills to work independently. Artistic outcomes aside, and these were very good indeed, the students had achieved or were in the process of developing a key life skill which the art and design courses aspire to nurture.

It is commendable that, despite the restrictions on space and facilities, fifth year students working in groups have been empowered to create very large costume pieces. The potential of the art department to nurture creativity, independent thinking, higher-order skills and aesthetic awareness is embodied in the way the students have been taught and expected to proceed in their art learning. It is recommended that the expertise, practicality and appropriateness of the manner in which this has been achieved become a bigger influence in future on the delivery of other courses throughout the art department, particularly in first and second year.

Though display areas in the art room itself are limited, the art notice board in the corridor outside compensates to a degree, and extends and shares the artefacts and energy of the department with the wider school community.

ASSESSMENT

Regular assessment takes place during the school year. This 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. All student work is monitored during the preparation of the Junior Certificate project and timeframes are also checked regularly for all components of the project. Continual assessment is carried out throughout the year on practical and written work. There are more formal examinations for the history and appreciation of art component of the Leaving Certificate programme. There are systematic records maintained 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, which support students’ learning and progress.

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 recommended. It is also recommended that learning outcomes, which are established through the planning carried out for the subject, are used to create appropriate assessment criteria for students’ learning and attainment. It is recommended that any potential to overemphasis State Examination Commission (SEC) examination criteria, particularly during first and second year, be reviewed and that the very strong creative and self-expressive approaches seen in some parts of the art department’s work be further developed for these early years.

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 and focuses on the creative and observational dimensions of the syllabus.

**SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Art and design have been long established in the school and are valued by management for the contribution they make to the students’ personal, academic and vocational development.
- The art department has a strong presence within the school; student artefacts are displayed in the social areas, and the department contributes to public and communal occasions for the school community.
- Good use is made of the limited space available to the art department.
- Students benefit by the way courses are delivered and learning activities are presented and managed.
- A highly creative approach is encouraged and supported by the art department in the fifth year art and design course.

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

- It is recommended that further development be undertaken, through elaboration and enrichment, of the current planning documentation for all years and courses. Overall the planning document should be enhanced by the development and inclusion of clearer and more extensive learning outcomes for all years.
- It is recommended that any overemphasis on SEC examination criteria, particularly during first and second year, be reviewed and that the very strong creative and self-expressive approaches seen in some parts of the art department’s work be further developed for these early years.
- It is recommended that learning outcomes, which are established through planning for the subject, are used to create appropriate assessment criteria for students’ learning and attainment.
- It is recommended that the ICT contribution to enriching the students’ experience of the subject is further developed as opportunity and resources allow.

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

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