

An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Art
REPORT**

**Scoil Mhuire Gan Smál,
Convent of Mercy,
Roscommon**

Roll number: 65090S

Date of inspection: 5 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 ART

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Scoil Mhuire Gan Smál, Roscommon. 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 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

There has been a long tradition of providing Art as a subject in the school, going back at least thirty-five years. Art has a good status both as an academic subject and as a vehicle for self development of students. Management have empathy and understanding with the needs of Art as a subject and have provided strong practical and material support to the art department. There is good access for students to the subject in both junior and senior cycle and in the Transition Year (TY) programme. There is a consistently strong uptake for Art and the full range of student aptitude and motivation are represented in the mixed-ability class groups. Adequate time has been allocated to the subject.

There are two art rooms, a very large one with extensive adjacent storage rooms, and a smaller room with a pottery and 3D area. Though small, this room nonetheless works for quite large class groups because it has access to a large conference room next door, equipped for PowerPoint. Large groups can be accommodated here when necessary, for space-hungry activities like life drawing. Albeit at different ends of the school, the two art rooms provide good learning environments for visual art.

For health, safety and security reasons, the pottery kiln is housed in an outbuilding behind the ground-floor art room where ceramics is taught.

Provision of materials and equipment is good. A range of crafts is well provided for. Computers with PowerPoint accessories are available in both rooms of the art department.

The art department has a strong whole-school profile with student art works on display throughout the public areas of the school. The school stages a theatrical show annually and the art department is depended upon to provide design and scenery for this. This is a huge input of time, effort and expertise on the part of the art department into the cultural life of the school community.

Two art teachers run an effective art department. Subject department meetings are accommodated with time allocations throughout the year and minutes of these are kept, and made available to management.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Preparation for the lessons seen was excellent. There is a strong sense in the art department of practical and workable systems being in place that allow the efficient delivery of courses.

The department plan has been documented, describing in outline the courses taught. There is a good breadth and balance in the range of activities outlined. However, it is far from comprehensive, and should be brought from outline into a fuller form that is more informative and complete. In order to further develop planning in the art department, it is recommended that the document is extended in several ways. It is recommended that the learning outcomes envisaged for the various art, design and craft activities are further defined, and that those are differentiated for students who have high levels of motivation and aptitude, and also for those students who are challenged by the learning and assessment requirements of the subject. In planning for assessment, use of the stated learning outcomes as the basis for constructing assessment criteria, for use when assessing students' attainment for class tests and in-house examinations, is recommended as it links closely what is taught with what has actually been learned during the learning phase of skills and knowledge building. More details of different methodologies used in delivering the courses and linked to activities are also recommended.

Some joint planning is carried out by the art personnel, particularly for sequencing the time-frames for the use of shared equipment between the two art rooms. This is good practice.

It is recommended that an overall review is jointly undertaken by the art department personnel of key aspects of its practice. More emphasis could valuably be focussed on learning and it is recommended that present practices are reviewed from the point of view of their effectiveness in promoting quality learning. Re-emphasising the centrality of the learning process should enhance the good practice seen, and make students benefit even more from their art education. This should result in enhanced development of students' perceptual, aesthetic and artistic skills.

Research, as is worded in the plan, appears to mean research from secondary sources and it should be balanced by inclusion of primary sources and activities. The overall aims need extension and fuller definition, with reference to the junior cycle syllabus. The overall aim for third year is appropriate for all years of junior cycle. Specific strategies should be outlined for how imagination, creativity and independent thinking can be nurtured in practical terms, in the reality of the classroom, and through co-curricular and extracurricular activities.

Planning for students with special educational needs is well established. An individual learning plan with art content was seen and it is commendable that the art department has produced so thorough a guide. A document with technical and descriptive vocabulary specific to art and design has been prepared for students with English as a second language. Both these strategies indicate the professionalism of the art department and the potential that exists there to review and redefine teaching and learning through extension of the department planning document.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

High standards of professionalism are apparent in the delivery of courses. The well-managed and orderly ambience combined with a friendly and personal approach creates a good positive learning environment. Great effort is expended in ensuring that students' learning needs are met insofar as the school context can possibly allow. There are high expectations for student engagement and productivity. It is greatly to the students' advantage that good conditions for complex and challenging crafts such as batik, printmaking and ceramics have been developed in the art department.

A strong and valuable technical emphasis was seen in the content and activities of the lessons, which were very well conducted, with good levels of challenge, interest and variety. Teaching of the mechanics of how materials and art elements are effectively used is well represented in the practice of the art department. Good technical competence and achievement was evident in the currently-in-progress student artefacts seen, and in the artefacts archived or displayed in the department. In order to bring the good practice seen in the delivery of technique-based learning experiences further, a drive to give new emphasis to the creative and expressive aspect of the subject should be made. It is recommended that renewed thought is given in the art department to balancing the expressive and creative dimensions with the technical aspects of student learning.

It was noted that there was a good deal of secondary sources used in students' work. This should be reviewed with reference to its value to students' learning in Art, and for any negative or restrictive relationship it has with self development in the areas of creativity and expressiveness as a natural and central dimension of making artwork. For students who are very challenged by the creative and self-generational processes inherent in art as an activity, reliance on secondary sources is understandable. It is recommended that a distinction should be made between students of various aptitudes when determining the use of secondary sources. Also, the particular use of secondary sources to which students are directed needs attention, for example the *idea* within a piece of photo-journalism, rather than copying or imitating its *form*, should be highlighted. Active research, where the student will take her own photographs, draw or paint from primary sources as a tool of research, and use imagination and personal creativity to generate and develop imagery should be now emphasised over collection of images for use later as secondary sources for image making.

All the lessons inspected were thoughtfully constructed and well carried through. The perceptual training given during a life-drawing class is highly praiseworthy. The content of this lesson and the communications techniques used to guide and direct the students' work was excellent. The less confident and less technically effective students were supported well through this challenging suite of tasks.

Very good opportunities exist for TY students to develop art and design skills in the way the school has organised access to Art for this group in the timetable. An increment of art and design appreciation, to include personal research by individual students, would add breadth and balance to the well-delivered and quite challenging practical work in ceramics and painting which TY students of Art encounter. Their programme includes a tranche of art history of pre-historic Ireland, which is essentially archaeological. It is suggested that this is replaced with a broader appreciation-driven introduction to a range of visual-arts topics.

ASSESSMENT

Good assessment procedures are in place. Regular assessment is undertaken during the school year, with end-of-term and end-of-year examinations, and mock examinations.

A variety of standard assessment procedures is in use in the art department, including continuous assessment based on class work and examinations, and formative assessment on a continuous *ad hoc* basis during lessons. There are written examinations for the history and appreciation of art component of the Leaving Certificate programme. Students are monitored during the Junior Certificate project, to ensure quality and to meet deadlines for completion.. Continual assessment is carried out throughout the year on practical and written work. There are systematic records maintained of students' assessment and examination results. Regular parent-teacher meetings are held and the art department provides discussion, feedback and advice at these. End-of-term and end-of-year results are communicated to parents and guardians. This is all good practice.

It is recommended that some element of self-assessment for students, such as a self-report questionnaire, should be included during the teaching and learning of specific technical, artistic and perceptual skills, and after the results of end-of-term examinations. This would be useful and practical in order that learners, after becoming more focussed about the significance of their results for their progress, can give feedback to their teacher on particular issues they encounter, as individuals, which are a barrier to their attainment and to encourage them to take increased responsibility for their own learning.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The art department is highly valued and well-established. Good resources of space and time and personnel have been assigned to it. It plays a large part in students' academic and personal development and in the cultural life of the school.
- Management have empathy and understanding with the needs of Art as a subject and have provided strong practical and material support for it. There is good access for students to the subject, including in the TY programme.
- High standards of professionalism are apparent in the delivery of courses and in the running of the art department.

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

- It is recommended that a review of present practices is carried out from the point of view of learning and that the planning document is extended and developed, with particular emphasis on learning outcomes. Learning outcomes when defined should become the basis of assessment criteria.
- It is recommended that strategies be developed to make students more proactive in relation to their own learning, particularly in relation to the history and appreciation of art.
- It is recommended that balancing the expressive and creative with technical aspects of student learning is a focus of planning and delivery of courses.

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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