

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Music  
REPORT**

**Castleknock Community College  
Carpenterstown, Dublin 15  
Roll number: 76062B**

**Date of inspection: 15 September 2010**



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F  
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N  
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

**REPORT  
ON  
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN MUSIC**

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**SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT**

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Castleknock Community College. 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 two days 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 principal, both deputy principals and the subject teachers. The board of management 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.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

Castleknock Community College caters for 632 male and 496 female students. Music is available as an optional subject for both the Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate examinations. Music is also available in the school as a compulsory component of the Transition Year (TY) programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. In the TY and LCA programmes, Music is delivered in modular format.

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 to students. In addition, very good support systems are in place to provide relevant subject information to incoming first-year students and fifth-year students and to their parents.

The numbers of male and female students selecting Music is very healthy and this is evidence of the very good work done to promote the subject in the school. The music department is staffed by two, fully qualified, specialist teachers. Music has a very high profile in the school and is well supported by senior management. Timetable provision for Music is in line with the guidelines from the National Council of Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). There is an appropriate spread of contact time throughout the week with a sufficient number of double periods to accommodate practical work.

In addition to the curricular opportunities, a wide array of extracurricular musical activities is available for students. The school has developed very strong links with the *Castleknock School of Music* who provide instrumental lessons to students. Other activities include participation in the college choir, a traditional Irish group and a guitar club. In addition, the school participates in the annual *Festival of Music* hosted by county Dublin Vocational Educational Community (VEC). Students have also performed in the National Concert Hall (NCH), at the bi-annual concert which is held in the local Draíocht Theatre as well as at the school's inter-faith celebrations. It is good to note the participation of teachers, past pupils and parents, as well as the students themselves, in

some of these activities. Each year, the music department provides a worthwhile opportunity to all Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate music students to host an annual concert and perform a selection of their practical pieces in public. This is a very good initiative. The high level of commitment of both music teachers to these events in conjunction with the very good level of support which is provided by senior management to facilitate these activities is commended.

Budgetary arrangements in the school are supportive of the subject and resources for Music are very good. A large and spacious classroom is available to the music department which is fully equipped. A separate room nearby is used for storing all materials and equipment. A second class room is also available and this contains sufficient facilities to conduct music lessons. The music department ensures that there is equal access to the main music room for both teachers.

Castleknock Community College is one of seventy eight schools who are participating in the *100mbps Post Primary Schools' Project* organised by the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE). This project is designed to deliver high-speed broadband connectivity to the participating school. The music department has benefited from this provision. Facilities for Music include a laptop and two computers with music software installed. In addition, the music department now has access to sixteen recently acquired laptops which are available for use in class. Advice was given to the school at the time of the evaluation regarding the acquisition of additional software packages so that music technology can be made available to a larger number of students. It is recommended that the school follows up on this advice. In so doing, music technology could then be integrated more easily into music lessons beyond the requirements of practical examinations.

Management is very supportive of teachers' continuing professional development (CPD). Both teachers have attended the annual conference hosted by the Post-Primary Music Teachers' Association (PPMTA). This affords the teachers opportunities 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, the music teachers attended in-service which was recently provided by the Second Level Support Service (SLSS). The level of interest demonstrated by the music department in continuing professional development is commended.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

Formal planning time is allocated to all subject departments including Music to meet five times per year. In addition, many informal meetings for Music occur from day-to day. Records are kept by the music teachers of all formal meetings. There is a clearly identifiable subject department in this school and both teachers share the responsibility for co-ordinating the department. Their mutual support and their willingness to share their professional expertise were very evident during the evaluation. This is a noteworthy strength of the music department. Formal discussions have taken place around organisational practices in the music department, the setting of common assessments and the creation of common schemes of work and the outcomes of this work have been recorded. To add to this very good work, it is recommended that the music department should now allocate some planning time to the discussion and subsequent recording of issues pertaining directly to learning and teaching in lessons. The outcomes of these discussions should prove to be very useful during the planning process.

A key strength of the planning process in this school is the active involvement of senior management in curriculum planning. Senior management is very aware of the planning that is

taking place at subject department level including Music. In particular, a noteworthy planning initiative in this school is the requirement that all sixth-year students set their own targets at the start of the academic year regarding attainment and achievement in the Leaving Certificate Examination in all subjects including Music. These students are required to complete a self-assessment template and this information is stored centrally by the school. Encouraging students to take personal ownership of their own learning and achievement is a very worthwhile motivational strategy and as such is commended.

The quality of department planning and co-ordination of Music is very good in this school. In addition to the necessary planning to ensure the smooth operation of the musical activities that take place, there is very good planning for the timetabled lessons in Music. Planning documentation that was made available by the music department contains much information including the many organisational practices that are in place for Music in the school. In addition, common programmes of work have been developed for each year group. These are broad, content-based and time bound and in line with syllabus requirements. Some of this written documentation includes more specific information about topics to be delivered and this is good.

In order to progress this very good work, there is a need for each music teacher to interpret the plan and to develop individual schemes of work. These schemes should reflect all of the many very good teaching and learning practices that are ongoing in the department so that they can direct teaching in the future. On that basis, the following recommendations are being made. Content should, where appropriate, be linked to the intended learning outcomes, methodologies and 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 order to support this work, each music teacher should from time-to-time track the manner in which particular topics are being delivered. This information could be shared at subject planning meetings and make a significant contribution to the further development of individual schemes of work.

In keeping with good practice, the music department is provided with an analysis of certificate examination results and a comparison of school achievements with national norms. This information is also included in the plan. All of this very good work is commended.

The TY programme is broad and is designed to provide students with a wide breadth of musical styles. It is important that the recommendations already outlined regarding schemes of work be similarly addressed for any future TY planning. In addition there is scope to introduce music technology to these students as part of this programme and this should be borne in mind.

Individual preparation for the lessons observed was of a very good quality. All resources including audio and ICT were ready for immediate inclusion into lessons. In many instances, written materials provided to students were designed by the teachers and tailored to meet their needs. This level of commitment is commended.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Three lessons were observed during the course of the evaluation, one in junior cycle and two in senior cycle. 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. Good routines were established in all lessons from the outset.

All lessons were very well structured and suitably paced. The material chosen was very suitable to all students. In senior cycle, students were constantly challenged to develop their music vocabulary and use appropriate music language. Younger students who were less knowledgeable in this regard were encouraged to develop these skills at an appropriate pace.

In one lesson observed, the aims and the learning intention were very clearly stated to the students. This is important as it provides students with a focus and structure for the lesson and makes them aware of what they should understand and be able to do at the end of the lesson. This strategy should be included in all lessons. In the classes visited, students were interested and motivated by the content and the manner in which the lesson was delivered.

The quality of teaching in all of the classes visited was very good. Teachers set high expectations for their students who in turn rose very competently to these challenges. Teaching and learning strategies were varied and placed an appropriate level of emphasis on students' participation in the majority of lessons. Strategies included the integration of ICT, teacher input, questioning, practical performances and games. In one lesson observed, two students took a leading role when they were requested to describe their instruments for their peers and to provide a practical demonstration. Allowing students to take control in the learning environment is very good practice. There is now further scope to include pair work and group work strategies particularly when students are reluctant to respond in a large class setting. This is recommended.

The quality of learning displayed by students was very good. This was evidenced by the standard of analytical information provided by students on their prescribed works and the ability to compare and contrast styles in an insightful way and to recall extensive quantities of information from previous lessons. In addition, very good progress has been made regarding the development of students' aural and composing abilities. Practical activities were incorporated into all lessons observed. This either took the form of clapping activities or singing. The music that was chosen was challenging and required a high level of harmonic awareness by the students. These performances were of a very good standard.

## **ASSESSMENT**

Formal house examinations are held for first-year, second-year and fifth-year students at Christmas and before the summer holidays. "Mock" certificate examinations are held for Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate students in the spring. Parents are made aware of students' progress through the annual parent-teacher meeting and the student journal. Reports are sent home following formal examinations.

The music department has developed an assessment policy which describes a variety of assessment practices currently in use and it is good that peer assessment is one such model. There is an expectation that students will store all materials and resources provided by the teacher in folders. In all cases, this practice is consistent across all class groups. This is good as these materials will function as useful sources for revision.

Students' homework and class work is monitored and assessed very frequently and this is good. Music students are assessed through the completion of worksheets, homework assignments and questioning in lessons. Students' copies and manuscripts are thoroughly corrected and constructive comments indicating strategies for improvement are provided.

Patterns of achievement in certificate examinations are very good.

## **SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The organisation, teaching and learning of Music is very well supported by school management.
- The uptake of the subject is very healthy.
- A detailed subject department plan is in place and teachers work collaboratively to share their professional knowledge and expertise.
- Planning and preparation by individual teachers for the lessons observed was of a very high standard and this was supported by the use of teacher-generated resources.
- Very high quality teaching was evident and teachers used a variety of teaching methods to engage students in the learning process.
- ICT was used very effectively in the lessons observed.
- Students displayed a good knowledge of the subject in the lessons visited.
- Homework is regularly assigned, monitored and corrected.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following recommendation is made:

- There should be more frequent integration of pair work and group work activities in lessons.

A post-evaluation meeting was held with the teachers of Music, the principal and both deputy principals at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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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 of Castleknock Community College are very pleased with the Music Inspection Report. The Board welcomes the acknowledgement of the hard work and commitment of the teachers in the Music Department. In particular, the recognition of “very high quality teaching” and “detailed subject department planning” is welcomed. The Board wishes to acknowledge the high level of professionalism displayed by the Inspector during the inspection.

**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 of Management, senior management and staff welcome the recommendations of this report. All are committed to continuing to improve the quality of Teaching and Learning as experienced by our students. The Music Department are incorporating the recommendations in their subject planning and senior management have ensured that all subject departments are appraised of these recommendations to inform their department planning.