Subject Inspection of Technical Graphics and Design
and Communication Graphics
REPORT

Saint Ailbe’s School
Tipperary Town
Roll number: 72480W

Date of inspection: 10 October 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN TECHNICAL GRAPHICS (TG) AND DESIGN AND COMMUNICATION GRAPHICS (DCG)

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

- Teaching in all lessons observed was effective with a few examples of very good practice noted.
- Electronic resources are integrated into lessons innovatively and in a manner that provides teachers with high quality display and modelling tools.
- Teachers employ well developed assessment for learning practices resulting in students receiving high levels of oral and written formative feedback.
- Graphics subjects receive a good level of support from senior management.
- Planning for the delivery of graphics subjects is well developed and progressing appropriately.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Senior management should form optional subject bands in junior and senior cycle based upon surveyed student preferences.
- The subject department should identify strategic plans for the ongoing development of TG and DCG with a particular emphasis placed upon maintaining appropriate levels of student uptake of higher level at both junior and senior cycle.
- The practices of sharing identified learning outcomes at the beginning of lessons and assessing students’ understanding at the end of lessons should be further developed throughout the subject department.
INTRODUCTION
Saint Ailbe’s School offers a graphics subject in its Junior Certificate, optional Transition Year and Leaving Certificate programmes and as a vocational specialism in its Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. The school serves students from the local urban area and its surrounding rural hinterland. The school’s current enrolment is 310 students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teaching was effective in all lessons observed with a few examples of very good practice noted.

- Each lesson had a clearly defined learning objective. However, only on one occasion was this intention shared with students. Teachers should make every effort to include students in this process by clearly outlining the learning outcomes for lessons at the beginning and revisiting them in a collaborative manner as part of a focused recapitulation.

- In all lessons content was delivered in a sequential manner that reinforced students’ prior learning. Good practice was observed in one instance when students recalled the previous lesson’s learning before progressing onto the topic at hand.

- A number of positive methods were utilised to encourage full student participation in lesson activities. One good example was the use of partially-completed drawing sheets. These drawings enabled the teacher to place significant emphasis on the specific learning outcome for the lesson and reduced the time spent setting up the question and reinforcing basic draughting techniques.

- ICT was used innovatively and effectively for demonstration and display purposes in all lessons observed. Electronic and board display techniques were very clear and provided students with examples of high quality presentations.

- Individual and group demonstrations were utilised to supplement whole-class teaching practices. This was achieved through a high level of teacher circulation. Oral formative feedback was given to students during prescribed activities and this had the effect of helping students to identify areas for development, whilst also informing the teachers about students’ progress and the progress of the entire class group. Students’ class work and portfolio work receive very good levels of formative feedback.

- In one instance, the teacher’s encouragement and attention to detail helped students to develop appropriately high expectations and also had the effect of encouraging some students to actively research the viability of modifying locally-sourced products as part of their design assignment. This active engagement in tasks is commended.

- Student-led research and analysis was incorporated into a senior cycle lesson as part of the leaving certificate DCG assignment. This independent learning, including elements of peer and self assessment, created a positive dynamic in a small class group.

- Classroom management was effective in all lessons observed and student behaviour was very good.

- The graphics classroom environment is bright, well maintained and fit for purpose. Students’ portfolios are stored centrally and examples of high quality student work are on display.
• The LCA course material viewed was of a high standard and demonstrated a good degree of student engagement and commitment to the various tasks.

• The uptake of TG at higher level has improved recently and is currently at a good level. Due to the smaller numbers choosing DCG at senior cycle, uptake of higher level DCG varies from year to year. These trends should be monitored closely with every effort made to maximise students’ possibilities of sitting the higher-level examination where possible.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

• The time allocated to graphics subjects is very good. This allocation is delivered in an appropriate blend of single and double periods that are distributed throughout the week.

• The graphics subject department is made up of three suitably qualified teachers. These teachers are deployed to teach all year groups, levels and programmes on a rotational basis.

• All students sample TG in first year. This system enables students to base their optional subject choices on their experience of the subject. This is a worthwhile initiative.

• While graphics subjects are offered to students in all programmes, option bands in second and fifth year have remained unchanged for a number of years. Second-year students choose between TG, Geography and Art, while fifth-year students choose between DCG, Business Studies and Art. Senior management should investigate the possibility of designing optional subject bands based upon surveyed student preferences in order to ensure that the bands meet the particular needs of that year’s student cohort.

• The subject department receives a good level of support from senior management and has access to appropriate material, resources and consumables.

• The subject department has engaged fully with the recent continuing professional development (CPD) programme designed to facilitate the introduction of the new DCG syllabus at senior cycle.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

• The subject department operates within a defined structure. A subject co-ordinator is identified and formal planning meetings occur periodically. The subject department operates in a collaborative manner and teachers co-operate extensively in relation to many aspects of subject planning.

• The subject plan is stored and developed within a web-based collaborative environment. This method allows users to review the plan remotely thereby facilitating its ongoing development.

• The subject plan identifies content by topic linked with proposed methodologies. An area lacking in this plan is the specification of clear timeframes for the achievement of learning outcomes.

• To enhance subject planning further, the subject department should identify key strategic goals for the ongoing improvement and development of the subjects within the school. These goals should be progressed within an action planning framework. One area that
should be included in this process is the ongoing challenge of improving uptake of higher level at senior cycle.

- Teachers’ individual planning and preparation was good. The use of a computer-aided design (CAD) application has helped the subject department to provide a common learning experience for students in different class groups.

- Saint Ailbe’s School has been very successful in the worldwide ‘Formula 1 in Schools’ competition. Significant efforts from students and teachers have resulted in school teams reaching two world finals. This commitment to co-curricular learning is highly commended.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and the subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.

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.

*Published, May 2012*