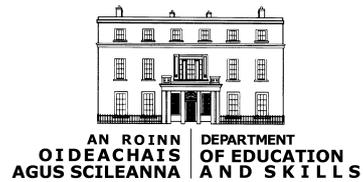


An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Art
REPORT

Confey College,
Leixlip, County Kildare.
Roll number: 70691C

Date of inspection: 11 December 2009



**REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ART**

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Confey College, Leixlip. 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 two days 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; a response was not received from the board.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

The subject is valued and very well supported by management: timetable, funding and resources are good. As part of a recent whole-school management initiative planning for subject departments is underway, and the expectation for planning for art and design learning will in the long-term have a strong positive impact on improved student engagement and attainment. Time allocated is adequate and every effort is made to ensure that students who wish to study art are facilitated to do so. Commendably, students who have not taken art as a subject for junior certificate may take it up ab initio in senior cycle.

All first year students sample the subject for six weeks. Art is set against Woodwork, Metalwork, Home Economics, Business and Technical Graphics for junior cycle. In the current year one third of the students in first year opted for Art. Students are surveyed in order to establish what the choice patterns are and the option bands are generated from this information. In senior cycle, art is offered on two of the option bands, allowing good access to the subject. Uptake is healthy and demand has been consistent over time.

At present due to job-sharing, the subject is delivered by two people, who are never timetabled to be present in the school on the same day. This is a barrier to collaborative action. In the interest of art department development and it is recommended that in future academic years, if opportunity allows, this might be arranged differently to ensure some expanded potential contact between the personnel involved.

It is recommended that management oversee the implementation of the recommendations of this report, particularly in relation to planning, as a whole department endeavour and that it is used to develop the good practice already apparent in many, though not all, facets of course delivery and teaching methodology.

The college has in place a successful cross-departmental initiative in relation to the history and appreciation of art, which has been developed entirely in-house and which is discussed below. It may be possible to use this experience in curriculum enhancement as a model for a new initiative to enrich TY art and design experience, through, for example, an affiliation

with technology or home economics. It is recommended that consideration be given to examining the viability of this in the near future.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

A co-ordinator has been appointed in the art department, and planning documents have been produced as part of a school-wide planning process. The coordinators work to date in this regard in creating a starter document is praiseworthy. The art department planning documents are a good basis for further development, extension and improvement. This development should be motivated by the enhancement of the students' overall learning experience.

The planning in the department's file conformed to the school's planning templates and it is supportive of the development of teaching and learning in art and design that these basic statements are in place. In order to bring all planning up to the status, quality, and detail required by the school management who have recently been driving the planning process, it is recommended that all art department staff prepare improved, detailed and focussed planning. Furthermore, collegiality should be developed on a professional basis in the development of effective planning for all aspects of students learning needs in art.

No specific planning was seen for some of the classes inspected, except a list outlining topics to be covered and short notes which referred to aspects of this. This is, at best, rudimentary preparation rather than planning.

Some of the department planning documentation was of a very general nature: the statements used therein should be further extended in the interest of clarity, and ultimately for usefulness in the delivery, and monitoring of the effectiveness of learning experiences to students. Overall, there needs to be a strong emphasis throughout on learning outcomes for students of all aptitudes and motivations, included in an integrated way, in the planning. Furthermore, all planning documents need to be expanded to include reference to methodologies and techniques for differentiated teaching and learning.

There was higher level of preparation for some classes than for others, ranging from highly detailed to very little. Planning for more specificity in the development of the programme of learning activities for all class groups is required in order that the optimum use is made of time and resources. Planning for the allocation of time to particular activities and assignments should be undertaken, and breadth and balance in the variety of media and content should be scheduled for all year groups.

It is recommended that management monitor whole-department planning to ensure that all elements of it is of benefit to student learning, and is in line with general expectations for teaching staff throughout the school.

It is recommended that planning for the use of ICT for the delivery of practical lessons, for history and appreciation of art and for student art-making takes place for all personnel in the art department and is reflected in the department planning document in a more action-plan mode than at present.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Two separate strands of stylistic approach were seen in the delivery of learning experiences to students on the day of the inspection. One was structured and the other unstructured and ad hoc. Attention should be directed to a review of both approaches to ensure that the positive elements of each are not weakened by the negatives inherent in the two differing approaches.

When the student's options for choice and self expression are blocked or cramped or lack focus and age-appropriate and experience-appropriate learning material, this results in limitations, and in art learning from which an important range of skills are potentially missing or underdeveloped.

Of the two approaches seen the over-structured was more successful from the point of view of student learning, but while certain skills were developed through this approach, it was apparent that creativity, expressiveness and spontaneity could not be developed to any great extent. The unstructured mode was activity based and was less likely to have a focussed outcome. It is recommended in future that a range of contrasting methodological approaches be used.

In both the structured and more unstructured modes, the management of class groups was exemplary. For example, in a lesson where a very large group of students were painting at easels, and in several others, cordial conversation and open discussion were typical of the student-teacher interaction.

Some classes were conducted with an over-reliance on talk and description and did not use visual aids customised for the class, whiteboard notes or formal note-taking procedures for students, all aspects of delivery that increase the possibilities of good learning outcomes for students, particularly those who are challenged by the learning requirements. While individual attention was given to students in these talk-driven classes, a more considered and professional approach would have been more advantageous in the acquisition of information and skills.

In a still-life class at senior cycle, students were assigned material which the majority had encountered in preparation for Junior Certificate. The observational skills that were being showcased were rudimentary and a range of different skills are required for Leaving Certificate. It should be noted that students are required to set up their own still life object group and to create a composition at Leaving Certificate level. This would have been a more appropriate starting point and would have provided a richness of learning opportunity that would pay attainment dividends in the long term. Lesson time could have been more effectively used if pre-lesson planning and research had determined the range of observation exercises students in the class had already undertaken for junior certificate. The lesson could then have better reflected students' prior learning and current needs.

Leaving Certificate students were completing a block of history and appreciation of art covering the Renaissance period and as part of this, on the day of the inspection, Raphael was being discussed. Students revealed that they had some knowledge of characteristics and issues of the Renaissance period. A textbook was being used and this was augmented by a black and white photocopy of the Raphael's *School of Athens*. The effort to provide more detail on the painting is commendable. However, the use of ICT would have allowed the topic to be more completely and effectively presented and would have provided a higher quality learning experience for this motivated and attentive group of students. It is recommended that steps are taken to integrate this technology into the delivery of history of Art lessons with an emphasis on increasing the clarity of information and on enhancing the visual dimension of students' learning. In order to ensure that the learning of the technical and descriptive vocabulary of art history is further supported, it is recommended that regularly updated wall mounted lists are made and used for regular revision of the vocabulary involved in this component of senior cycle study. The use of this approach would be valuable for both Irish students and newcomers for whom English is not their mother tongue.

As a general principle, methods and techniques of differentiating delivery for students of higher aptitude and motivation, and for students who are challenged by the requirements of any aspect of the subject need to become part of the habitual teaching techniques across the

department. While individual attention is given to students as necessary, differentiation would put the varying learning needs of different sub-groups of the mixed ability classes into more focus. It is recommended that differentiation be integrated into the delivery of lessons and that the website of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment is consulted for information on the principles and practice of differentiation.

Good use is being made of ICT by some members of the art department for delivery and archival purposes. This is very good practice and it is recommended that ways of encouraging students to use ITC for research, and for technical, creative and expressive purposes is grafted over time onto day-to-day practice.

A good range of learning experiences is available to students and access to 2-D and 3-D media and crafts has the potential to engage students in the long term with art and design. It is recommended that different crafts are practised and presented before SEC assessment at junior and senior cycles. A narrow range of graphics such as posters should not be practised as the sole craft learning opportunity over the five years of the students' art education.

The history department of Confey College has for many years made a very significant and innovative contribution to student art and design knowledge, by way of an excellent history module of the Georgian period in Ireland. The focussed interest and expertise in this field has been developed for transition year (TY) and adds immeasurably to the depth and quality of art historical learning in senior cycle. Research, theory, and hands-on making and doing combines with site visits: these trips and activities together create vibrant and dynamic learning experiences for students of all aptitude and motivation levels in the TY group. Links with the Irish Georgian Society have made visits to nearby Leixlip Castle a highlight of the course, and has also been valuable in providing access to national experts on Georgian architecture and life, all of which makes this a unique TY course component. Huge credit is due to all involved with this very successful and exemplary piece of art history curriculum development, tailored for students in a specific local context.

ASSESSMENT

A consciousness of SEC assessment criteria, and practical requirements associated with preparation for and conduct of the state examinations informs the work of the art department. Examinations for the history and appreciation of art component of the Leaving Certificate programme are held. Students show good levels of achievement. Records of students' results of during-term, end-of-term, and end-of-year assessment and examination are kept. End of term and end of year results are communicated to parents. Regular parent-teacher meetings are held and the art department participates in these to provide discussion, feedback and advice.

It is recommended that an element of self-assessment for students, such as a self-report questionnaire, be included at some stage in the teaching and learning of specific technical, artistic or perceptual skills, techniques and processes. This would be useful and practical in order that learners 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.

When learning outcomes are included in the planning of teaching and learning it is recommended that these become the basis for well worked out assessment criteria for specific tasks, assignments and projects. This should be done as soon as possible in key areas of the syllabus so that assessment of particular skills takes place in a focused way, in order to provide additional feedback to the learner. It is recommended that Assessment for Learning

(Afl) techniques are integrated into the daily life of the art department. Comprehensive information on assessment for learning is available at www.ncca.ie.

In some of the lessons inspected information and advice was given about how the students should prepare for the upcoming Christmas house examinations in Art. This was good practice as it made students focus on what they must do to be effective and what was expected of them in terms of advance preparation and revision.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- A good range of learning experiences is available to students and access to 2-D and 3-D media and crafts has the potential to engage students in the long term with art and design.
- ICT is in use for delivery of learning materials and excellently for archival purposes in part of the art department.
- There is good demand for the subject and in general students are engaged and attain successfully in art and design learning.
- Confey College has an excellent transition year module on Georgian architecture and society, developed in-house by the history department, that adds immeasurably to the history and appreciation of art learning opportunities experienced by the school's senior cycle students

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

- It is recommended that the planning process is embraced by the whole art department and that the current document is extended and developed in a collaborative way to include provision for differentiation and learning outcomes, which can be developed as assessment criteria.
- It is recommended that the use of ICT is extended by the whole department and that initial steps are taken to use it as an expressive medium for student artefacts.
- A review of teaching methodologies and styles across the whole department is strongly recommended, in order to provide greater breadth and balance in student learning opportunity.

Post-evaluation meeting was held with the principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.