An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of MUSIC
REPORT

Saint Francis Capuchin College
Rochestown, County Cork
Roll number: 62460K

Date of inspection: 13 May 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	13 May 2013
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal and teachers • Interaction with students	• Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- A very 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.
- All lessons are undertaken in a warm, comfortable, respectful atmosphere with good interpersonal relations between teachers and students.
- A very good use of assessment for learning (AfL) strategies was observed.
- Music has a high profile in the school, is available to all students on an optional basis and is supported by in-school management.
- There was evidence of comprehensive planning in this collaborative department.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Consideration should be given to the manner in which the AfL strategies used so effectively in the lessons observed could be extended to further develop a collaborative learning environment and include a focus on peer-assessment and student self-assessment.
- The development of these strategies should also be reflected in the music department plan.

INTRODUCTION

St Francis College is a boys' voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of the Capuchin Franciscan Order. The school has a current enrolment of 682 students. Music is available as an optional subject for the Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate examinations. First-year students choose their subjects for Junior Certificate prior to entry, while senior cycle students have options based on an open choice. Music is also an optional subject in the compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- A very high standard of teaching and learning was evident in the lessons observed. A collaborative learning environment allowing constructive and productive peer interaction and purposeful group work was observed, where the teachers guided students through various stages and facilitated a stimulating and challenging music-learning environment. This type of learning environment, the use of varied learning methods and strategies which were used to increase and develop their aural awareness, understanding and appreciation of music are examples of best practice and are significant contributory factors to the high profile Music has in the school.
- All lessons encompassed a variety of active music-making methodologies. The teachers used the students' strengths to maximise the learning opportunities. The good teaching observed, which also included some team-teaching, was characterised by engaging and motivating the wide range of abilities of the students through well-structured and varied activities.
- A high level of student engagement was seen in lessons, with a firm focus on music-making activities. All lessons observed had an aural focus and some elements of performing which included singing and instrumental activities. Some of these lessons involved some aspects of rehearsal where students learned new material by rote and refined and reinforced this learning over time with performances noticeably improving as the lessons progressed. Whole class performances of the music provided convincing evidence that most students are capable of maintaining their own part in group music-making. Observation of students' practical work, at all stages, showed that whilst many were challenged, few students were unable to cope with the demands of the music.
- Student performances and demonstrations abounded, were of a good standard, contributed to the collaborative learning environment evident in the classroom and ensured that students achieved successful outcomes. This focus on building the role of Music and giving students the opportunity to take part in and enjoy practical music-making is entirely appropriate. This resulted in attentive, interested, and motivated students who participated very well in the learning process.
- The extensive resources available in the music department are used to facilitate good quality teaching and learning and contribute to an effective learning environment. Well-designed, clear worksheets, skilful use of information and communication technology (ICT) and very good question and answering were observed with student contributions welcomed and affirmed.

- Aspects of AfL were skilfully used to support learning wherever possible, such as sharing clear learning outcomes with the students at the outset of a lesson and using a type of 'mini whiteboards' technique and the traffic light system to ascertain the students' learning. Consideration should now be given to ways in which these practices could be extended and allow for the organisation of assessment strategies, such as peer assessment and self-assessment, where students could learn how to improve their learning and provide further direction to improve the standard of their work.
- The majority of students opt for higher level in the certificate examinations and their attainment and achievement are very high. Monitoring of student progress is undertaken by the teachers, and students evaluate their own performing from second year onwards. This is good practice and supports their development as autonomous learners. Expanding this to other areas of musical learning could allow students to take further ownership for their own learning and could aid them in understanding the development of their own musical competencies.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- School management is very supportive with regard to provision and whole-school support for the subject. The fact that it is one of very few boys' schools in Cork providing Music to Leaving Certificate level is noted and applauded. Access to the subject is very good. First-year students choose between Art and Music prior to entry. Generally there is a very good uptake for the subject, especially in junior cycle.
- 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.
- The music department is well resourced, having a specialist room and the library which are used for music lessons. Both rooms are bright, spacious, have excellent acoustics and provide effective learning environments for Music. There is also a wide range of resources available including ICT and musical instruments.
- There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities and events which take place during the school year. This variety helps to raise the profile of Music in the school and is a significant contributor to raising awareness of other school activities.
- The teachers are members of the Post-Primary Music Teachers Association and have attended some of the recent in-service courses run by the Professional Development Service for Teachers. Management encourages staff to avail of any ongoing training courses which contribute to overall continuing professional development and commendably, much is self-generated by the music teachers themselves.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Planning structures are well developed. A co-ordinator has been appointed and regular subject department meetings are appropriately documented. The good work done at these meetings is supported by frequent informal communication.

- Comprehensive programmes of work, scheduling the topics to be covered, have been developed and were found to be in line with syllabus requirements. It was good to note also that all assessment procedures, resources and repertoire are managed electronically. Common programmes of work for the junior classes are available and these are adapted and modified according to the student profile. At this stage it would be useful to document planned learning outcomes and consider cataloguing suitable music-teaching activities.
- A range of collaborative planning is also evident in the variety of extracurricular and cross-curricular activities which occur throughout the school year.
- In all lessons observed, clear objectives were evident, there was continuity from previous lessons and appropriate resources and stimuli were utilised. In general, a good level of planning for performing was evident in the prior preparation of relevant materials such as sheet music, accompaniments, worksheets, and audio and visual resources. This indicates that short-term planning is at a satisfactory level.
- In keeping with the recommendation above, regarding the expansion of AfL strategies in the classroom, it is recommended that any such development would also be reflected in the music department plan.

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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