

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Music
REPORT

Ardcoil Rís
North Circular Road, Limerick
Roll number: 64201T

Date of inspection: 13 October 2011



A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S

**REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN MUSIC**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	13 October 2011
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- All lessons were characterised by a warm friendly rapport, underpinned by mutual respect and exemplary student behaviour.
- High standards of music performance were observed, with students engaged in a range of meaningful music-making experiences.
- A variety of teaching methods were seen with resources used in effective and skilful ways.
- Strategic use of assessment for learning (AfL) practices to inform students' learning was evident.
- Access to the subject is excellent, with a very healthy uptake and high achievement in the certificate examinations.
- While planning is at an advanced stage, the department is more than ready to undertake the next phase.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Efforts should be made to ensure that, in conjunction with the integration of performing composing and listening, a consistent 'sound before symbol' approach is incorporated in the variety of teaching methodologies used.
 - In as much as is feasible, all music classes should take place in the music room.
 - Planning should be progressed to the next stage and it should include a focus on intended learning outcomes.
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INTRODUCTION

Ard Scoil Rís is a boys' voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools' Trust (ERST). The school has a current enrolment of 747 students. Music is available as an optional subject for both the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations. All students study Music in the optional Transition Year programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- 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.
- The music teachers created a positive learning environment through effective organisation and management of learning activities. Students were motivated and demonstrated an interest in the subject. Students responded very well to this positive climate for learning and participated with enthusiasm wherever challenging opportunities were presented.
- There was a good level of student engagement, and students' contributions to class discussions were valued, with praise used effectively to acknowledge their efforts. Student responses were integrated into lessons, where appropriate, and they were encouraged to develop their ideas.
- Strategies linking aspects of the curriculum were utilised to very good effect, often through appropriate practical elements.
- A collaborative learning environment allowing constructive and productive peer interaction and purposeful group work was observed. The teachers concerned guided students through various stages and facilitated a stimulating and challenging music-learning environment.
- The extensive resources available were used to very good effect. Appropriate use of the whiteboard, musical extracts, piano and worksheets was seen which contributed to the effective learning environment observed. Good use of the computer and data projector was also observed.
- Aspects of AfL were used to support learning and the teachers made good use of assessment information to provide regular feedback to students, to monitor their progress and identify the next steps in learning. Useful teacher comments in copybooks and manuscripts provided valuable feedback to students on their progress and affirmed work well done.
- In some lessons, the proposed homework was written up on the whiteboard and referred to at the end of the lesson. It would be worthwhile if the intended learning outcome was also outlined at the beginning of the lesson and communicated to the students.
- Whilst acknowledging that some examples of the 'sound before symbol' approach were seen during the evaluation, it is recommended that this approach be consistently utilised to allow students experience a more meaningful exploration of the parameters of music. This would ensure that all opportunities can be used to reinforce musical concepts and to encourage students to think musically.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Music enjoys a very high profile within the school. The support from management, the timetabling provision for the subject and the access arrangements for the students all reflect this.
- As well as the curricular aspects of the subject and examination preparation, other musical activities take place during the school year. Activities include choir, the production of a TY musical on a biennial basis and an arts and culture evening. This wide variety of extracurricular musical activities provides a rich musical experience that is challenging and rewarding for all the students.
- The school has made a significant investment in the music department with a very well-resourced music room forming part of the current refurbishment programme. It is recommended that in as much as is practicable, all music classes take place in this specialist room. This would optimise the learning opportunities for all students of music and ensure that the benefits from this custom-built facility would be shared by all.
- The music teachers are members of the Post-Primary Music Teachers' Association (PPMTA) and attendance at its meetings allows them to keep abreast of all information pertaining to music education at second level, to keep up to date with ongoing curricular innovation and to network with other music teachers.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Planning structures are well developed. A co-ordinator has been appointed and regular subject department meetings are appropriately documented.
- Comprehensive programmes of work, scheduling the topics to be covered, have been developed and were found to be in line with syllabus requirements.
- Planning is informed by student achievement and performance in the certificate examinations in relation to national norms. After this comparative analysis, which occurs on an annual basis, the teachers are required to discuss the implications of this for teaching and learning in their subject and inform senior management in writing. This is good practice.
- Plans are also reviewed regularly, the result of which forms part of the submission, compiled by the subject coordinator, to the school's annual report.
- Considerable thought has also been given to short-term planning as evidenced by the careful prior preparation and organisation of the materials necessary for each lesson.
- In order to enhance the effective planning that has already been undertaken, it is recommended that planning for all year groups be expanded to include schemes reflecting a purposeful sequencing of material with suggested learning outcomes that go beyond fulfilling the requirements of the certificate examinations and include some broader aspects in terms of musical competencies.
- It is also suggested that a collaborative approach for the first year music programme, which is shared by both teachers, be adopted. Although a common programme of work exists, a sharing of best practice and teaching methodologies would ensure a smooth

transition to second year for the students who often experience a change of teacher due to the merging of classes into one class group.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. 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.