

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Art
REPORT**

**Hartstown Community School
Clonsilla Dublin 15
Roll number: 91339F**

Date of inspection: 21 September 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 Hartstown Community School, 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 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, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

The art department is staffed by two specialist teachers. These teachers are very much aware of the need to keep up to date with current trends and developments in art education. They are members of the Art Teachers Association of Ireland and have a practice of attending relevant continuing professional development (CPD) events to help ensure that they are offering students the best art education possible. This is praiseworthy.

Whole-school provision for Art is very good. Appropriate time periods, including double periods to facilitate practical work, are provided for Art. This is good practice. TY students are provided with a double period of Art for a module which lasts approximately half the academic year. This gives these students a good opportunity to experience the subject for the first time or to consolidate their learning in the subject from junior cycle.

Students' access to Art is good. Incoming students choose their optional subjects from an open menu as do students entering fifth year. The school makes good arrangements to ensure that students and their parents are well informed about the individual optional subjects and the consequences of their choices for their further education and future careers.

The school provides very good facilities for Art. Two bright purpose-built rooms are designated for the subject and these are maintained to a high standard. In collaboration with senior management, the art department takes care to review and enhance the facilities provided on a regular basis. This very good practice has resulted in tables being refurbished and the recent introduction of facilities for block-printmaking.

Senior management has prioritised investment in information and communications technology (ICT) to support teaching and learning. The art department has access to high speed internet access, interactive white boards and printers in each of the classrooms. This is a most useful resource for teaching and learning in Art and was used well during the evaluation. To make best

use of these facilities, it is recommended that a digital camera be obtained for each art room, as resources become available. Access to this type of equipment would allow for the easy and efficient storage of students' work and exemplars. It would also be a useful tool in preparing for and use during teaching and learning. It is also recommended that image manipulation software be obtained as opportunity presents, as there is expertise in the art department to make very good use of this type of equipment in teaching and learning. Images that have been created using the cameras and developed using the imagery manipulation software could then be displayed using the digital presentation equipment already in situ.

Art is well funded in the school. Arrangements are made so that the purchasing of materials is systemised and transparent.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

It is clear that the teachers in the art department work very well together. Senior management makes time available for planning and minutes are recorded of these formal meetings. More informal meetings take place on a much more regular basis. As well as an opportunity to discuss procedural issues, evidence was provided to show that these meetings form a basis for support and professional discourse which is good practice.

A highly developed plan for the art department was available during the evaluation. This very well presented document clearly outlines all the information necessary to understand how the department operates. Decisions such as how class groups are arranged, how materials are obtained and issues regarding health and safety are outlined and clarified in the plan. In addition to this, procedures and associated documentation have been devised for a number of subject-specific issues. All of this is very good work.

This document also outlines a clear vision for art education in Hartstown Community School. This vision is firmly anchored in the syllabuses and offers students the opportunity to learn the artistic skills necessary to perform in an academic setting whilst also learning about art for life. This very good work informs all of the planning in the art department.

The curricular elements of the plan are outlined using learning outcomes for each year group. This represents best practice. It is clear that students' interest and motivations are considered in the wide range of teaching methodologies planned. Good interpretations of the syllabuses ensure that students are provided with the opportunity to learn an appropriately wide range of skills. It is noted that the department intends to widen the range of disciplines available to students; this is a good strategy and should be supported.

The programme designed for Transition Year (TY) Art involves a lot of 'making' and this is good practice. However, not all students who are studying TY Art will be skilled in this area and not all of them will be studying Art for the Leaving Certificate. It is recommended that art appreciation be introduced to them as a discrete skill. It is further suggested that some contemporary Art be used as stimulus material so that, upon completion, students will have the language and skills to engage with art in their daily lives.

Great attention to detail has been given to preparing notes for the study of art history and appreciation as well as developing worksheets for a wide range of practical skills. The quality of these documents is very good.

All of the extracurricular and co-curricular activities provided for students are framed by the art department's desire to give students a realistic experience of the subject so that they understand the nature of professional art practice in contemporary life. It is good that the art department actively seeks appropriate engagement with the visual arts for students outside the classroom. A range of very valuable experiences has been provided for students. These include the opportunity to curate a professional exhibition of work, the design and making of short films and working with an artist in residence. Links with and visits to professional art galleries have also been very fruitful. Some of the artefacts produced as part of this work were available during the evaluation and indicate that the quality of the programmes provided was very good. These opportunities can and do have very profound effects on students' experience of the subject.

Communal areas of the school building are used to exhibit students' two dimensional and three dimensional works. The finish and presentation of these artefacts are of a very high standard and the displays significantly enhance the school. This is a very good way of affirming students and celebrating their achievements within the wider school community and represents good practice. The classrooms are also used as exhibition spaces and have been developed into stimulating and attractive environments for students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Four lessons were observed during this evaluation with groups from both junior cycle and senior cycle. The quality of teaching and learning as observed during this evaluation was very good.

The atmosphere in the classrooms visited was very warm, welcoming and positive. Teachers had a very good rapport with students. In turn, students were pleasant and were fully engaged in the tasks set for them. When at times, students found tasks challenging, they were encouraged and affirmed by their teachers and as a consequence were keen to make progress. Where appropriate, students were successfully redirected back to their work in a sensitive manner. In addition students were confident to ask questions and make comments on the work. The resulting atmosphere was very conducive to learning.

Each of the lessons observed was pitched appropriately and in some cases posed ambitious but achievable challenges for students. For example, students were asked to paint with non-traditional materials for particular effects. Challenging students to stretch their abilities is a very good strategy.

The learning outcomes developed for the lessons observed were very good. All of the lessons focussed on the students ability, firstly to observe, and secondly, to develop these observations in different ways. The assignment of tasks, designed to develop students' expressive abilities, was a notable feature of the lessons observed. This is good practice.

A range of questioning techniques was used in lessons. The questions used were a combination of higher order and lower order questions reflecting the abilities and developmental stages of the students. Where these worked best targeted questions were asked of individual students so that they had opportunities to answer successfully. This is very good practice and should be extended to all lessons.

Critiques of students' work were held in all of the lessons observed. This was a very effective way of checking on students' progress and on their learning. The nature of the questions asked in these critiques was very good and focussed students on the appropriate artistic terminology.

Where these questions were most successful, they referred to specific learning outcomes such as identifying examples of tone in the art work. This is most effective as it focuses students on the core learning.

In all of the lessons observed reference was made to the work of significant artists. This way of integrating the History of Art into the teaching and learning of practical skills is entirely in the spirit of the syllabuses and is praiseworthy. In addition, the works chosen for students to observe were relevant to the tasks at hand and accessible for students.

The management of learning activities was good in the classrooms visited. Recapitulation was used in all lessons to set the learning in context. Lessons were focussed, and characterised by definite structures, whereby students knew at each point exactly what they should be doing and how much progress they should have achieved.

Communication in the lessons observed was of a very high standard. Teachers' use of voice was pleasant and contributed to the positive atmosphere of the classroom. Generally information was delivered clearly and unambiguously. Where best practice was observed, the teacher spoke from one position in the room and ensured that all were listening attentively. This practice should be extended. Instructions for tasks were broken into their component parts so that students could follow easily. To support these instructions, effective demonstrations were used. It was noted in one of the lessons that the various steps were displayed using the interactive whiteboard. Some students referred to this regularly and it contributed to their achievement. This is commendable.

Students were monitored at all times during lessons which is good practice. At times, some students benefited from advice which was shared earlier with another student. It is suggested that where students require similar advice that it be given to students in small groups as this is a more effective and efficient teaching and learning strategy.

Although this evaluation took place very early in the academic year, students have developed a fine body of good quality work. This shows that the pace of progress in the art department is swift and appropriate.

A wide range of students' two dimensional and three dimensional works in a variety of materials as well as students' portfolios and notebooks show that students are progressing well relative to their abilities. In particular, observational drawing using a variety of materials, colour studies, puppetry and constructed three dimensional items were of a very high standard. This is reflected in the students' achievements in the certificate examinations.

A significant number of students pursue careers in art or related disciplines each year. This reflects the positive nature of their experience of Art in the school and is an indication of the regard in which they hold the subject. Students who wish to develop a portfolio of art works for application to colleges are supported by their teachers outside of school time. This reflects teachers' generosity and genuine concern for students' progress in the subject.

ASSESSMENT

The art department has developed a good homework policy which informs activities in the classroom. Students' homework was checked, recorded and commented upon during the lessons observed. Specific work sheets were developed for students so that the homework given was

appropriate to the task addressed during the day and helps students remember salient points. All of this is praiseworthy.

The art department prioritises recording and communicating students' progress to the student and their parents. The department has established a policy of creating very comprehensive profiles of students' progress in line with the needs of the year group. For example, a template and calendar for recording students' progress when making longer-term projects. This methodology was shared with other teachers in the school which is good practice. At senior cycle, students' progress in the various components of the syllabus are recorded in detail so that it is clear what routes students must take to retain and improve their performance. This is very supportive of students' endeavours and very good work.

A range of assessment methods is used in the art department. These methods include formal tests at Christmas and summer as well as continual assessment throughout the year. Marking schemes based on those used for the certificate examinations are used with students on a regular basis so that they can identify areas for development. This is a very good strategy.

Students' progress is communicated to parents using school reports and at formal parent-teacher meetings. The art department also uses the students' journal to communicate messages about students' progress. It is good to note that this means of communication is used for positive affirmation, when appropriate.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Whole school provision for Art is very good.
- A highly-developed plan for the art department was available during the evaluation.
- The art department has developed a very good vision for Art in the school.
- Curricular plans are outlined using learning outcomes for each year group. This represents best practice.
- The quality of teaching and learning as observed during this evaluation was very good.
- The atmosphere in classrooms was positive and very conducive to learning.
- Lessons observed were pitched appropriately and the ideas for the lessons observed were very good.
- The pace of progress in the art department is appropriately swift and students are progressing well.
- The department has established a policy of creating very comprehensive profiles of students' progress in line with the needs of the year group.

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

- Art appreciation should be introduced to TY students as a discrete skill.

A post-evaluation meeting was held with the teachers 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.

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Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The board welcomes the very positive findings of the report in relation to subject planning and co-ordination including the overall vision for Art, the quality of teaching and learning and assessment.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

An Art appreciation course for TY is being considered in line with the recommendation.