An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of MUSIC
REPORT

Scoil Mhuire,
Kanturk, County Cork
Roll number: 62290L

Date of inspection: 12 May 2010
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN MUSIC

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Scoil Mhuire, Kanturk. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Music 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 the teacher’s written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and subject teacher. 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.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Music is available to all students in all years as an optional subject in Scoil Mhuire. New subject-sampling arrangements were instigated this year for first-year students. Instead of ten-week modules in a range of subjects, students now experience Music for half of the school year and spend the other half studying Technology. At the end of the year, students will be required to choose three subjects from Art, Business, Home Economics, Materials Technology (Wood), Music, Technical Graphics and Technology. While at present the uptake for Music is good at junior cycle, it is recommended that the new sampling procedures are carefully monitored to ensure not only that numbers are maintained but perhaps could be increased. Music is timetabled for two single periods per week for students in the optional Transition Year programme (TY) and an open-choice system operates at Leaving Certificate, with blocks formed according to the best-fit approach. Overall the number of students opting for Music at both Junior and Leaving Certificate is satisfactory.

Timetabled provision for Music is in line with syllabus guidelines. There is an appropriate spread of class-contact time throughout the week along with a sufficient number of double periods in all year groups to facilitate practical work.

In addition to the curricular opportunities, a good range of extracurricular musical activities exists in the school. Students are very active throughout the school year engaged in a variety of events as evidenced by the numerous photo montages on the music room’s walls. There are close cross-curricular links with the Irish, religion and technology departments, with students involved in Seachtain na Gaeilge, liturgical services and designing posters, tickets and invitations to the many musical events taking place in the school. There is a traditional Irish group which rehearses after school and students with particular ability perform at important events such as the awards night and open evenings. There is also close collaboration with Cór Duhallow, a local adult choir which rehearses in the school and with the parents’ association which occasionally organises school
concerts such as the successful event organised last term. The school has an extensive range of traditional Irish instruments and guitars in its possession which the students may rent for use during the scheme of instrumental tuition going on in the school. This scheme provides individual and group tuition in a variety of instruments. In-school tuition is organised on a rota basis to avoid continual interruption of any one lesson and complements the curricular activity provided by the school. All these activities ensure that students in Scoil Mhuire experience a wide range of music-making activities. The music teacher’s commitment to these events and the school’s support in facilitating such activities are deserving of the highest praise.

Scoil Mhuire has a specialist music room adjoining a general assembly area. This spacious room has desks laid out in traditional style but the lightweight furniture allows for efficient flexible seating to be set up to deal with all types of music-teaching settings. The room is very well equipped with a piano, a sound system, keyboard, classroom instruments, computer, interactive whiteboard, internet access, a range of sheet music, audio resources, texts and reference material. Two smaller rooms provide ample space for the storage of materials including the instruments mentioned above. Along with the montages referred to above, there is an attractive range of musical posters on the walls, examples of student work and bulletin boards with notices and information about various aspects of Music. This is very positive as it all serves to heighten an awareness of Music and the musical activities that go on in the school.

The music teacher is an active member of the Post-Primary Music Teachers’ Association (PPMTA) and has kept abreast of all information pertaining to music education at second level and has kept up to date with ongoing curricular innovation. The teacher has also spent considerable time developing her skills in the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) which is very positive.

**Planning and Preparation**

There is evidence of significant teacher commitment to planning and preparation in Scoil Mhuire, Kanturk. Extensive work has gone into the creation of a comprehensive subject department folder for Music. This folder contains numerous documents relevant to teaching and learning in Music and includes a list of music resources available in the department, relevant learning outcomes and some effective generic teaching methodologies. In addition liaison with the special educational needs department and cross-curricular links with other subject departments such as Irish, Religion and Technology are outlined. This is very good practice. It is suggested that further additions to the folder include methodologies relevant to the teaching of Music that are appropriate for all year groups. Another possible area for development would be the inclusion of a review section in the subject plan. This would ensure that either the contents remained relevant and purposeful or the plan could be adapted to suit students’ differing abilities and changing needs as they occurred.

**Teaching and Learning**

In all lessons visited, a comfortable and warm atmosphere was maintained. A clear and fair code of behaviour was very much in evidence and provided a calm environment for learning to take place. There was a good rapport between the students and the teacher in a secure, enthusiastic and work-orientated atmosphere. A very good level of student engagement was seen in lessons, with a firm focus on music-making activities. The students were attentive, interested, and enthusiastic and participated very well in the learning process.
In all lessons visited, a variety of methodologies and examples of active music-making were seen. Lessons were well structured and paced accordingly. The material chosen in all classes was pitched at the level of the students and the pace of learning was commensurate with their ability. Good learning was seen through skill development, trial and error, and progressive refinement in all activities. Strategies linking aspects of the curriculum were utilised to very good effect with the areas of performing, composing and listening integrated in a musically-focussed way. Lessons focusing on theoretical aspects were reinforced and consolidated through practical activities and listening exercises. The integrated learning and teaching of performing, composing and listening, and the manner in which it was demonstrated that these skills complement each other and support the development of each area, is very good practice.

Good teaching was characterised by engaging and motivating the wide range of abilities of the students and facilitating collaborative and peer-peer interaction and learning through well-structured and varied activities. This was fully borne out for example during a lesson focusing on Ripples in the Rockpools from Granuaile, a set work for the Junior Certificate. During this lesson the students worked out the rhythm pattern of the main theme, composed sequences based on the theme and notated the opening phrase of the work. The teacher circulated to ascertain students’ understanding and good questioning was employed as a means of clarification, explanation and encouragement. The material was then consolidated through viewing a YouTube™ clip of the work combined with very interesting scenes from Connemara. This linking of activities and active participation by the students does much to ensure a broad musical development, rather than a narrow focus on examination material.

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. Good questioning, which ascertained the level of student retention in terms of the more cognitive areas of musical understanding, was observed. Appropriate links were made with the musical features that the students outlined when answering these questions which is very good. The extensive resources available in the music room are used to very good effect and contribute to the very effective learning environment and skilful use of the interactive whiteboard was observed. While acknowledging the effective use of the interactive whiteboard, an exploration of the ways in which this powerful resource could be used to even greater effect in music lessons is recommended.

ASSESSMENT

In all lessons observed, students were generally confident and capable and performed to a good standard. Students’ folders and manuscripts showed evidence of good organisation and were generally neat in appearance. Special mention of the second-year copybooks and files has to be made. The samples viewed were of an exceptionally high standard of organisation and neatness, with handwriting that was a pleasure to read.

In addition to regular assessments at Christmas and summer, and the mock examinations for Junior and Leaving Certificate students in the spring, formative assessment takes place in a variety of ways. Homework, which includes written, aural and practical work, is given on a regular basis. Good use has been made of technological resources and students are encouraged to use the internet for research and bring their work in on memory sticks. This is then shared with others through presentations and class discussions. This is very good practice. Other examples include questioning in class, completion of worksheets and group projects. Practical elements are continually assessed both within and outside class where necessary. Students also experience
practical assessments similar to those encountered in the certificate examinations. In addition
students who are not in an examination year are encouraged to accompany examination students
at both junior and senior cycle. This allows students to gain experience of a practical examination
without the pressure of being examined. Every year all music students are required to have
participated in at least two major events in the school calendar by Christmas which ensures a
consistent building of experience. 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 teacher to helping all students achieve their potential in
Music.

The school has an open communication policy for parents and, in addition to reports issued after
formal examinations at Christmas, spring and summer, regular parent-teacher meetings take place
for all class groups. These meetings also provide a forum for parents to discuss any concerns or
difficulties students may be having. There is also a willingness on the part of staff to meet parents
at any stage if they have concerns about their children’s progress.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Music has a high profile in the school, is available to all students on an optional basis and
  is supported by in-school management.
- A well-resourced music teaching area exists in the school and is used appropriately and
effectively in an integrated way to support the teaching and learning of Music.
- There is a very good level of planning for the development of Music.
- A positive classroom atmosphere and very good standards of teaching and learning were
  significant aspects of the lessons seen during the visit.
- Student involvement in extracurricular musical activities impacts greatly on their musical
  development. The variety of activities available to the students is welcomed.

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 new subject sampling arrangements in first year are carefully
  monitored.
- It would be worthwhile to include a review section in the subject plan.
- An exploration of ways in which the interactive whiteboard can be used to even greater
  effect in music lessons should be undertaken.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the teacher of Music 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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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 appreciates the positive nature of the report particularly in terms of provision, planning, teaching and learning, as well as assessment.

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

The Board of Management is committed to supporting best practice, and welcomes the recommendations in aiding it to do so.