

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scilleanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Art
REPORT**

**St Joseph's Secondary School
Foxford, Co. Mayo
Roll number: 64640W**

Date of inspection: 11 May 2010



**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS
AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA** | **DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
AND SCIENCE**

REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ART

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in St Joseph's Secondary School, Foxford. 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 the teacher, examined students' work, and had discussions with the teacher. 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 department. 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

The art department in St. Joseph's has been long established. There are high levels of support for the art department from school management who are appreciative of the work being done in the development of students' skills and aptitudes in art and design as part of their personal and academic growth. One full-time member of staff has been assigned to the art department. Timetabling and access to the subject are adequate. Resources are made available as required and it is reported that these have been consistently good for a long period, ensuring that the delivery of the courses and programmes in visual art, which are highly resource dependant, are not compromised.

Provision of information to incoming first years and senior cycle students is good and this ensures that students are empowered to make informed choices. There is generally a healthy demand for the subject, with relatively large class numbers. Students are given free choice and subjects are offered on the basis of adequate demand. Thus, demand may fluctuate from time to time: this year no fifth year class was formed. The art department contributes widely and well to school activities and has a much-appreciated profile in the school's interface with parents and the public. Great encouragement is given to students who aspire to careers in visual art and design.

The art room is housed in the former chapel of an older school building across the road from the main campus. This lofty room brings all the advantages and opportunities that a lot of space does for the subject, with lots of display space, storage room and easy circulation.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

A planning document for the art department was made available for the subject inspection. Detailed and informative lesson plans were available for the lessons inspected; this is commendable.

In general, the planning document for the art department consisted of a comprehensive list of activities, art and design, media and course components. It has provided a basic memory aid

for the art department's work and it is recommended that it be further added to and developed. The additions should be defined by the review of practices recommended below in the teaching and learning section of this report. It is important that the current plan has desired outcomes for students' learning added to it, in relation to lessons and assignments. It is recommended that strategies for differentiation should also be included in the planning document.

Preparation for the lessons was good and a well managed array of tools and materials was available for students' use.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The art department is effectively run and the courses are delivered enthusiastically and efficiently. Class sizes are relatively big and the art room space accommodates them and the varied art and design activities with ease.

The ample wall space for hanging and display of student artefacts in 2D and 3D is well utilised for teaching and learning, with both current and archival artefacts on view. There are also very good learning aids displayed, poster-style, in the room.

Management of students was excellent; time and opportunity were well utilised for teaching and learning. There was an equally good learning atmosphere, with effective communication and an ambience of friendliness and trust. Students asked questions, answered readily and attended to the tasks assigned.

A large class group of first years was especially well managed as they engaged in the challenges of modelling clay figures. It was clear from work these students produced, and the nature of the questions that they asked, that significant learning was underway, initiated by the lesson. In this lesson, and others, the mixed-ability nature of the group put complex demands on the teacher but these were handled with the expertise that comes with long experience.

This rich and valuable learning in clay modelling had come late in the school year; it would have been of greater educational benefit to students to have experienced it earlier, even during their initial weeks in first year. It is recommended that review of the type of learning experiences students now have during their first year is given consideration with a view to rescheduling these, in order to enhance students' experience of art, and to motivate them through interesting and challenging activity from their first days in secondary school.

A teaching and learning emphasis on the art elements in first year is good as it provided a basis for further development later in the junior cycle. However, a review of how, when and in what order the various art elements are introduced in first year should be undertaken. It is desirable that more emphasis on experiencing materials and being expressive would be the focus of review and change in the art department, not only in first year but throughout junior and senior cycle. Ensuring that students, especially those challenged by the learning required of them, draw constantly, not occasionally, with media other than pencil. It is recommended that the art department undertakes a review of its current practices in the light of enhancing artistic learning over perceived examination preparation efficiency.

As part of the review, a strong focus should be placed on developing the necessary skills that will ensure empowerment of young students to experience, appreciate and engage with art, design and architecture. The schedule of activities in the planning document for first year should be also reviewed. While nurture of creativity and expressiveness are apparent in the art department's delivery of courses at present, it is suggested that increased emphasis be given

to this at the earliest stage of students' artistic development, and that this be allowed to develop throughout the years of their art education.

Appreciation of art and design has a profile in teaching and learning. It is recommended that it is further and more extensively integrated into the overall planned vision for the delivery of courses at both junior and senior cycle. It should be given a more pivotal role in the learning process at all stages of students' development. It was clear, from lessons inspected and students' artefacts seen, that this change of emphasis will be easy enough to attain, as the basic conditions are there, but just need further emphasis.

Overall, the practical artwork of students exhibited confidence and competence. Emphasising artistic possibilities for students is recommended, as it is possible to bring about examination readiness by development of the skills necessary for artistic mastery and success without narrowing the focus of their learning, specifically for the examination.

ASSESSMENT

Homework is regularly set and checked. Good feedback is given to students about their progress. Varied assessment procedures are used in the art department: continuous assessment based on class work, and examinations. There are written examinations for the history and appreciation of art component of the Leaving Certificate programme. The students are closely observed, monitored and advised whilst working on their Junior Certificate project and Transition Year (TY) assignments. A strong consciousness of State Examinations Commission (SEC) assessment criteria, and of the associated practical requirements, informs the work of the art department. There are systematic records of students' during-term, end-of-term and end-of-year assessment and examination results. End-of-term and end-of-year results are communicated to parents and guardians. Regular parent-teacher meetings are held in the school and the art department contributes discussion, support, feedback and advice at these. The school welcomes inquiries by parents and guardians about the progress students are making at any time during the school year.

It is recommended that assessment for learning criteria (Afl) be utilised during both senior and junior cycle courses, independently of the state examination assessment criteria, which are better used towards the end of the courses and for mock examinations, as they are designed to assess the accumulated learning attained rather than the developmental processes that are involved in learning. Assessment for learning criteria (Afl) are available on the website of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) at www.ncca.ie.

The range of crafts and design options chosen for examination submission should be extended. Not all students could optimally showcase their personal skills and attainments through the poster/graphic design option and there should have been more uptake of 3D options and other crafts, given the mixed ability of the year group. A full review of the crafts and media that the students submit for examinations should be undertaken in order to further their artistic opportunity and their potential to attain high standards through being creative, individualistic and expressive.

Supporting students to focus on the learning they have attained and their own ongoing progress, and to take more responsibility themselves for their learning, is a direction that assessment should now include. The use of simple concrete devices, such as self-report questionnaires, whereby students of all aptitudes and capabilities are facilitated to carry out some basic self assessment, would enhance and extend the art department's assessment practices and bolster student engagement. It is recommended that versions of self-assessment questionnaires, using age-appropriate language and terminology, should be developed in order to link the teaching-learning-assessment continuum in a student-friendly way.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- There are high levels of support for the art department from school management, who are appreciative of the work being done in the development of students' skills and aptitudes in art and design as part of their personal and academic growth.
- Provision of information to incoming first years and senior cycle students is good and this ensures that students are empowered to make informed choices.
- The art department is effectively run and the courses are delivered enthusiastically and efficiently. Class sizes are relatively big and the art room space accommodates these and the varied art and design activities with ease.
- Management of students was excellent; time and opportunity were well utilised for teaching and learning. There was an equally good learning atmosphere, with effective communication and an ambience of friendliness and trust.
- Overall, the students' practical artwork exhibited a confidence and competence. Good feedback is given to students about their progress.

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 document for the art department be further developed. It is important that the plan would include desired outcomes for students' learning, and strategies for differentiation.
- It is recommended that appreciation of art and design is further, and more extensively, integrated into the overall plan for the delivery of courses at both junior and senior cycle.
- It is recommended that the art department undertakes a review of its current practices in the light of enhancing artistic learning and aesthetic development. Emphasising artistic possibilities for students over perceived examination convenience is strongly recommended.
- It is recommended that assessment for learning criteria (Afl) be utilised during both senior and junior cycle courses and that self-assessment questionnaires, using age-appropriate language and terminology, be developed in order to link the teaching-learning-assessment continuum in a student-friendly way.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the teacher of Art and the principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.