

IMPROVING Music

in Post-Primary Schools

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eti
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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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A number of quantitative terms are used in the report. In percentages, the terms correspond as follows:-

More than 90%	-	almost/nearly all
75%-90%	-	most
50%-74%	-	a majority
30%-49%	-	a significant minority
10%-29%	-	a minority
Less than 10%	-	very few/a small number.

INTRODUCTION

The findings in this paper are based on inspections of and visits to music departments in post-primary schools in Northern Ireland during the period 1996-2000.

1. Strengths

- 1.1 A majority of the schools present a good ethos for music. Many departments are lively, led by a committed and hardworking teacher, and effective both within the school and in the local community. The atmosphere in class is frequently businesslike, and derives from good relationships between teacher and pupils and among the pupils.
- 1.2 In about a quarter of the schools, there is a large and enthusiastic uptake of a balanced range of extra-curricular activities.
- 1.3 In a large majority of the schools, the teachers plan and implement a fully practical programme for all the pupils in key stage 3 (KS3) - this is becoming an increasingly consistent picture.
- 1.4 In about half of the schools, the teachers engage the pupils in activities which draw on and develop their intuitive sensitivity to music. The teachers are increasingly aware of, and providing some opportunities for the pupils to use in class, instrumental skills which have been developed outside the classroom.
- 1.5 In half of the schools, the pupils in KS3 make good progress and produce work of a satisfactory or better standard.
- 1.6 In most of the work observed at General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced level, the syllabus is used as a basis for a sound and more broadly based course.
- 1.7 In a large majority of the schools, the pupils' responses are very good. They are able to work independently in groups or on their own; they enjoy the practical work and demonstrate a willingness to persevere in order to improve their skills and refine their compositions.
- 1.8 Assessment is effective in a minority of instances; it is most valuable when the teachers continually observe and record the pupils' musical response, and adjust their programme accordingly.

2. Areas for Improvement

- 2.1 Planning for long-term progression is poor in about half the schools: the schemes give details of lesson content, but do not focus sufficiently on the learning outcomes for the pupils; the programmes lack diagnostic activities which would indicate appropriate starting points, which are particularly important in year 8; and, in both key stages, the teaching relies too much on academic rather than aural approaches, and on learning background information at the expense of developing the pupils' musicianship.
- 2.2 In KS4, provision in a large number of the schools is restricted mainly to those pupils already involved in music outside school hours.
- 2.3 Information and communications technology (ICT) is rarely used well to develop the pupils' musical thinking.
- 2.4 The main weaknesses in GCE work are a lack of teaching of composition, and insufficient emphasis on the pupils' aural experience.
- 2.5 In half of the schools, standards of achievement in KS3 are modest or low; this is notably so when the pupils engage only rarely in one - or more - of the essential forms of musical activity (improvising, composing, performing, listening and appraising). Their inadequate aural or improvisational skills limit their ability to think musically. Characteristically, spoken explanations by the teacher substitute for musical demonstration; or the completion of worksheets by the pupils restricts musical exploration.
- 2.6 There are more weaknesses than strengths in the monitoring and assessment of the pupils' work: in many cases, assessment is not concerned with musical outcomes, and so provides little help for the pupils to improve their skills and understanding.
- 2.7 While a significant minority of teachers evaluate conscientiously their lessons and units of work, it is less common for heads of department or school management to monitor and review departmental effectiveness more generally.
- 2.8 A major constraint, in over half the schools, is the accommodation, especially in relation to the size of teaching groups and to sound-interference when pupils are making music simultaneously. Often, inappropriate furniture contributes to a cramped and hazardous environment. However, there are also instances of satisfactory accommodation being poorly used.

3. Priorities for Action

Given the areas of weakness above, and to promote further improvement in the teaching and learning of music:

- 3.1 teachers should continue to develop broad, practical programmes in which improvising, composing, arranging, performing, listening and appraising activities support and inform each other;
- 3.2 teachers should develop diagnostic activities in order to determine their pupils' musical needs; and then plan progressive development of the pupils' musicianship;
- 3.3 teachers need to analyse their classroom approaches to ensure that the pupils acquire sufficient aural understanding to provide a secure foundation for learning facts or notational skills;
- 3.4 the practice and skills of monitoring and assessing the pupils' musicianship need to be strengthened;
- 3.5 schools should encourage music departments to review and evaluate their work on a regular basis; and ensure that the time for music, the sizes of teaching groups and the accommodation permit effective teaching and learning.

CONCLUSION

Schools and the Inspectorate recognise the importance of self-evaluation as a basis for improvement and development. It is intended that this publication, and the publication 'Evaluating Music', will support music teachers and departments in their evaluation and improvement of their teaching and of their pupils' learning and standards of achievement.

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