Subject Inspection of MUSIC
REPORT

Sacred Heart Secondary School
Clonakilty, County Cork
Roll number: 62170B

Date of inspection: 27 March 2012
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN MUSIC

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

• All lessons observed encompassed a variety of active music-making methodologies, underpinned by an effective collaborative and cooperative learning environment.

• There was a very good quality of teaching and learning with a thorough integration of the three curricular areas of performing, composing and listening.

• Good standards of musical performance at both curricular and extracurricular levels were observed, with high standards of vocal performing.

• Music has a high profile in the school with numbers doubling over the past few years at both junior and senior cycles.

• The music department is very active and has high expectations with high achievement in the certificate examinations.

• Good progress has been made with subject-department planning and includes a focus on literacy.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• The music department should advance subject planning to the next stage to include a review of short-term plans.

• Strategies which would encourage students to take ownership of their own learning should be further explored and expanded on.
INTRODUCTION

Sacred Heart Secondary School is a girls’ voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of the Catholic Education, An Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). The school has a current enrolment of 482 students. Music is available as an optional subject for both the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations. All students study Music in first year and in the compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Very good standards of teaching and learning and a positive classroom atmosphere were significant aspects of the lessons observed during the visit. Examples of appropriate music methodological practice were observed in all lessons visited with well-prepared materials, a consistent aural focus and teaching that was supportive of all students. Strategies linking aspects of the curriculum were utilised to very good effect with the areas of performing, composing and listening integrated in musically-focussed ways.

- There was a good level of student engagement, and students’ contributions to class discussions were valued, with praise used effectively to acknowledge their efforts. The teachers used the students’ strengths to maximise the learning opportunities. Student responses were integrated into lessons, where appropriate, and they were encouraged to develop their ideas.

- A variety of teaching methods was seen with resources used in effective and skilful ways. High standards of music performance were observed, with students engaged in a range of meaningful music-making experiences.

- A collaborative learning environment allowing constructive and productive peer interaction and purposeful group work was observed. The teachers concerned guided students through various stages and facilitated a stimulating and challenging music-learning environment.

- The extensive resources available were used to very good effect. Appropriate use of the whiteboard, musical extracts, piano, worksheets and information and communication technology (ICT) was observed. This contributed to the effective learning environment observed.

- Students’ folders and copybooks were very well organised and generally neat in appearance. These contained a range of materials and coursework, and there was evidence of good organisational habits which are a significant means of support for all students. Students’ work is checked regularly by the teachers, and useful teacher comments in copybooks or key assignments provided valuable feedback to students on their progress and affirmed work well done.

- The majority of students opt for higher level in the certificate examinations and their attainment and achievement are high. Homework, which includes written, aural and practical work, is given on a regular basis. Other forms of assessment include questioning in class, completion of worksheets and projects. Practical elements are continually assessed and students also experience practical assessments similar to those encountered in the certificate examinations. These methods allow for careful monitoring of a student’s progress, provide sound guidelines for performance in the certificate examinations, and are indicative of the commitment of the teachers to helping all students achieve their potential in Music.
• The high-functioning learning environment evident in the classroom ensures that students achieve successful outcomes. In addition, the teachers make good use of assessment information to provide regular feedback to students, to monitor their progress and identify the next steps in learning. The teachers are thus well-placed to enhance the learning experience of the students. With this in mind, it is recommended that strategies which would encourage students to take ownership of their own learning be explored.

SUBJECT Provision AND Whole SCHOOL Support

• Music enjoys a very high profile within the school. The support from management, the timetabling provision for the subject and the access arrangements for the students all reflect this. Uptake of Music has doubled in both junior and senior cycles over the past few years, which is very positive.

• Timetabled provision for Music is in line with syllabus guidelines and there is an appropriate spread of contact time for individual class groups throughout the week. It is good that there are a sufficient number of double periods in all year groups to facilitate practical work.

• The school has a specialist music room which is a good size, acoustically satisfactory and is used exclusively for music classes. The room is very well resourced with an extensive range of music-teaching resources including ICT, and is a contributory factor to the success of this department. The walls are adorned with posters and charts about Music, students’ projects and notices pertaining to different aspects of the music courses. These also contribute to a heightened awareness of the subject.

• Music activities also take place in a general purpose room in which there is a good quality baby grand piano. This room is also used for the practical assessments for the certificate examinations.

• The music teachers have availed of many opportunities for continuing professional development and are both members of the Post-Primary Music Teachers’ Association.

• The wide variety of extracurricular musical activities provides a rich musical experience that is challenging and rewarding for all the students.

PLANNING AND Preparation

• Planning structures are well developed. A co-ordinator has been appointed and regular subject department meetings are appropriately documented.

• Comprehensive programmes of work, scheduling the topics to be covered, have been developed and were found to be in line with syllabus requirements. It was good to note also that a literacy policy has been devised for the music department.

• Considerable thought has also been given to short-term planning as evidenced by the careful prior preparation and organisation of the materials necessary for each lesson.

• There is an annual departmental review where the teachers reflect on the previous school year, plan for the incoming year and consider the direction in which they want the department to move. This is developing into a very effective system with both teachers,
who are relatively new to the school, working collaboratively and proactively in order to enhance the learning opportunities for the students.

- In order to enhance the effective planning that has already been undertaken, it is recommended that a review procedure be built into short-term planning. These plans could be regularly reviewed, perhaps on a monthly basis, according to the student profile and modified to meet any changing needs of the students. Regular review may also lead to a variety of approach and development every year, and would be a useful self-evaluation tool for the annual review when analysing the strengths and challenges facing the subject.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.

The board of management of the school 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.

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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 of Management (BOM) of Sacred Heart Secondary School wishes to acknowledge the immensely positive findings regarding the quality of teaching and learning in the music department.

It is highly satisfying to read the inspectorate’s recognition of high standards of musical performance and thorough integration of the three components of music in the classroom. It is also gratifying to read an acknowledgement of the high expectations set by music teachers regarding the certificate examinations.

The board understands that due to the format of the new inspection report, there is limited opportunity to recognise the wide array of extra-curricular musical activities on offer in the school. The BOM would hereby like to acknowledge the on-going hard work and dedication of teachers and students to the preservation and continued success of junior choir, senior choir, traditional Irish music group, annual school musical and school showcase.

The regular participation in the ‘All-Island School Choirs Competition’ and ‘Feis Maitiú’ is also noteworthy.

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

Although teachers of music regularly engage in professional discourse regarding planning for the subject, they are currently forming plans for more specific aspects of the junior and senior cycle curricula. These plans will take effect in September 2012.

The board has also been informed that students of music already take ample ownership of their learning and this is a process which continues to evolve and progress.