Subject Inspection of MUSIC
REPORT

Loreto Secondary School,
Fermoy, County Cork
Roll number: 62270F

Date of inspection: 4 October 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN MUSIC

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td><strong>• Observation of teaching and learning during five class periods</strong></td>
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<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal, and teachers</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

• An aural focus was maintained at all times with a particular emphasis on vocal and choral activities.
• The curricular areas of performing and listening were linked appropriately at all times, but opportunities to include the integration of composing were often overlooked.
• The use of effective Assessment for Learning strategies is well established.
• Music has a high profile in the school with a very good uptake and high achievement in the certificate examinations.
• While there has been some investment in resources for the music department, there is scope for development.
• Good progress has been made with subject department planning.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• Opportunities where students are engaged in a co-operative learning environment should be further expanded.
• Consideration should be given to the manner in which the three areas of performing, composing and listening could be integrated in musically-focussed ways in all lessons.
• Subject department planning should be further progressed to include a firm focus on intended learning outcomes and to ensure that the plan is a flexible working document and open to review.
• Strategic planning for the development of resources should be advanced.
INTRODUCTION

Loreto Secondary School is a girls’ voluntary secondary school. The school has a current enrolment of 664 students. Music is available as an optional subject for both the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations. All first-year students study Music and option bands are then generated from student preference for both the junior and senior cycle. Students choose between Music and Art in the optional Transition Year programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

• The quality of teaching and learning was good. 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.

• A good level of student engagement was seen in lessons with all students involved in meaningful music-making activities.

• The teaching observed employed many strategies to engage the students and include them in all aspects of the learning process. It is recommended that these strategies be expanded in order to minimise teacher-led activities and to encourage students towards more self-directed and autonomous learning. In addition, a more collaborative learning environment allowing constructive and productive peer-to-peer interaction and purposeful group work, where the teacher could guide students through various stages is recommended.

• In lessons that had a performing element, relevant rote learning, good rehearsal technique, where awkward passages were isolated and worked on, and assured teacher accompaniment were some of the activities seen. At times the activity was open-ended enough to allow students’ opinions to impact on the musical interpretation of these performances.

• 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. The repertoire chosen to illustrate these features was attractive and accessible for the age levels concerned.

• The curricular areas of performing and listening were linked appropriately at all times. However, opportunities to include the integration of composing were often overlooked. It is recommended that greater consideration be given to the manner in which the three areas of performing, composing and listening could be integrated in musically-focussed ways in all lessons.

• Students’ progress and competence is monitored and assessed effectively by a range of assessment modes for example, oral questioning, regular class assessments, homework assignments, examination questions and continuous monitoring of students’ practical work. With regard to formative assessment, the good practice of annotation of students’ work was evident.

• Learning outcomes were outlined at the beginning of some lessons with subsequent consolidation of all information at the end of lessons.
**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- School management is very supportive with regard to provision and whole-school support for the subject. Appropriate provision is made for Music in all relevant curricular programmes, along with a variety of co-curricular and extracurricular music activities.

- Timetable provision is in line with syllabus guidelines with a sufficient number of double periods in all year groups to facilitate practical work. There is generally an appropriate spread of contact time during the week with one exception. Although it is acknowledged that this does not always happen, the exploration of ways in which this could be avoided is advised in order to minimise lengthy gaps between lessons.

- The school has a long choral tradition and its choir and other choral pursuits are significant contributors to raising awareness of the school’s musical activities.

- There are two class rooms which are used for music lessons, and a spacious hall which is used for choir and rehearsals. While the rooms are generally well-resourced, one of them has limited space, cumbersome furniture and restricted information and communication technology facilities. Consideration of how to optimise the space in this room along with a strategic development of resources for the music department would be in order.

- The music teachers have availed of many opportunities for continuing professional development and are members of the Post-Primary Music Teachers’ Association (PPMTA). 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**

- The three music teachers work effectively as a team, planning programmes of work for the school year and organising activities for the many musical events that take place. From discussion with the teachers it was found that considerable thought has been given to the accurate and effective delivery of all music courses in the school. There is regular contact and co-operation between them in the sharing of collective facilities and resources, and in the day-to-day implementation of the syllabuses with their classes.

- The subject department plan outlines in general terms the content to be covered with each year group. It is recommended that short-term schemes of work be included in the subject plan. These schemes of work should provide greater detail on the content taught, outline shorter timeframes and the corresponding methodologies, assessment modes and intended learning outcomes to be attained.

- The inclusion of a section for evaluation and review is recommended. This section of the plan would assist the subject department when analysing the strengths and challenges facing the subject within the school.

- Planning for the ongoing development of resources and how they would be utilised in the classroom setting as effective teaching tools is also recommended.
• Planning could also be developed to facilitate more integration of the core activities of performing, composing and listening within the classroom context.

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

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.

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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 very positive review of the quality of teaching and learning in Music in Loreto Secondary School Fermoy. The Board particularly notes the recognition of
- The high profile of Music in the school
- The very good uptake of Music in the school
- The high achievement in certificate examinations
- The good quality of teaching and learning taking place in Music
- The practice by teachers of involving all students in meaningful music-making activities
- The use of good questioning and assessments strategies in the classroom
- The high level of collaborative work displayed by the teachers.

The Board thanks the inspector for her professionalism and courtesy during the inspection process.

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 will continue to strategically plan for the development of resources within the school.