

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Music
REPORT**

**Mount Temple Comprehensive School
Malahide Road, Dublin 3
Roll number: 81002K**

Date of inspection: 19 October 2009



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT
OIDEACHAIS | OF EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | A N D S K I L L S**

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

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Mount Temple Comprehensive School as part of a whole school evaluation. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Music 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, deputy principal and the music department.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Mount Temple Comprehensive School caters for 482 male and 367 female students. Music is mandatory in first year where all students study Music for the entire year before making their final subject choices for the Junior Certificate. Timetabling arrangements for Music are in line with the guidelines of the syllabuses. There are a sufficient number of double periods to facilitate practical work. An open-choice system operates at both junior and senior cycles where students prioritise their preferred subject options. This is good practice.

In this school, Transition Year (TY) is an optional programme in senior cycle. However, the majority of students participate in this programme. There is satisfactory provision for Music in TY. It is delivered as an optional ten-week modular course. The uptake of Music in both junior and senior cycles is high. Overall, the gender balance is very good and the high numbers of boys studying this subject is noteworthy.

There is satisfactory resource provision for Music. Two large and spacious rooms are available for the delivery of all music lessons. Instrumental lessons are held in a separate room adjacent to one of the music rooms. Both rooms are appropriately equipped and each room also contains one computer. Music technology is offered to students as part of the practical component of certificate examinations and music software is installed on one computer. This provision could be greatly enhanced by exploring the range of resources in relation to music technology that is available on the internet and installing an appropriate selection onto computers in the computer room. This would allow music technology to be delivered to a larger number of students and integrated into the other aspects of the music syllabus. This is recommended.

Budgetary arrangements in the school are not supportive of the subject. There is no pre-determined budget for Music. Music teachers have purchased many resources including books, CDs and DVDs themselves. It is essential that a system be put in place so that a school-based library of resources can be developed. As part of planning for the music department, all resource

needs should be identified and prioritised. A system should then be put in place to meet these needs over time. Good efforts have been made to create a learning environment that is attractive and stimulating for students of Music. There was a high quantity of students' work on display. This is good practice. The addition of professionally printed material would be a further stimulus for students.

The music department is staffed by two, fully-qualified specialist music teachers. The school actively encourages and supports attendance at continuing professional development events. The music department has benefited from the music teachers' involvement in the Post-Primary Music Teachers' Association (PPMTA).

In addition to the curricular aspects of the subject and preparation for certificate examinations, a wide variety of extracurricular and co-curricular activities in Music is available to the students. These include participation in all liturgical ceremonies, the reinvigorated school musical, lunchtime recitals and the school orchestra. A junior and senior school choir have been formed and the music department is also working towards the development of a large whole-school choir. Private lessons are available in guitar, piano, drumming and singing. The commitment of the music department in facilitating all of these activities is praiseworthy.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

There is a good level of planning and co-ordination of Music within the school. This involves planning for the timetabled classes and the various extracurricular groups where an extensive amount of advance planning is required to ensure the smooth operation of the many activities that take place. The music module in TY is creative and provides a very wide breadth of music experiences to students.

Subject department planning documentation was presented during the evaluation. This documentation outlined the management and organisation of the department and programmes of work scheduling the topics to be covered for each half term. These topics were based on syllabus documents and the requirements of the certificate examinations. In some instances, modes of assessments were also included.

To progress this work further, it would be valuable to document planned learning outcomes, consideration of learning strategies, the inclusion of active-learning methodologies and appropriate assessment procedures. Planning could also be developed to facilitate more integration of the three disciplines—listening, composing and performing—within the classroom context. It is recommended that programmes of work be developed now with these areas in mind. Reference could be made to the inspectorate report, *Looking at Music*, for further advice. This is available on the Department's website (www.education.gov.ie).

Teachers' individual preparation for the lessons observed was good. Handouts and worksheets were well integrated into these lessons and most of these, were appropriate to the students. However, in classes where there is a wide range of student ability, the development of differentiated worksheets is essential in order to meet the differing needs of students. This is recommended. These worksheets should be designed to challenge the more able students while allowing the less able students to learn at a pace suited to their particular abilities. It is good that all handouts and worksheets that have been designed or acquired by the teachers are filed and

readily accessible. Both teachers record carefully the work that has been covered during each lesson.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Three lessons were observed during the course of the evaluation, one in junior cycle and two in senior cycle. In all lessons, a comfortable and warm atmosphere was maintained. High expectations of attainment and behaviour were evident. Students' contributions were valued and praise was used effectively to acknowledge their efforts. In some lessons, students were introduced to the topic of the lesson and to the intended learning objectives at the outset. This is very good practice as it provides students with a focus and a structure for their learning. The lessons observed were logical and sequential and good links were made with previous learning. In the classrooms visited, students were challenged to use appropriate music vocabulary. This is an important aspect to students' learning in Music.

Some very effective practice was observed when students were provided with opportunities to think critically and independently from the teacher. For instance, in one lesson, the topic-at-hand was an analysis of movement two from the prescribed work, *Piano Concerto no 23 in A Major* by Mozart. Students, in pairs, were requested to analyse sections of the music themselves. After a suitable period of time, students discussed this work as a whole-class activity. All responses were documented on the board by the teacher and duly recorded by the students. Students' responses in the worksheet and to the oral questions indicated a level of learning had taken place.

Overall, the material chosen for lessons was appropriate and pitched to the level of the students' ability. However, in one lesson, where students were required to identify the speed of an excerpt of music and then to choose one descriptor to describe it from a short list of possibilities, no one of the options provided was correct. It is strongly recommended that care is always taken to ensure that the content material of lessons is fully checked for accuracy.

The *Sound before Symbol* approach was adopted in some of the lessons observed. For instance, in the junior-cycle lesson visited, students' understanding of dynamics was reinforced effectively by an appropriate inflection of the teacher's voice. Consequently, the students' understanding of dynamics in music was apparent. During the same lesson, rhythm patterns were successfully reinforced through a variety of clapping activities. In a senior-cycle lesson observed, good links were made between melody writing and practical music-making activities. These approaches to music teaching are good practices.

It is evident that practical activities are incorporated into lessons and good progress is being made by students. Questioning strategies observed throughout the evaluation were generally varied and in some cases, there was a good balance between those requiring a specific answer and those which encouraged students to think analytically at a higher cognitive level.

Students are making good progress through their music programmes. During the evaluation, they demonstrated good knowledge of topics in class and overall, they were successful in completing the tasks presented in lessons.

ASSESSMENT

In addition to regular assessments at Christmas and before the summer holidays and to the “mock” examinations for third year and sixth year students, formative assessment takes place in a variety of ways. Assessment strategies include questioning in class, completion of worksheets and practical assessments. Practical elements are continually assessed. It is good that students also experience practical assessments similar to those encountered in the certificate examinations.

In some classes, there is an expectation that students will store all materials provided by the teachers in folders. However, this requires greater attention by teachers as it was observed during the evaluation that standards regarding the organisation and maintenance of work varied considerably between students. It is recommended that the storage of students’ resources and materials be monitored regularly and where necessary that students be supported by clearer directions.

Monitoring of students’ work is ongoing. Best practice was observed when students were provided with comments indicating strategies for improvement. An examination of students’ written work indicated that some of the teachers’ comments of praise and affirmation did not actually match the standard of this work. Care should be taken to ensure that the comment is appropriate to the quality of the work. It is good to note that peer assessment and self-assessment strategies are used in some lessons.

In addition to reports being issued after formal school assessments, annual parent-teacher meetings take place for all class groups. Teachers keep records of students’ assessments but no record of homework or classroom activities were available. This information is important as it provides a concrete basis for constructing students’ profiles when these are required.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Music has a high profile and it is available to all year groups.
- The uptake of Music throughout junior and senior cycle is very high and it is very well gender balanced.
- The school actively encourages and supports teachers’ attendance at continuing professional development events.
- Good efforts have been made to create a learning environment that is attractive and stimulating for students of Music and this includes the display of a high quantity of students’ work.
- A wide variety of extracurricular and co-curricular activities in Music is available to the students.
- Practical activities were integrated into all lessons and the three disciplines of Music were well synthesised throughout the evaluation.

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

- It is essential that a budgetary system be put in place so that a school-based library of resources for Music can be developed over time.
- Care should always be taken to ensure that the content of lessons is always fully checked for accuracy.
- When providing feedback on students' work, it is important that all the comments made are appropriate to the quality of the work.

A post-evaluation meeting was held with the music department, principal and deputy principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.