An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Music
REPORT

Drumshanbo Vocational School
Drumshanbo, County Leitrim
Roll number: 71570S

Date of inspection: 20 October 2010

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN MUSIC

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Drumshanbo Vocational School. 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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Drumshanbo Vocational School currently caters for 169 male and 162 female students. Music is available as an optional subject for both the Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate examinations. Music is also available in this school within the Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) programme. This report is confined to the evaluation of Music within the mainstream programmes.

The systems in place to facilitate students' selection of optional subjects for study in both the junior cycle and the senior cycle offer a high level of choice and flexibility. All first-year students study all optional subjects including Music in modular format for one third of the academic year. Music is rotated with Home Economics and Technical Graphics. Towards the end of the year, students select their subjects for study in the Junior Certificate from the full range of optional subjects available in this school. Students entering senior cycle also choose from the full range of available optional subjects. In addition, very good support systems are in place to provide relevant subject information to in-coming first-year students and third-year students and to their parents.

The music department is staffed by one fully qualified specialist music teacher. This teacher is shared between this school and a neighbouring school. This arrangement places limitations on the number of music lessons available in the school throughout the week. For example, only four periods have been allocated to Music in fifth year which falls short of the guidelines from the National Council of Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). The music teacher provides students with some additional time after school for practical activities to compensate for some of this shortfall. This level of dedication is commended. The uptake of the subject varies from year to year. The music department and school management are encouraged to examine ways in which this might be addressed.

In addition to the curricular opportunities, a variety of extracurricular musical activities are on offer to students to enhance their musical experiences. These include participation in all liturgical

ceremonies, Seachtain na Gaeilge and the Christmas Talent Show *DV X Factor*. The provision of these activities is particularly noteworthy given the limited availability of the teacher to the school. This level of commitment by the teacher and the support of management in facilitating these activities are commended.

At the time of the evaluation, due to building work taking place in the school, the music teacher had been relocated from the dedicated music room to a smaller room. This room is adequately equipped for the delivery of the music curriculum. Good efforts have been made at creating an atmosphere conducive to teaching and learning in the subject. Some posters containing illustrations of musical features were displayed on the walls in this room.

Management is supportive of the teacher's continuing professional development. The music teacher is involved with the local branch of the Post-Primary Music Teachers' Association (PPMTA) and has attended some meetings. It is suggested that the music teacher, where possible, should attend the annual conferences which affords opportunities for the teacher to keep abreast of all information pertaining to music education at second-level and to keep up-to-date with ongoing curricular innovation. In addition, attendance at the in-service currently being provided by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) is also recommended.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Formal planning time is allocated to all subject departments to meet three times per year. The music teacher, if not teaching in the partner school, uses these occasions for individual planning purposes. It is recommended that, where possible, the music teacher meet with other similarly sized subject departments to share good practices. Issues pertaining directly to teaching and learning in these subjects should be recorded as this information should prove valuable for future planning.

The quality of department planning and co-ordination of Music is quite good in this school. In addition to the planning necessary to ensure the smooth operation of the musical activities that take place, planning for the timetabled lessons is quite good. Planning documentation was made available on the day and included information regarding the overarching aims and objectives of music education in the school, an indication of resources that would be used for the delivery of these programmes and materials copied from various websites. In addition, common programmes of work have been developed for music classes in each year group. These are broad, content-based and time bound and in line with syllabus requirements.

In order to progress this work, there is a need for the music teacher to develop, over time, more detailed schemes of work. Content should be linked to intended learning outcomes and methodologies and the modes of assessment that will be used to determine the extent of the learning. It is important to indicate how the three components of Music—listening, composing and performing—are being synthesised into lessons and also to record any other student participative strategies which are currently in use in lessons. In the interim and as a starting point, the music teacher should now record the manner in which some topics are currently being delivered and the progress achieved with students.

Individual preparation for all lessons observed was good. Resources were ready for all lessons and included handouts and worksheets. In some instances, these were designed by the teacher and tailored to meet the students' needs. These also indicated that the teacher is giving attention to the gradual acquisition of student's skills. This is good practice.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

In all lessons observed, there was a warm and respectful atmosphere where praise was used effectively to acknowledge students' efforts and their contributions to class discussions were valued. No roll call was taken in any lesson observed. It is important that a roll call be taken in all lessons and this is recommended.

In many cases the pace of the lesson was too slow. This was due to an imbalance of time being spent on one activity and consequently, an insufficient number of activities in the lesson. It is important when planning any lesson that activities are timed and paced appropriately so that all students are challenged and engaged at all times. This is strongly recommended.

There was some use of active student participative strategies in some of the lessons observed. For instance, in one lesson, pair work was used to great effect. This provided opportunities to students to consult and discuss the topic-at-hand. The increased use of this strategy is recommended. Some monitoring of students' activities occurred in the lessons observed. While the restrictions imposed by the size of the room are acknowledged, it is important to monitor students when they are engaged in activities. This will ensure that any difficulties which students encounter can be tackled more swiftly.

The quality of learning in lessons was quite good. This was evident by the students' abilities to answer theoretical questions, to identify Irish and orchestral instruments, to accurately write out triads and to name the chords correctly. In summary, the quality of teaching and learning in lessons was satisfactory and students are doing well in certificate examinations.

ASSESSMENT

Formal house examinations are held for all year groups at Christmas and for first-year, second-year and students in the first year of the Leaving Certificate programme at summer. 'Mock' certificate examinations are held for Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate students in the spring. Reports are issued following all formal assessments. In addition, all students receive progress reports in October and February. Parents are also made aware of students' progress through the annual parent-teacher meeting and the student journal.

The music department has yet to develop a policy for assessment and homework. The music department should always record its procedures regarding the allocation of homework and the assessment of students' work. This is highly recommended.

Students' homework and class work is monitored from time-to-time and verbal feedback is given. It is good that students are given guidance regarding the quality of their work. However, it is important that students' work is also taken up, corrected and that written comments be provided indicating strategies for improvement. This is recommended. A selection of these results should be recorded by the teacher so that there is a profile being kept on each student.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The systems in place to facilitate students' selection of optional subjects for study in both the junior cycle and the senior cycle offer a high level of choice and flexibility.
- Very good support systems are in place to provide relevant subject information to incoming first-year students and third-year students and to their parents.
- Good efforts have been made at creating an atmosphere in the music room conducive to teaching and learning.
- In addition to the curricular opportunities, a variety of extracurricular musical activities is on offer to students to enhance their musical experiences.
- In all lessons observed, there was a warm and respectful atmosphere where praise was used effectively to acknowledge students' efforts and their contributions to class discussions were valued.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- The music teacher should progress the music plan and develop, over time, more detailed schemes of work.
- Lesson activities are timed and paced appropriately so that all students are challenged and engaged at all times.
- Students should be monitored when they are engaged in activities.
- Students' work should be taken up, corrected and comments provided indicating strategies for improvement.

A post-evaluation meeting was 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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