Subject Inspection of Art
REPORT

Jesus and Mary Secondary School
Enniscrone, County Sligo
Roll number: 65150K

Date of inspection: 5 November 2009
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ART

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Jesus and Mary Secondary School. 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

Jesus and Mary Secondary School has an enrolment of 152 males and 220 females. The school offers the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). Art is offered as an optional subject to all students other than those in first year and in TY. First-year students are required to study Art as part of option-subject sampling arrangements and Art is a core subject on the TY programme. Art is also offered on the Post-Leaving Certificate programme at the school. All of these programmes contribute to the evidence base for this evaluation.

The art department is staffed by two specialist art teachers. Members of the art department benefit from the continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities available for art educators through the Art Teachers’ Association of Ireland. They engage in relevant CPD workshops and events to enhance their skills. This is good work. In order to broaden and deepen the expertise and experience within the subject department, it is recommended that both art teachers should be deployed across the range of programmes and levels available in the school. In this way, responsibility for senior-cycle art can be shared and teachers can be provided with opportunities to extend their experience.

The art department has developed links with local arts organisations to further support students’ education in Art. From time to time, local professional craftspeople have been employed by the school to provide additional tuition to students in pottery and sculpture. This good practice has served to extend the range of opportunities offered to students in the subject.

Timetabling for Art is good; for example all TY students are provided with a double period for Art for the duration of the TY programme. Appropriate time slots are provided on the timetable to facilitate practical lessons in Art on all programmes.
Access to the subject is good. At both junior cycle and senior cycle, students are asked to make their subject choices from an open menu of optional subjects. Arrangements are made by school management to ensure that students and their parents are fully informed of the implications of subject choice decisions.

The art department is based in two separate classrooms each with some storage space. The rooms have been developed into visually stimulating and inviting spaces. During the evaluation, the art department described plans to move to an alternative school space in the near future. Although this move has not yet been confirmed, the art department has been carefully planning for it. For example, a projector was obtained for the art department which is portable so that it can easily be moved when the new space becomes available. This is a good strategy.

The art rooms are used to display students’ work. This is good practice. However, as the art rooms are not in the main part of the school and there is no display area in the communal part of the school building, the opportunity for students’ work to be seen by the wider school community is limited. It is recommended that a space be designated in the communal part of the school to display students’ artwork. This would help to build students’ confidence in their artistic abilities and to further develop the profile of the subject in the school. It is noted that during the evaluation that the principal and teachers of Art welcomed this suggestion.

Requests for consumable materials are made by the art department using an annual budget. This system appears to be working well. On the day of the evaluation sufficient materials were available to students.

**Planning and Preparation**

School management provides time for planning each term. In addition to this, informal planning also takes place. The organisation and administration of the art department is good.

The art department has begun to develop learning plans based on learning outcomes for students. This good work should now be developed further as the detail provided to date is not sufficient to provide direction for lessons. It is recommended that the learning outcomes should be framed to include details such as the exact nature and level of skill to be achieved. This would help to support differentiation for the mixed-ability class groups. The learning outcomes to be achieved should be associated with an agreed time frame and the resulting plans should be updated and reviewed as each year group progresses. It is suggested that the department should begin by developing learning outcomes for first and fifth year and that progress on planning for other groups could be made incrementally.

The art department has developed plans for Art on the TY programme. Whilst the plans for TY are educationally sound, they are similar in nature to those generally associated with Leaving Certificate Art, Craft and Design. They do not take advantage of the TY programme’s potential for innovation regarding topics and methodologies. It is recommended that the art department takes some steps to introduce some more innovative topics of study for these students such as the study of contemporary culture or film. It is suggested that some of the art plans designed specifically for TY, such as the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland’s *Shaping Space* available at [www.riai.ie](http://www.riai.ie), could be consulted in the development of these plans. These plans can be very useful in devising appropriate learning outcomes for students at this stage in their art development.
It was noted during the evaluation that the finish and presentation of students’ work is in need of attention. This is essential at all levels to ensure good presentation of work for the certificate examinations. It is recommended that the finish and presentation of students’ work be prioritised by the art department and that strategies for developing these skills be included in the planning documentation. All artefacts completed by students should be presented to the highest standard possible to show the work to its best advantage. Two-dimensional works should be presented using coloured card and paper. The art department is encouraged to obtain a supply of coloured paper and card specifically for this purpose.

The art department provides a range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities for students to augment their experiences of the subject in the classroom. These activities include gallery visits, field trips, workshops and opportunities to produce artefacts for school events. This is good work.

**TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The quality of teaching and learning in Art varied across the lessons observed. Where best practice was observed, good lesson planning had been completed and the lesson was focussed on a clear and achievable set of learning objectives. These learning objectives were shared with the students at the outset of the lesson and were appropriately referred to during the lesson in order to remind the learners of their goal. This was effective in keeping students on task. The delivery of information during the lesson was clear and the level of challenge for students was pitched appropriately. There is scope to extend these practices to all lessons in Art.

The atmosphere was good in the lessons observed. Students were pleasant and very well behaved. The rapport between students and teachers was positive. Affirmation was given regularly and used to encourage engagement with the task on hand. Generally students showed interest in the subject matter and in some cases students were very enthused and motivated by their work. Students helped to organise materials and their work at both the beginning and end of lessons. This good practice helps students to become familiar with the responsibility of working in a studio environment. During tasks teachers monitored students’ work to ensure pace and to help those who required extra support.

The planning for materials and for the organisation of the lessons observed was good. For example, in one of the lessons students were learning how to draw ellipses. A collection of appropriate objects with ellipses was prepared for each group of students in the class. This meant that the correct type of object was available in the art room for students to observe and consequently, the learning potential of the activity for students was enhanced.

The pitch of one of the lessons observed was not appropriate to the abilities of the students involved. The task set for students was too difficult for some and involved too many topics for it to be successful for the majority of students. As a result, students prioritised completion of the task as opposed to focussing on acquiring or developing skills. Teachers should remain alert to the fact that particular lesson plans will suit some groups of students more than others. During lessons, students’ progress and engagement should be continually monitored to ensure that the planned learning outcomes are appropriate for all students in the group. Lesson activities should be amended if this monitoring indicates that such is necessary.
A range of questioning techniques was used to keep students focussed and to help students find ways of improving their work. This is a good strategy. Questions were designed to challenge students at their own particular level of ability. Students were also asked to make links with previous knowledge to contextualise information and to challenge their perceptions. Where students were enthused about their work, they were very responsive to questioning and were happy to answer and ask questions.

It was noted that during one of the lessons students conducted a critical evaluation of the work they had completed using a teacher-designed assessment sheet. This document broke down the various tasks which were required to complete the project. Students were then asked to score their achievement for each task. This approach is useful as it focuses students on the need for consistent work to achieve a good result. To gain best advantage from this strategy, it is suggested that lesson outcomes be included in the evaluation and phrased in very simple and clear terms for students.

From the samples of students’ work available; it is clear that students are encouraged to work in a wide range of craft areas and disciplines. This is good practice. The work available showed that, across the ability spectrum, students are progressing and developing a number of appropriate skills. In order for students to achieve to their full potential it is essential that the finish of their work is developed as outlined in the previous section of this report.

ASSESSMENT

Homework was given in one of the lessons observed. This homework was of appropriate duration and supportive of the topics being addressed in the lessons.

During the school year summative and formative assessments take place in the art department. Formative assessment during practical assignments is used to encourage students to improve their work and performance. Formal summative tests take place at mid-term, Christmas and at the end of the summer term. Students are also assessed on their work throughout the year. Good profiling of students’ work including homework ensures that accurate tracking of students’ progress is maintained.

A variety of assessment methods is used, including peer-assessment, self-assessment, and assessment of practical work, classroom activities and homework. Students are informed of their progress through school reports, comments on work in progress and regular oral and written feedback on completed work. Parents are kept informed of their children’s progress through school reports and parent-teacher meetings.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The art department is staffed by two specialist art teachers who engage in relevant workshops and events to enhance their art education skills.
• The art department has developed links with local arts organisations to further support students’ education in Art.
• A range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities is arranged for students to augment their experiences of Art as a curriculum subject.
• The atmosphere was good in the lessons observed and students were pleasant and very well behaved.
• The delivery of information during the lessons observed was good and the good practice of introducing the learning outcome at the outset of lessons was observed.
• Questioning techniques were used to support students’ learning.
• Across the ability spectrum, students are progressing in the subject and are developing a range of appropriate skills.
• The assessment of students’ work is regular and the art department’s evaluation procedures include teacher-generated assessment sheets for students.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:
• Both art teachers should be deployed in teaching Art across the range of curricular programmes and levels available in the school.
• A space should be designated in the communal part of the school to display students’ completed art work.
• Subject department planning should be further developed to include more detailed learning outcomes for students.
• Lessons should be continually monitored to ensure that the planned learning outcomes are appropriate for all students in the group.
• Better advantage should be taken of the potential of the TY programme to develop some more innovative topics of study for students.
• The finish and presentation of students’ work should be prioritised by the art department and strategies for developing these skills should be included in the planning documentation.

Post-evaluation meetings were 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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