Subject Inspection of Music
REPORT

Balla Secondary School
Castlebar, County Mayo
Roll number: 64500G

Date of inspection: 13 December 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN MUSIC

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching in the lessons observed was good.
- There is a lack of consistency in relation to the recording of students’ attendance in music lessons.
- Some practical activities were integrated into the lessons observed. However, due to the predominance of teacher input, students were not always afforded adequate opportunity to demonstrate their skills.
- Approaches to the assessment of students’ work varied in the lessons observed. Some very good practices were noted.
- In each lesson observed, the teacher demonstrated a thorough knowledge and understanding of the students and a very good rapport existed.
- There is a very healthy uptake of Music in all year groups which is very good given the size of the school.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The music department should ensure that students’ attendance is formally recorded in all lessons.
- It is important that students are given opportunities to perform unaided by the teacher.
- The music department should adopt a consistent approach to the assessment of students’ work and ensure that there is a sufficient profile developed for each student.
INTRODUCTION

Balla secondary school is situated in a small village and caters for 299 boys and girls. The school offers Music as an optional subject within the Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate programmes. It is also a mandatory component of the Transition Year (TY) programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching in the lessons observed was good. In every case, lessons were purposeful, logical, sequential and suitably paced.
- The teaching aim of each lesson was made very clear to students and this is good. However, it is equally important that the learning purpose of the lesson is made apparent to them.
- Currently, there is a lack of consistency in relation to the recording of students’ attendance in music lessons and this should be addressed.
- A variety of methodologies was used in all lessons observed and, sometimes, this included the integration of the three components of Music: listening, composing and performing. There is scope to broaden the range of teaching strategies and include methodologies such as pair work and group work activities.
- It is evident that students are being given the opportunity to work independently from the teacher either during lessons or in project work. This is very good.
- Practical music-making activities were integrated in the lessons visited and this included clapping various rhythm patterns. However, for an activity such as this, students should be given opportunities to work with no teacher input in order to realise their potential.
- It is apparent that the music staff has a thorough knowledge and understanding of the students and has developed a very good rapport. Students were engaged and motivated in all activities.
- Questioning strategies deployed were varied. There was a very good balance between questions which required a defined answer and those which required students to think analytically at a higher cognitive level.
- In all classrooms visited, the quality of learning displayed by the students was very good and students rose very well to the various challenges posed by the teacher.
- Students are consistently encouraged by their teacher to develop their musical vocabulary and literacy skills. This is very good.
- Classroom management was very good.
- Very good efforts have been made to acquire or create posters containing illustrations of various music concepts.
- Approaches to the assessment of students’ work varied in the lessons observed. Very good practice was seen where students’ compositions are being marked regularly and annotated appropriately. This good practice should now be applied to other homework activities and workbooks.
• Records of assessments are kept by the teacher. There is a need to develop a more detailed profile on each student which should include some records of homework and class work.

• The music department is acquiring or developing resources for students but no system has yet been established for them to store these materials appropriately. This should be addressed.

• Information regarding achievement in certificate examinations is analysed each year by the music department and comparisons are made to national norms. This is excellent practice. Notwithstanding current levels of achievement in certificate examinations, the music department should now use this information to determine whether all students are fulfilling their potential and to establish if there is scope for improvement.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

• Music is well supported in the school by senior management.

• Timetabling of Music is in line with syllabus recommendations. The school should now explore the feasibility of providing a weekly double period in senior cycle.

• The systems in place for students selecting their optional subjects are appropriate.

• There is a very healthy uptake of Music in all year groups, given the size of the school.

• The resources and facilities for music are very good. As funding becomes available, the acquisition of percussion instruments would enhance this provision. In addition, the speakers should be mounted on either side of the white board for optimal acoustical effect.

• Music technology is available as an option for the practical component of certificate examinations.

• The music department currently comprises one fully qualified teacher of Music.

• The school is very supportive of teachers engaging in continuing professional development (CPD) and the level of engagement by the teacher in this regard is very good.

• Commendably, students are afforded the opportunity to participate in a range of music activities. Included in this are the following: school musical; choir; participation in a regional talent show. It is very good to note the contributions being made by the deputy principal to some of these activities.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

• Management is supportive of collaborative planning and schedules formal meeting times for all subject departments, including Music. In the past, the music teacher met other similarly sized departments to discuss common issues. This good practice could now be reinstated.

• The quality of planning for lessons was very good. However, on occasion, there is scope for the teacher to use information and communication technology (ICT) to prepare
materials in advance so that students are not spending valuable teaching time recording information that could be provided in advance.

- A subject department plan has been developed which includes a broad outline of time-bound programme content for each year group. Over a prolonged period, this plan could be developed further by documenting methodologies being used by the teacher in the delivery of topics and particularly where the three components are being integrated.

- Consideration needs to be given to the manner in which the general literacy and numeracy needs of students will be met through their study of Music. This should form part of whole-school planning and it should recognise some of the effective practices that are currently in place in lessons.

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

Published April 2012