Subject Inspection of ART
REPORT

Mercy College
Woodford, County Galway
Roll number: 63171I

Date of inspection: 27 October 2011
REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ART

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

- Good classroom management and communication skills ensure that students engage with the subject in a positive way. The learning atmosphere is pleasant with encouragement and praise given abundantly.
- The art department is accommodated in a small inconvenient classroom which has a negative impact on the delivery of courses and in general inhibits the range, nature and quality of students’ educational experience of visual art.
- Both scheduling and time management for Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate examination assignments are good.
- Excellent large-scale portrait work has been produced by the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) class as part of their thematic cross-curricular work on identity.
- Interesting assignments have been provided in Transition Year (TY) and these have motivated most students to engage enthusiastically with visual art during the programme.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- More habitual use of information and communication technology (ICT) to integrate art, design and architecture materials from contemporary and historical sources into the learning of all year groups is recommended.
- Provision for junior cycle art lessons should be reviewed and an additional class period should be considered to increase provision to four periods per week.
- The overuse of secondary sources in the generation of imagery needs to be addressed in the teaching process, and the use of observation and imagination-derived imagery needs to be very strongly promoted through planning and in classroom practice.
- Review of all lesson and homework activities should be undertaken and these should be evaluated for their learning content.
- *Assessment for Learning* (AfL) techniques need now to be integrated into the habitual activities involved in teaching and planned for in course delivery for all year groups and levels.
• Strategies for differentiation need to be devised for students of higher aptitude and motivation, and for the middle-ability range of students who could be further nurtured by specific and practical interventions during lessons to achieve a higher attainment.

INTRODUCTION

Mercy College, Woodford, is a co-educational voluntary secondary school located in a County Galway village. It serves a wide rural catchment area. Enrolment is currently 198 students. An optional TY programme is offered, along with LCA and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

TEACHING AND LEARNING

• Excellent large-scale portrait work has been produced by the LCA class as part of their thematic cross-curricular work on identity.

• There was a good classroom atmosphere and students were largely well motivated and on task during lessons.

• Good work has been done in teaching the formal art elements. To build on this solid foundation, there needs to be considerably more focus on linking students’ knowledge of the art elements with a stronger emphasis on creativity and self expression in their practical work. This should be an integrated part of developing higher-order skills in art and design.

• It is commendable that interesting assignments have been provided in TY and these have motivated most students to engage enthusiastically with visual art. Art is offered through the whole of the year for TY.

• Good communication skills are in use in lesson delivery; classroom management is effective, and praise and encouragement are abundantly given in the course of lessons.

• Over-use of secondary sources in the generation of imagery restricts the learning potential of students’ art and design activities. This needs to be addressed in the teaching process. Also, the use of observation and imagination-derived imagery needs to be very strongly promoted through planning and in classroom practice.

• Review of all lesson and homework activities should be undertaken and these should be evaluated for their learning content. Differentiation of levels of expectation for students of strong aptitude and motivation should be part of this, and higher attainment needs to be nurtured in a focussed and practical way.

• AfL techniques need now to be integrated into the habitual activities involved in teaching and planned for in course delivery for all year groups and levels.

• Wall displays of specific art and design vocabulary need to be developed in a systematic way and the numeracy learning potential of the subject needs to be highlighted in the planning and delivery of courses.

• More habitual use of ICT to integrate art, design and architecture materials from contemporary and historical sources into the learning of all year groups is recommended.
SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is one full-time art teacher. Timetabling of the subject is adequate in senior cycle. However, the three periods per week allocated in junior cycle are not and should be reviewed. Students have access to Art as part of the option-band arrangements and Art is currently timetabled alongside Music and Technical Graphics.

- The school has assigned increased space to the art department, which now operates from two small rooms and a lobby. Storage is good, but the classroom area is cramped and circulation is not easy. The available space uncomfortably accommodates the active learning necessary in the subject and is a challenging environment for delivering quality. Practical and spatial arrangements within the facility make use of a projector and screen difficult, inhibits their use, and creates a negative element in the learning environment. Larger class sizes are problematic in this environment.

- The school should review the access routes available to students for Art and ensure that students of high aptitude and motivation have access to it as an examination subject by the careful placing of it in option bands.

- Regular assessment takes place through end-of-term and mock examinations, good records of assessment outcomes are kept, and parents are kept abreast of results in bi-annual reports.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Planning documentation needs significant extension and enrichment.

- Differentiation needs to be outlined in relation to students of higher aptitude and motivation. Strategies for the middle-ability range of students, who could be further nurtured by particular interventions in teaching to achieve a higher attainment, would add value to current lesson sequences which are largely sound in terms of developing basic skills.

- Scheduling and time management for Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate examination assignments are good.

- Planning for optimised usage of the school year should be undertaken on a week-by-week basis by the art department. This is necessary to ensure best possible extensiveness and variety of learning topics and activities and, more particularly, to ensure that assignments and projects are not allowed to run on too long, to the detriment of curricular breadth, balance and richness.

- Learning outcomes for all activities and assignments need to be articulated in the planning document. Assessment criteria should be based on these learning outcomes to ensure the best fit between teaching, learning and assessment.

- The integration of ICT into teaching on a habitual basis should be planned for in order to bring approaches to course delivery up to date.
The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the deputy principal and subject teacher 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.