An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of MUSIC
REPORT

Ballincollig Community School
County Cork
Roll number: 91386O

Date of inspection: 26 February 2013

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN MUSIC

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	26 February 2013
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal and teacher • Interaction with students	• Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal and teacher

MAIN FINDINGS

- A good quality of teaching and learning was observed in the lessons visited.
- There was a high level of student engagement with a focus on music-making activities.
- A very good integration of performing, composing and listening was observed in all lessons visited.
- There is a very well-resourced department with most resources being used effectively.
- There is a good uptake for Music by students but there is a gender imbalance.
- There is scope to develop the very good planning evident in this single-teacher department

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Assessment for Learning (AfL) should be progressed in lessons to allow for a linking of learning outcomes and literacy key words, and to provide opportunities for the development of both peer assessment and student self-assessment.
- Consideration should be given to the manner in which the layout of the music room could be organised in order to maximise the available space and to ensure flexibility for a range of music teaching and learning settings.
- The development of AfL strategies should be reflected in the music department plan.
- All programmes and schemes of work should become flexible working documents that include procedures for regular review and evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

Ballincollig Community School is a co-educational school situated in County Cork. The school has a current enrolment of 766 students. Music is available as an optional subject for both the Junior and the Leaving Certificate examinations, with all subject-choice options generated through student preference. Music is also an optional subject in the compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- There was a good quality of teaching and learning with a variety of teaching methods and lessons which were very well-prepared, with clear instructions and appropriate timing and pacing.
- The recently-appointed teacher has built up a very good relationship with the students and a comfortable, warm classroom atmosphere was evident during the evaluation.
- The students were exposed to effective participatory and experiential methodologies with a commensurate level of motivation, challenge and engagement. This student engagement with these classroom activities, coupled with the positive, collaborative atmosphere allowed for good quality learning to take place.
- Throughout the lessons, student knowledge and experience were used to support learning wherever possible, and this was broadened and expanded through detailed questioning, explanation, clarification and encouragement from the teacher. Affirmation of student effort was effective and the teacher circulated to ascertain students' understanding. This ensured successful learning outcomes, along with a thorough consolidation of all learning activities.
- In all lessons observed, the three areas of performing, composing and listening were integrated in musically-focused ways which is highly appropriate. The resources available in the music room were used to very good effect and the use of teacher-generated handouts and worksheets added to the quality of learning. At times however, a more effective use could have been made of the classroom space in order to optimise the student learning experience.
- Progressing the use of AfL strategies is now recommended. At this stage it would be worthwhile to organise assessment strategies which would help develop students as independent learners and allow them to take ownership of their own learning. A focus on learning outcomes and linking literacy key words would be appropriate in all lessons and could encourage students to become more active and responsible participants in their own learning. Including comments of a formative nature in feedback to individual students would also provide them with the direction to improve the standard of their work, while the inclusion of some peer assessment strategies could further develop collaborative skills and encourage learning through discussion. Embedding this in classroom practice can only be realised once it is given due consideration in the planning process, as outlined below.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- School management is very supportive with regard to provision and whole-school support for the subject. Timetable 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.

- There is a good uptake of Music and all first-year students study the subject for the entire year through the sampling system operated in the school.
- In line with national trends there is a gender imbalance, with significantly more girls than boys studying the subject. Management is aware of this and some efforts have been made to redress the gender imbalance with some progress noted. It is acknowledged however, that as option blocks are generated through student preference, other variables will always affect this balance.
- There is a very well-resourced specialist room for the teaching and learning of Music. This spacious room, with lightweight furniture, allows for a variety of learning settings but generally it is set out in a traditional classroom style. In this light is would be worthwhile to consider the classroom layout and maximise the space in order to optimise the student learning experience and allow for a more fluid learning environment where performing, composing and listening activities could be undertaken with minimal upheaval.
- The music teacher, currently on leave, has availed of many opportunities for continuing professional development, is a member of the Post-Primary Music Teachers' Association and attends regular branch meetings during the school year as well as the association's annual conference. This is positive as attendance at these meetings and events allows music teachers 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 thus preventing professional isolation.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- There is evidence of very good planning for the development of Music in this single-teacher department. Comprehensive programmes of work, scheduling the topics to be covered, have been developed and were found to be in line with syllabus requirements. Commendably, due consideration has been given both to the cross-curricular and to the extracurricular activities going on in the department.
- Individual planning is good in that considerable thought has been given to short-term planning, as evidenced by the careful prior preparation and organisation of the materials necessary for each lesson. This has helped to ensure a smooth transition for the new teacher and to minimise undue disruption for the students.
- It is recommended that future planning includes consideration of ways of encouraging students to reflect on their learning and allow for the increased use of formative assessment practices. This should be aligned with the development of AfL strategies as outlined above.
- It would also be important to ensure that all programmes and schemes of work are working documents that are regularly reviewed according to the student profile and modified to meet any changing needs of the students. Regular review may also lead to a variety of approach and development every year and would be a useful tool when analysing the strengths and challenges facing the subject within the school. However,

as this is a single-teacher department, it would be important to ensure that these recommendations would be prioritised and undertaken within realistic and reasonable timeframes.

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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

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