Subject Inspection of Art
REPORT

Pobalscoil Neasáin
Baldoyle, County Dublin
Roll number: 91342R

Date of inspection: 24 September 2010
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ART

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main findings of the evaluation:

• The quality of teaching and learning as observed during this evaluation was very good. The quality of the students’ finished work examined and the work completed during lessons showed that students are progressing well.
• The teacher-generated resources used during lessons were of a very high quality and very appropriate to the tasks being carried out.
• Preparation for the lessons observed was of a very good standard.
• The approach observed to designing homework is optimal practice.
• Good classroom management and the good rapport between teacher and students resulted in a very positive atmosphere for teaching and learning.
• Whole-school provision for Art is good. This includes the provision of necessary resources and appropriate timetabling.
• Access to the subject is good except on the TY programme where there is no provision for Art.
• The school provides a very good range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities to support students’ learning in Art.
• Planning for the art department is of a very high standard.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:
• Senior management should continue to explore ways to introduce Art into the TY programme.
INTRODUCTION

Pobalscoil Neasáin is a community school with an enrolment of 155 females and 405 males. The inspection of Art took place over one day and a total of three lessons were observed. These lessons were spread across junior cycle and senior cycle classes. The board of management 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.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The quality of teaching and learning as observed during this evaluation was very good. At the outset of each lesson the teacher shared the learning outcomes with the students in a clear manner thus ensuring that students knew what was expected of them. The content covered during each of the lessons was identifiable as part of the teacher’s longer-term learning plan for the groups visited. The content was set in context for students by the teacher who linked the topics to previously learned material. This is good work.

The level of challenge in each of the lessons observed was pitched very well. All students in the group were enabled to progress at an appropriate rate in line with their own abilities. From the beginning of each of the lessons there was a clear expectation that there was work to be addressed and that students would be successful in getting their work done. The atmosphere of the lessons observed was very positive. The good rapport between teacher and students and the respect which characterised all interactions created a very secure environment for teaching and learning. Students were pleasant, well-behaved and generally engaged in their work. It is positive to note that at times students were very deeply engrossed in their tasks. Students were affirmed regularly and all of the interactions observed during the evaluation were good-natured and pleasant. On one occasion a junior-cycle student was distracted from his work. This student was redirected back to his task in a firm and friendly manner. All students were then reminded of the responsibilities of working in an art room. This was very affirming and good for students. In one of the class groups a number of students found it difficult at the outset to focus on the lesson. It is suggested that all of the students in this group be assigned seating. In this way those students who find concentrating difficult can be seated in strategic positions around the classroom.

The management of activities and of the student groups was very good. The established routines of lessons such as roll call helped students to stay focussed and ensured that time was not wasted. Students were adept at setting up their materials and tidying away upon completion of tasks. This is good work. Preparation for activities was carefully carried out so that time was used efficiently and so that students were engaged in tasks throughout. Students were monitored as the lessons progressed and where appropriate they were given extra support. All of this represents good class management.

The preparation for the lessons observed was of a very good standard. For example, some very high quality still-life materials were available for students to draw. These materials were chosen for their visual qualities to help students achieve specific learning outcomes. This prioritising of subject matter is very good practice and is a very good example for students. In another lesson, students were asked to look at and touch examples of sculpture in a variety of materials as well as the tools that made them. Students were appreciative of the very good opportunity to explore these artefacts. They asked very good questions and made astute comments. The preparation of
appropriate materials and artefacts contributed to a very successful learning experience for students.

Information was communicated very effectively during lessons. The use of voice was clear and pleasant and contributed to the good atmosphere during class. During all of the lessons observed there was a focus on the use of terminology. For example, as a ‘warm up’ exercise junior-cycle students were asked to name forms. This is very good practice. Instructions were carefully broken down to their component parts so that students could understand new and challenging tasks. Instructions were made more interesting by, for example, asking students to feel differences with their hands as well as observing them. Demonstrations were used very effectively. These illustrated tasks in a manner that was clear and informative. The various steps were broken down sufficiently so that all students could understand how to proceed. Asides were used very effectively during the demonstrations to give added information and ‘tips’ to help students and keep them engaged.

Teacher-generated resources such as work sheets and visual aids were also used to support the communication of ideas and concepts. In particular the visual resources were of a very high quality and very appropriate to the tasks being carried out. These helped students to aspire to a high standard of personal engagement with their tasks. A number of presentations created using information and communications technology (ICT) were observed. These presentations were of a particularly high calibre with regard to their content and appropriateness to the student groups.

Homework was given in two of the lessons observed. The homework assigned was very appropriate, for example, students who were using watercolour in lessons were asked to research Irish watercolour artists. In the lesson on sculpture, students were assigned ‘construction boxes’ from which they had to make animals such as giraffes and dinosaurs. The boxes contained items such as elastic bands, corks, pegs, glue and other items. Students were equally challenged and excited by this task. Such an approach to designing homework which is educationally sound as well as being engaging and motivating for students is optimal practice.

The quality of the work completed during the lessons showed that students are progressing well. Students’ work on display and in the folders presented show that a wide range of skills are being achieved in a variety of disciplines. In particular students’ understanding of and abilities in three-dimensional studies are very strong. Students at all levels are adept at designing and executing good block-prints. Students’ notebooks and the interactions with students during lessons show that their knowledge and understanding of the history and appreciation of art is good and is developing as it should be.

All of the work on display was very well presented. This is a particular priority of the art department and helps students to aim for a high quality finish. As a result students’ completed work looks well and encourages pride and confidence in their abilities.

The practice of assessing students’ learning as lessons developed was carried out during each of the lessons observed. This very good practice was carried out in a number of ways. Questioning techniques were used to establish understanding of concepts and upon completion of work group critiques were held. The questions asked during the group critiques were focussed on the learning outcomes which helped students to understand how well they had achieved tasks as well as identifying routes for improvement. This is good work.
SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Art is offered as an optional subject in junior cycle and is also offered as an optional subject in fifth year and sixth year for students wishing to take the subject for Leaving Certificate. It is not offered as a module in the school’s compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme. It is acknowledged by the school that Art would be a positive inclusion on the TY programme but that timetabling priorities have prevented this thus far. It is recommended that the school continue to explore ways to introduce the subject into the TY programme.

Appropriate time periods for Art including double periods are provided for all students of Art. Access to Art is good in junior cycle. Students are provided with a sampling period to experience the subject before they choose to study it as a subject for the certificate examinations. A sampling period in the TY programme would allow those students who have not studied Art before a similar opportunity to experience the subject before making subject choice decisions at senior cycle. Students choose optional subjects from a banded list of options. The school makes arrangements so that students and their parents are informed about the consequences of their subject decisions. This is good practice.

The art department provides a very full programme of co-curricular and extracurricular activities for students of Art. This includes visits to art galleries and heritage sites, the decoration of the school building for important events, and the design and production of artefacts for the school’s musicals. In addition to this the art department also takes opportunities to bring in professional artists to work with students at the school. This has resulted in some very good learning opportunities for students. The art department also provides the school with a range of artefacts which are displayed to enhance the school building. All of this good work reinforces the work carried out in the classroom, highlights students’ abilities and maintains the good profile of the department in the school.

The art department has developed and implements a good assessment policy for students of Art. This policy includes the use of a variety of appropriate assessment methods. Students are tested formally twice per term in addition to continual assessments. A number of methods are used to communicate progress to students including marking homework and oral feedback. Students’ progress is communicated to parents using a variety of means including parent-teacher meetings, school reports, the student journal and phone calls when necessary.

The art department is situated in a large bright room with a designated area for ceramics. This room is well maintained and continues to be developed, for example by investing in appropriate ICT equipment for the department. Consideration could be given to obtaining blinds for the room to enhance the digital display. The good practice of using the room as an exhibition area for students’ work and exemplars was also observed. Relevant terminology is displayed around the room with visual explanations to help those students who are less able. In summary the art room is a very stimulating, effective and attractive learning environment for Art.

One specialist teacher currently staffs the art department. This member of staff engages in very significant continuing professional development in personal time. This is carried out through membership of the Art Teachers’ Association of Ireland, and by regular attendance at relevant courses. This regular engaging in CPD results in a fresh and up-to-date approach to art education in the classroom and is good work.
PLANNING AND PREPARATION

An art department plan which was of a very high standard was presented during the evaluation. All of the procedures governing art department decisions and actions are noted in this document, making it a very valuable and useful basis for further planning.

In addition to procedures, the art department plan also outlines curricular plans for students. Lesson schemes are outlined per year group using learning outcomes and assessment methods. This represents best practice. Great care has been taken so that the content of the syllabuses are addressed in a way that will be of interest to students. The tasks and projects associated with specific topics are designed to be attractive upon completion and are designed to maximise students’ successful learning. This is very good work.

Record keeping in the art department is very good. Records are kept of decisions made and of interdepartmental meetings. This enables monitoring of the progression and operations of the department.

CONCLUSION

A summary of the draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation was presented to the principal and subject teacher at the conclusion of the evaluation. These were discussed with the inspector. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the 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 welcomes the report which highlights the high standard of teaching and learning in the Art Department. The school would like to thank the inspector for the professional and positive manner in which the inspection was carried out and for the affirmation of good practice provided.

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

Management will continue to strive to include Art within the transition year experience through set design, visits to galleries etc. Formal timetabling of Art in transition year poses challenges due to teacher allocation.