

An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta
Department of Education and Science

**Subject Inspection of Art
REPORT**

**Castleknock College
Castleknock, Dublin 15
Roll number: 60100Q**

**Date of inspection: 8 May 2006
Date of issue of report: 15 December 2006**

[Report on the Quality of Learning and Teaching in Art](#)
[Subject Provision and Whole School Support](#)
[Planning and Preparation](#)
[Teaching and Learning](#)
[Assessment and Achievement](#)
[Summary of Main Findings and Recommendations](#)

Report on the Quality of Learning and Teaching in Art

This Subject Inspection report

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Castleknock College, conducted as part of a whole school evaluation. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Art 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 teachers, examined students' work, and had discussions with the teachers. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and teachers' written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the deputy principal and subject teachers.

Subject Provision and Whole School Support

There are two full-time members of staff in the Art department. In addition, during this academic year, a student teacher contributed to the delivery of courses. Time allocated to the subject is good, and the uptake is healthy. The rooms in use by the Art department are spacious and well lit by natural light. There is little specialist equipment and a somewhat restricted range of crafts is practised. When the new art rooms are being equipped, it is recommended that these shortcomings are addressed and resources put in place to give students an opportunity to encounter a fuller range of learning experiences in a variety of 2D and 3D media. It is also recommended that ICT facilities be made available as soon as resources permit in order that teaching and learning in support studies for junior cycle and in history and appreciation of art for senior cycle are brought up-to-date.

Planning and Preparation

A year plan was available for inspection. This was a basic skeleton of the class periods to be spent at certain activities and topics. It gave a clear overview of what students had been doing during the current academic year. It is recommended that the learning aims and objectives of particular activities be fully articulated in planning in the future, and that these form the basis of assessment criteria. Planning should also include a separate set of aims and objectives for students of high aptitude and motivation on one hand, and for their less motivated and engaged peers on the other.

There was little evidence of the type of approaches to be taken in the delivery of the programmes to students or how modifications or enhancements were to be made for students with special needs or high aptitude. It is recommended that this type of detail be included in future.

Forward planning for the new Art rooms is necessary; a review of all activities and approaches is now timely prior to the new facility becoming available. The introduction of a wider range of crafts, the use of ICT, and the expansion of the modes of 3D taught should be now be thought about and planned for in detail. Forward planning should also be undertaken for the use of homework. Preparation is always important in a practical subject, and on the day of the inspection there was a well-managed supply of the materials necessary for the learning activities to be undertaken during the classes.

Teaching and Learning

Much good practice was seen in the Art department which has two large classrooms and a store room at its disposal. There was a good learning atmosphere, the students were well managed and highly engaged in their work. There were clear ground rules for all aspects of students' roles in the Art department. There was an enthusiastic and positive interaction between teachers and students.

The Art rooms both have glass walls on two sides, allowing great natural light in and affording good views and fine prospect of the college's splendid grounds. The use of secondary sources, usually photographic, was ubiquitous in the Art department. Much use could be made of the primary source provided by the college grounds as a basis for teaching and learning of drawing from observation, painting from life, and the study of perspective and the depiction of space, among many other topics. Both the views from the Art department windows and well-planned forays outdoors should be integrated into the way the department approaches delivery of its programmes for learning. In all aspects and components of junior and senior cycle, there needs to be a de-emphasis on secondary sources and more skills-building in the use of primary sources. Castleknock has at its disposal great primary source in the visual sense, which is not at present being exploited in teaching and learning.

Student artefacts were displayed on the walls, and these showed examples of good attainment in composition and colour use. It is recommended that these displays are changed more frequently and that current work is displayed for group discussion, however brief, ideally at least once a fortnight per class group.

The class groups are of mixed-ability. For the history and appreciation of art component of the Leaving Certificate course, it is recommended, in order that students who are challenged by the terminology and specialist vocabulary necessary, that a chart or poster of all new important terminology encountered during class is written up, and frequently read, as a way of reinforcing learning over the two years of the course. The cultural and aesthetic aspects of the subject have not been notably developed and this should be attended to in the next academic year. There is a need to use ICT to give students access to a wide range of artefacts in reproduction.

In Transition Year (TY) there was good use of an Art history source in a group project about contemporary warfare. Students were asked to reinterpret Picasso's 'Guernica', and in doing this accessed photojournalistic imagery about The Gulf and other recent wars. Students researched imagery for this assignment in books and on the Web. Then, as a group, they painted a large 3-panel monochrome tableau based on their visual research. What resulted was an ambitious and complex piece of image making. It was apparent that much advice and tuition had been available to the students and that they had benefited greatly by this attention. Different students painted different sections, parts or motifs of this picture, proceeding in an ad hoc manner by adding to what had been previously painted. There was, understandably, a variance in how much every student in the class group painted of this detailed and well-composed image. It is suggested, by way of extending the learning and individualising the contribution of all the participants, that after doing the research, every one of them should prepare their own idea for a single motif as a preliminary stage of planning. Then, by consensus, the group should pre-plan a design using parts of everyone's contribution, and a fairly even division of labour be arranged for the execution of the finished piece.

TY did not have an organised museum or gallery visit. This is recommended. Since the school is Dublin-based, the proximity of galleries makes such visits easy to arrange. A gallery devoted to art and design at Farmleigh, even nearer to the school than the City centre, could provide, by the variety of its exhibition schedule during the course of the school year a core of educationally useful events convenient to the College. This resource could be used for TY and other year groups.

A classroom visit – and preferably more than one - by an artist, a designer and an architect during the Transition Year is also a recommended addition to the current programme which appears to be heavily focused on making artefacts. Visitors from the visual arts disciplines could very valuably discuss their work process, discourse on their enthusiasms and influences, show slides of what they have achieved, and even initiate an assignment that the students would undertake in the following classes. Visiting speakers and gallery and museum visits should be considered in order to open up the students in an intense and concentrated way to the different possibilities of these visual arts disciplines. This would be particularly useful in the case of those who did not study Art for Junior Certificate.

In general, the TY Art programme needs to be more imaginative in its conception of what is educationally possible for the students during this examination-free year, and more broad and wide-ranging in the ways in which visual art education is encountered and presented. The practice of technique is excellently catered for by the in-class assignments, but visual arts culture in all its diversity, and in its vocational and expressive possibilities, appears not to be as well covered, and it is recommended that future planning for TY completely review the present provision of these dimensions.

It was noted that classroom assignments for all the year groups ran on until the artefact was completed. On the day of the inspection it was verified that all the class periods a particular year group had over a month might be devoted to completing the assignment. While completing the final object is important for learning, the breadth and variety of the course studied, and the activities and media that the student encounters whilst following the junior and senior cycle programmes needs to be broadened. This focus on finishing artefacts completely in class needs to be reviewed and the whole issue of covering a broader and more extensive range of artistic activities, both practical and theoretical, given attention. Shorter class time allocations for teaching a more comprehensive array of techniques and Art Elements-based topics, with more focused learning aims and objectives are strongly recommended, to allow for variety and wider coverage.

Homework can and should be managed to ensure optimal use of class time for delivering a wide and varied range of education activities to the students. It is recommended that class assignments that are time-hungry should be completed as homework, brought back to the college, and then assessed. This would free up considerable time during the academic year for an extended and enriched set of learning experiences. Homework can be better used to get students to develop calligraphy skills and to learn new styles of script independently and pro-actively after the basic principles and techniques have been learned in class. Calligraphy work seen on the day of the inspection seemed to be focused on too limited a range of script styles and it is preferable, for aesthetic choice and expressiveness in this craft, that a wide range of contrasting styles are learned in order that students have a chance to create the most personal and individualistic sort of work possible in their projects and assignments and in their State Examinations Commission (SEC) assessments. It was noticeable that the junior cycle calligraphy followed a pattern as far as layout and composition were concerned and there was widespread use of one style of typeface. It would be educationally preferable to make sure students can work in many styles in order that they become empowered to respond in the most creative and appropriate way to different assessment and assignment tasks.

A wider range of crafts should be studied in junior cycle, allowing students more choice and a more interesting and motivating experience of artistic variety and possibility. The senior cycle should also include a wider range of crafts. The current practice of students taking the same crafts for Leaving Certificate as they did for Junior Certificate should be discontinued as altogether too much can time spent on the same things; the reasoning for this conservative approach is that students become practised at these few crafts and thus are prepared for the state examinations. Students can, and should be, brought to the same or a higher level of state examination readiness by a route that extends their artistic skills and aesthetic sensibilities, and motivates them on a personal basis to develop creative confidence.

It is recommended that from the start of first year and throughout all the years that follow a planned programme that presents the duality of the subject, that is of 'making' art and design artefacts on one hand, and of 'receiving' art and design, through the development of appreciation skills, on the other, should be delivered. This is not to say that the receiving art and design aspect is absent at present. On the day of the inspection it was apparent that the history of Art is referred to and used in the teaching and learning of the practical course components. It is recommended that this practice is extended to be more comprehensive and more widely integrated. This can be supported by planning for the use of the largest possible variety of art, design and architectural imagery, and by ensuring that resources are in place to provide materials such as reproductions of artefacts, frequently changed and rotated display on the classroom walls, and books and periodicals. It is recommended also the facility and ease with which ICT can give students access to essential art, design and architectural imagery and material is made available to them in situ in the classrooms as soon as resources become available.

It was apparent from documentation available that the history and appreciation of art course is being presented to students in a way that does not cover medieval art and architecture, and other key historical periods. If the historical material was presented in a visual way with the help of laptop, multimedia projector screen and Powerpoint and CD-ROM rather than in a totally text-bound way it would be easier for the students to assimilate it, and thus make coverage of more or all of the historical periods possible. It must be reiterated in the strongest possible way here that good state examination performance is not the only criterion for success in the teaching and learning of art and design in post-primary schools. The students' cultural education and personal development are an important outcome of their following the courses. The teaching and learning in the support studies and history and appreciation areas should be reviewed in the light of the above paragraph, and an inclusive modern approach taken to it that emphasises visual experience of and engagement with the historical material.

Good use was made of papier maché and other construction techniques to make 3D artefacts. It is recommended that all students are given an opportunity to become experienced with modelling and carving to provide the necessary balance and variety in their education in the creation of form, mass and space and in the exploration of materials. In carving, soap and plaster are good substitutes for wood, and it is hoped that the new Art rooms will be utilized to provide clay modelling. Plasticine is an economical and simple material that could in the meantime be used to teach the basic principles of creating form through an additive process.

The use of photography was well utilised in teaching and learning tone-based painting. The good effect of this approach was that students were secure in what was being asked of them. The artefacts that resulted were largely technical exercises based on secondary sources, and were not primarily expressive or emotion-led. The students' work generally lacked expressiveness, and had a narrow base, and was very dependent on secondary sources, usually photographic ones. This should be corrected through planning for a wider range of techniques, materials and styles. The work was good but there was little evidence in the portfolio and other work of a wide range of techniques and methods being taught, explored and learned. It is recommended that imaginative work, and work derived from primary sources should be a major, frequent, influential and formative part of the teaching of all aspects of the programmes delivered to students in all the year groups.

Unusually in a post-primary school, acrylic and oil on canvas are used in painting classes. Good quality materials were used carefully and painstakingly in the two self-portrait lessons seen. There is a strong and laudable emphasis on finish, and on completion of assignments; students have developed good control of these media. There was a 'house style' in that much of the work showed little accented individuality of style, was executed in an old-fashioned 'academic' manner and strongly naturalistic. Despite its many good points, the work produced in painting had a lack of individuality and expressiveness about it. This was a direct result of basing the assignments on photography, and on tone-based principles of using colour. It is recommended that different

practices be developed in teaching and learning painting, which will complement those at present dominant. With such good materials available, students could easily be encouraged to use them in stylistic modes other than the naturalistic 'house style' for the creation of abstract, non-representational, and representational images. Students should be empowered and facilitated by the Art department to make their painting, as well as their crafts and 3D, expressive, exploratory, and creative, building on the many good approaches at present in use.

On the day of the inspection in class and as evidenced by the portfolio work available, there was an over-reliance on hard 'writing' pencils for drawing. This needs to be attended to in delivering the courses. From the earliest stages in first year and throughout the six years during which students have art and design lessons, a wide range of drawing tools and materials should be used. It is recommended that a clear and practical policy be formulated, with day-to-day strategies included in it, to extend and develop students' skills in the use of varied tools and materials for drawing.

During the current academic year a Higher Diploma in Education student was timetabled for teaching practice in the Art department. Accepted practice in relation to such placements is that for the first term of the academic year the permanent teacher is in the classroom at all times, and that for the second term onwards the student teacher is alone, though the permanent teacher is on call nearby. It is recommended that this procedure be adhered to for the benefit of students and student teachers.

Assessment and Achievement

A combination of assessment procedures is in use in the Art department: continuous assessment based on classwork and invigilated examinations. There are written examinations for the history and appreciation of art component of the Leaving Certificate programme. Students show good levels of achievement in the state examinations. A strong consciousness of SEC assessment criteria, and of the associated practical requirements, informs the work of the Art department. There are systematic records of students' during-term, end-of-term, and end-of-year assessment/examination results. End-of-term and end-of-year results are communicated to parents and guardians. Regular parent-teacher meetings are held and the Art department provides discussion, feedback and advice at these meetings.

It is recommended that the aims and objectives for learning become the basis for assessment criteria. These aims and objectives are not available in the present planning documentation. Criteria for the attainment levels expected should be outlined, in the case of students of high aptitude and motivation and for their less artistically effective peers, as well as for individuals with special learning needs.

Summary of Main Findings and Recommendations

The following are the main strengths and areas for development identified in the evaluation:

- The art department provides a good learning environment. The particular advantages the college has in its visually beautiful grounds, in its proximity to museums and galleries, and enthusiastic and attentive art department personnel should be developed to enhance and broaden the students experience of and engagement with art and design.
- Programmes are taught in a structured way, and good resources are available .

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

- Planning should include more detail about teaching methods and include learning aims and objectives that subsequently inform assessment criteria
- ICT should be developed particularly in the areas of support studies and history and appreciation of art
- That an overview of the type of learning activities, and their duration, be undertaken and their educational value assessed as part of planning for the future of the subject
- That sequences of learning activities be developed which encourage exploratory and creative engagement with materials, media and ideas

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the teachers of Art and with the deputy principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.