Subject Inspection of Art
REPORT

Beech Hill College
Monaghan, County Monaghan
Roll number: 72210Q

Date of inspection: 12 October 2010
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ART

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Beech Hill College. 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 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 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

Beech Hill College has an enrolment of 222 males and 188 females. The school offers the full range of programmes: the Junior Certificate (JC), the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) an optional Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied programme (LCA). Art is an optional subject in all but the TY and LCA programmes: in these two it is compulsory.

The art department is staffed by two very dedicated and committed specialist teachers. These teachers have benefited from continuing professional development (CPD) provided by the school. These teachers also benefit from the subject-specific support available from the Art Teachers Association of Ireland. This is good work.

Access to Art for students is good and the numbers of students taking the subject are very healthy at both junior cycle and senior cycle. The school makes very good arrangements to accurately inform students and their parents about their choices and about the consequences of their subject choice decisions. Opportunities for students to experience subjects before choosing them are provided in first year and for those students taking the TY programme in senior cycle. This sampling period is a very good way for students to make well-informed, subject-choice decisions. Art is provided for all students in the TY programme which allows students who may not have studied the subject before to experience it and to take Art as a subject for their certificate examinations should they so wish. All of this is very good work.

Timetabling for the subject is good. Double periods are provided for all groups studying Art to facilitate practical work.

Good whole-school support is evidenced by the provision of two neighbouring rooms with ample storage and a ceramic room for Art. These rooms are well maintained and teachers are commended for their development of the rooms, facilities and resources for students. Since the
walls are regularly used as display areas, and as a result are prone to wear and tear, it is recommended that the rooms be repainted whenever resources become available. It is also recommended that items such as the sinks, which are used on a daily basis, be replaced over time as funding becomes available to the school.

The rooms are bright and inviting. Students’ work is displayed around the rooms which is good practice. It is good to note that subject key words are displayed with explanatory illustrations to help students’ understanding of terminology. Students’ work is also displayed in the communal areas of the school which is commended.

The school has prioritised the development of ICT facilities for teaching and learning in recent years. The art department has access to useful ICT facilities and during the evaluation it was confirmed that a laptop and eBeam would be provided for the art department. This will ensure that both classrooms have very good access to ICT and is an example of the high level of support provided for the art department by the school.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

A subject department culture has been well established for Art. Good collaboration is a notable feature of the work of the department. During the evaluation, the art department provided evidence which showed that they have reviewed their practice and processes in recent times. This review included areas such as homework, sketchbooks and emphasis on specific crafts. The teaching of history and appreciation of art is on the agenda for further development. This strategy, which is designed to systematically review the efficacy of the work of the art department, is very good practice. It is especially good to note that teaching methodologies are regularly discussed at subject department meetings and that all decisions made at these meetings are recorded and retained.

The art department’s overarching philosophy and mission statement is to enable students to ‘be able to think in terms of a visual language’. This mission emphasises an approach that reflects the integrated nature of the various syllabuses and promotes the development of critical appraisal. This is very good work.

A very well-developed subject plan was available during the evaluation. The presentation of this document was good and included an array of visual information which is very appropriate for a visual subject. The presentation of plans with imagery including stimulus material and students’ work is very useful and represents best practice. It was evident that high-level planning has been a focus for the art department for a long number of years.

The plan clearly outlines the structural and procedural elements of the art department in the first segment of the document. This is balanced with the rest of the plan which is focussed on curricular planning. Planning for lessons is focussed on the skills and knowledge required for success in programmes and not just on individual years within programmes. This represents very good practice. Curricular planning is organised by topic over defined timeframes for each year group. The lessons developed are appropriate to the various syllabuses and cover a wide range of valuable learning experiences for students. The art department aims to provide new and innovative teaching methodologies to enhance and support the learning experience for students. This is very good work. As planning develops, it is recommended that the department frame curricular plans using learning outcomes.
The art department works with other subject departments at the school both to support the work of those departments and to provide extra learning opportunities for students. These co-curricular and extra-curricular activities include film making, murals, preparing students for entering local and national competitions and the design and execution of various exhibitions. This is good work. Students are also facilitated in visiting local and national cultural and heritage sites. The art department also provides opportunities for students to work with professional artists. This is very much in the spirit of the art department’s mission statement and is very good practice.

The art department has also developed a wide range of resources using ICT to address various aspects of art education. These include visual presentations to help teach art history and appreciation as well as a variety of handouts, information sheets and work sheets to help students focus on specific topics and tasks. This is good work.

**TEACHING AND LEARNING**

A range of lessons was observed across the junior and senior cycle. The quality of teaching and learning as observed in this evaluation was good.

Class routines were good and included roll call to help students settle into lessons. A wide variety of methodologies was used such as brainstorming, discussion, questioning, the use of handouts and challenging students to use their own observations and perceptions of a given stimulus. Teachers are commended for providing such a range of teaching and learning methods for students. ICT was used effectively to prepare material for lessons and was also used to good effect during lessons.

During one of the lessons observed, aspects of the history and appreciation of art were raised and discussed with students. These were difficult topics and were addressed in such a way as to meaningfully engage students. The use of the art elements and appropriate terminology to evaluate art works is very good practice. Students were given very good opportunities to use terminology in discussions. It is suggested that when students are learning how to use the art elements to critique artefacts, a variety of artefacts is presented to ensure that students become familiar with evaluating the widest range of art works available.

It was evident that communication was prioritised in the lessons observed and communication was generally of a good standard. Teachers had very good vocal presence in the classrooms. For example, whilst students’ work was monitored teachers reminded students of the important aspects of the tasks. Where students’ first language was not English, relevant key words and themes were translated into the students’ native language for them. This is very good practice.

A variety of questioning techniques was used by teachers during the evaluation. It is clear that teachers are aware of the potential of good questioning to develop students’ understanding and performance. Where good practice was observed, specifically targeted questions were asked of named students. This is a very useful way of challenging all students in a way that is appropriate to their ability. The quality of questioning in some cases was very high due to appropriate pitching and use of visual aids using ICT. For example, students were asked to examine visual texture as opposed to implied texture. To help students with their processing of answers, students were encouraged to look at and touch relevant objects. To further consolidate this knowledge, students were asked to identify textures in their own environments. This is good work. In one case it was noted that the words used in questions were too difficult for students to understand. In
such cases it is recommended that simple words and phrases are used with students initially so that they can better engage with material.

It was noted that in one lesson students were being shown how to interpret a theme and how to choose subject matter from it. To help inspire students, they were shown some images, a practice which is generally useful. However, the images shown to students were of limited interest to them. To help students of all ages and stages of development, it is recommended that they be encouraged to base their projects on topics of personal interest. It is also recommended that students be encouraged to bring in objects and take photographs of their stimulus material. By encouraging students to work with material that is of personal interest to them, it is easier for them to sustain motivation over the duration of the project.

Students are encouraged to have a sketch book in which students have a list of drawings to complete during the year. This is a very good strategy, however, it is suggested that students who find drawing difficult should be encouraged to carry out simpler tasks to ensure those students’ success.

In general students were very attentive and diligent. Teachers have developed a very good rapport with students. This contributed to a good and positive working environment in which students are facilitated to achieve to their potential.

**ASSESSMENT**

Commendably, the art department has developed its own art policy and system of assessment for junior cycle and senior cycle. These assessments are carefully balanced so that the focus for students is initially on skills such as the use of art vocabulary. Later in the various programmes students are encouraged to focus on the necessary skills for the specific certificate examinations. A range of assessment methods is used. These strategies include formal tests at Christmas as well as continual assessment throughout the year. The methods used to monitor students’ work are varied to maximise students’ potential for self-assessment. For example, the department has developed a series of students’ assessment sheets with guidelines for teachers. These completed forms are then marked by teachers and used to inform a comprehensive record of students’ progress. All of this is very good work. It is suggested that the next focus for attention could be the use of group critiques to help students ascertain their progress.

Homework was assigned to students in all of the lessons observed. In each case, the homework was appropriate and clear explanations were given to students. Homework and assessments are carefully recorded by the teacher to provide a comprehensive profile of students’ progress. This information is communicated to students during class time and to their parents at parent-teacher meetings and through use of the students’ journal. This is good work.

**SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The art department is staffed by two very dedicated teachers.
- School management provides a very high level of support for the subject in terms of timetabling, access and resources.
- The art department provides students with a wide array of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities to augment their learning in the classroom.
• The rooms provided for art create vibrant and stimulating learning environments for students of Art.
• Students’ efforts and achievements are celebrated by displaying students’ work in the art room and in the communal areas of the school.
• The art department plan evidences long term high-quality planning. The presentation of information and the approach taken to curricular planning represents best practice.
• Questioning techniques were used to very good effect to challenge students appropriately.
• Students are facilitated in achieving their potential.
• Very good assessment processes are in place in the art department.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:
• The high-quality planning observed during the evaluation should introduce the use of learning outcomes as planning develops further.

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

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