Looking at Music

Teaching and Learning in Post-Primary Schools

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

INSPECTORATE

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Foreword

I am delighted to welcome the publication of *Looking at Music*, a composite report of forty-five subject inspection reports on the teaching and learning of Music in post-primary schools. *Looking at Music* is the result of an analysis of inspection reports undertaken in schools between January 2006 and May 2007. Inspectors of Music conducted the inspections in a range of second-level schools and across a variety of school programmes. The report presents observations on practice in the areas of subject provision and whole-school support, planning and preparation, teaching and learning, and assessment.

The key findings and recommendations in *Looking at Music* reflect the current role Music plays in the learning experiences of second-level students. It acknowledges and affirms the contribution made by teachers and school managers in supporting this role. Issues such as the gender imbalance and difficulties with the use of information and communication technology in the music classroom are just two areas highlighted in the report. It is hoped that the highlighting of these and other issues will make a positive contribution to the teaching and learning of Music.

Looking at Music is a summary of what inspectors found during school visits and reflects closely current practice in the teaching of Music at post-primary level. I am confident that the report will provide a solid base of advice and support and that it will encourage dialogue, assist in the process of self-review, and provide suggestions for improvement in schools and among teachers.

Gearóid Ó Conluain
Deputy Chief Inspector

Chapter 1

1.1 Schools and evaluations

This report was compiled on the basis of the findings and recommendations made by inspectors of Music in a total of forty-five schools where subject inspections were carried out between January 2006 and May 2007. Most of the reports were written as a result of separate subject inspections, with some inspection reports forming part of a whole-school evaluation (WSE).

The forty-five schools selected as the basis of this report were in urban, suburban and rural settings and ranged in size from fewer than three hundred to more than eight hundred students. The types of schools included are shown in the following table.

Table 1.1 Schools by category

Schools by category	Voluntary secondary schools	27	60%
	VEC schools	8	18%
	Community and comprehensive schools	10	22%
	Total	**45**	**100%**

Table 1.2 Schools by gender

Schools by gender	Co-educational schools	28	62%
	Single-sex schools		
	Girls' schools	12	27%
	Boys' schools	5	11
	Total	**45**	**100%**

The subject inspections were carried out in line with *A Guide to Subject Inspection at Second Level* (Inspectorate, 2004). A subject inspection report in Music, as in other subjects, looks at the subject under a number of clearly defined headings: subject provision and whole-school support, planning and preparation, teaching and learning, and assessment. The format of this composite report follows these headings. Throughout the report, extracts from the subject inspection reports are included in an effort to illustrate the types of issues that arose during inspections and the ways in which good practice was reported and described. Features of good practice and issues that gave cause for concern during the inspections are summarised in each chapter. The report concludes with a summary of findings and recommendations that emerged from an analysis of the forty-five subject inspection reports.

1.2 The purpose of *Looking at Music*

Looking at Music has, in essence, a twofold purpose. First, it presents findings based on observation of current practice in schools and classrooms made during 2006 and 2007. Secondly, it is intended to be of particular relevance to teachers of Music and aims to assist schools by raising awareness of the issues related to the teaching and learning of this subject. It is hoped that *Looking at Music* will provide advice and support to those involved in the teaching of Music and that it will inform and encourage professional dialogue about the subject. Most importantly, it is hoped that *Looking at Music* will contribute to improving the learning experiences for all students of the subject.

Chapter 2

2.1 Access to the subject and uptake levels

The inspectors reported that Music was available within various forms of taster programmes in first year in the majority of the schools visited. Practice varied: in some schools the subject was available for the entire year; in others it was provided for a term, or as part of a rotating carousel, or for as little as three weeks.

Regardless of the taster format, a significant majority of the schools sampled used fixed blocks to allow students to choose their subject options for the Junior Certificate. Given the range of curricular options available, this was understandable. The most common option offered in co-educational schools was a choice of three subjects from Home Economics, Art, Music, Materials Technology (Wood), Metalwork, and Business Studies. In single-sex schools, subjects that were traditionally considered gender-specific were frequently grouped together; this meant that girls often chose two subjects from Home Economics, Science, Art, and Music, while boys had the option of choosing from Metalwork, Materials Technology (Wood), Art, Music, and Technical Graphics. Some schools formed blocks according to students' preference, in what is known as the "best-fit" approach, but only in a small number of instances. A small minority of students had to make their choices before entry, often choosing among Art, Business, and a second modern European language.

The majority of schools offered an optional Transition Year (TY) programme that in most instances offered some form of Music, mostly a compulsory module running in conjunction with the Drama department for the purpose of some form of TY production. A small number of schools complemented this further by offering an additional optional module in such aspects as music technology or sound production. The inspectors commended and encouraged this practice, as it allowed students access to music-making experiences, especially if they had not had this opportunity in the junior cycle.

With the exception of a small number of mostly boys' schools, practically all schools sampled offered Music to Leaving Certificate level. In most instances schools employed the best-fit approach when facilitating students' choice of subject. In this way the management tailored option blocks to suit students' preferences, and where fixed blocks were used there was a degree of flexibility with Music in order to facilitate those who expressed a wish to do the subject.

In general, Music was offered to all students in the sample schools, regardless of ability, which is good practice. In one

school, however, the subject was offered only to those of perceived lower ability. The inspectors actively discouraged this practice and also noted that Music should not be offered only to students of higher ability. One report noted:

> Music is currently offered as a compulsory subject in [the] junior cycle for students perceived as being of lower ability. This policy fosters an incorrect and unjustifiable perception regarding the nature of students who should study Music. In addition, this policy does not take account of the needs of other students who may also wish to study the subject at junior cycle.

A significant number of schools had a healthy uptake of the subject, with viable numbers in both cycles. In schools where the uptake was less than satisfactory the inspectors made recommendations to promote the subject, especially if it was considered that option procedures were affecting choice or where schools were not offering Music to Leaving Certificate level. Comments from reports included the following:

> Strategies to encourage greater participation in Music and to increase significantly its profile within the school should be devised. In this regard, it may be worthwhile re-introducing some type of music module in TY which could raise awareness of the subject and highlight possibilities for inclusion at senior cycle.

> Strategies to encourage greater participation in Music and to possibly re-introduce it in TY and, in time, provide it at senior cycle should be devised.

> Build on existing successes the school has had in raising the profile of Music and explore strategies to encourage a higher uptake of the subject.

In the twenty-eight co-educational schools in the sample the gender profile was generally imbalanced, with a significant number of girls taking the subject, especially in the junior cycle. In line with national trends, girls outnumbered boys in the ratio 4:1. The inspectors believed that this was caused in the majority of instances by the use of fixed option blocks in the junior cycle, where blocks grouped subjects that traditionally had a particular gender uptake. It was interesting to note also that schools that offered a TY module for Music and used the best-fit approach for the Leaving Certificate had a much better gender balance.

Features of good practice

- Music is well established in the school's curriculum
- Subject is available to all students as an option
- Students make subject choices after completing taster programmes

Concerns

- The impact of subject choice arrangements on the uptake of Music
- The gender imbalance: significantly more girls than boys studying Music
- Poor uptake by boys generally

2.2 Timetable

The Junior and Leaving Certificate syllabuses recommend the following timetable allocation for Music:

> It is recommended that three forty-minute class periods per week … be made available in each of the three years of the junior cycle as a minimum requirement for teaching this course effectively (Department of Education and Science, 1991, p.4).

> The syllabus is designed so that its objectives can be realised through two years (180 hours) of classroom study… It is recommended that not less than three hours per week be made available in each of the two Leaving Certificate years as a minimum requirement for teaching this course effectively. (Department of Education and Science, 1996, p.3)

Almost all the schools inspected followed these guidelines, with some variation in provision according to the different taster systems used in first year. A small number of schools had poor timetable allocation, and in some the allocated time was considerably less than the appropriate time recommended in the syllabus. In these instances the inspectors recommended actions to redress the shortfall. The further implications of this shortfall both for planning and preparation and for teaching and learning are outlined in this extract from one inspection report:

> Allocation comprises two lessons per week in each of second and third year and this is considerably less than that

recommended in the Junior Certificate Music syllabus . . . In [the] senior cycle beyond Transition Year, Music currently operates on an allocation of three periods in fifth year and two double periods in sixth year. This is also below the recommended allocation in the guidelines in the Leaving Certificate Music syllabus. It is recommended that ways of redressing this shortfall be examined as a matter of urgency and prioritised in future planning for the [music] department.

Features of good practice

- Timetable allocation in line with Departmental guidelines
- Balanced spread of contact time over the week

Concerns

- Lack of at least one double period per week to facilitate practical work

The allocation of at least one double period per week in both the junior and senior cycle is necessary if practical work is to be facilitated adequately. It is also important that there be a balanced spread of contact time over the week, as students rarely have daily contact with the subject. A significant majority of schools had a good spread of contact time during the week, which was commendable. Those that did not have this appropriate spread were encouraged to explore ways in which this situation could be rectified. One report contained the following:

Timetable provision for Music is in line with Departmental guidelines. There is generally an appropriate spread of contact time during the week with one exception. The two allotted double periods in third year run on two consecutive days leaving a five-day gap between classes. Although it is acknowledged that this does not always happen, the exploration of ways in which this could be avoided is recommended in order to minimise lengthy gaps between lessons.

2.3 Extracurricular activities

It is a testament to the commitment of teachers and management that all schools in the study offered some level of extracurricular music activities. An extensive range of activities was observed, the most common being choirs, instrumental ensembles, traditional music groups, and rock bands. For example, two reports contained these accounts:

> The school's choir, orchestra and traditional Irish group rehearse during four lunchtimes per week throughout the school year. The standard of performance and variety of repertoire provides a comprehensive range of music-making experience, as evidenced during the inspection. The various groups were impressive as, in the course of the evaluation, they performed such pieces as *The Sleeping Beauty Waltz, Pie Jesu, King of the Fairies, Les Avions en Papier, Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds, Banish Misfortune,* and *Oh, What a Beautiful Morning!*

Choirs, orchestras, pop and ballad groups, a traditional Irish group, lunch time concerts, competitions, and CD production are just some of the many activities that continue right throughout the school year.

These activities often provided further opportunities to students to develop individual interests and abilities. In other instances, extracurricular activities provided the only avenue for students who were not studying Music as a subject to engage in musical activities.

> Students perform on a regular basis for the rest of the school community and this was experienced [at] first-hand during the inspection, when a fitting performance of traditional Irish Music was enjoyed during morning break as part of Seachtain na Gaeilge.

Many workshops, visiting performers and trips to concerts and shows were also organised for the students, and a significant majority of schools produced some type of stage production.

> Music students participate in Irish events such as Siamsa and in the Eisteddfod festival in Wales. Students are also afforded the opportunity to participate in workshops including salsa/samba, song writing and in dance classes after school.

The school show frequently constituted one of the highlights of a school's arts programme, was often an integral part of the TY programme, and involved a sizeable proportion of the

school's community. In some cases, work on a school musical facilitated good integration between the curriculum studied by music students and a range of other co-curricular activities.

Some schools also provided instrumental tuition, using a range of procedures. For example, some schools engaged extra teachers, who provided group and individual tuition, either outside or within school hours, often using a rotating timetable to avoid undue disruption of lessons. Some schools had a variety of instruments at their disposal and used a rental scheme; some schools subsidised the tuition, others provided the facilities while the students paid for the lessons. One report commented as follows:

> The school has invested heavily in providing instruments for students, which in turn, has led to the development of the school orchestra. All students can access individual lessons for a nominal fee as the school subsidises all lessons. This very generous provision has enhanced the cultural education of students and [the] management is highly commended in this regard.

These schemes often complemented the curricular activity going on in class. Many of the schools visited expressed an interest in initiating such schemes but wondered about the disruption they might cause. No school that had such a scheme found these activities disruptive—a finding that should encourage other schools to consider introducing such complementary musical activities.

A small number of schools had timetabled practice periods for a choir or orchestra. Generally these were provided as a result of a traditional practice in the school. However, most of these schools were in the process of phasing out these activities, which is regrettable, as often these were the only opportunities some students had to experience some form of music-making activity.

The willing involvement of staff members in music-making activities over and above any contractual obligations was consistently acknowledged and affirmed in all reports. To voluntarily foster and monitor a wide range of activities that take place mostly outside the normal timetable involves extra organisational activity and often places additional demands on both music teachers and management.

The commitment of schools and teachers, and the myriad activities undertaken in schools were acknowledged and highly commended in the inspection reports. The inspectors recognised the valuable contribution these activities made to students' cultural enrichment and general aesthetic education and also noted that extracurricular activities reinforced the idea that Music is essentially a living, vibrant subject, the benefits of which cannot always be gleaned from textbooks.

Features of good practice

- A wide range of extracurricular musical activities is provided
- These activities are available to all students in the school
- The commitment of teachers and management in facilitating these activities

Concerns

- Sustaining the goodwill of all those involved in these voluntary activities

2.4 The music room

Most schools had some designated area for music lessons. Clarity regarding the term "music room" is needed during inspections, as this might mean either a room that is used consistently for Music but is used also for other subjects or one that is used exclusively for music activities. Although school management tended to consider the former arrangement to be satisfactory, the latter is regarded as best practice.

Optimal practice favours specialist music rooms that offer the flexibility needed for a wide range of class-based music activities. Other designated music rooms, while obviously better than no room at all, often restrict the ways in which teacher and students can interact in a music-teaching setting. They can also negatively affect lesson preparation and lead to the erosion of teaching time if frequent reorganisation of the room is required.

Roughly half the schools in the sample had some form of designated area for Music, but not all of these were suitable. The findings of the reports demonstrated the need for schools and school planners to consider carefully the quality of the accommodation provided for music lessons. Appropriate areas provided adaptable spaces that allowed for group and individual work, were acoustically suitable, had ample storage, and ideally included a separate performing area. Where good teaching spaces were provided, the environment helped to minimise didactic instruction and opened up opportunities to allow students to experience Music as an active, participatory subject. For example, two reports commented as follows:

> [The school] has a specialist music room which is bright and spacious, acoustically satisfactory and arranged into a teaching and performing area.

> [The school] has a specialist music room, which is appropriately equipped and resourced, and includes both a digital and acoustic piano, a range of classroom instruments, African drums, a drum kit, sound system, a computer and peripherals

installed with *Sibelius* and Irish music software, music stands, TV, VCR and DVD, choir steps and whiteboard ... In addition, there is an extensive stock of audio resources and sheet music, and the walls are decorated with a variety of posters, pictures of instruments, student projects and homemade instruments. These all contribute to a heightened awareness of the subject and are to be commended.

Where the allocation of teaching spaces was less satisfactory, the inspectors noted the negative impact this had on the teaching of the subject, as in these examples:

> [The school] has two designated music rooms but as these are used for other lessons also, the planning and preparation of lessons is difficult, with all resources stored in these rooms.

> Space is at a premium and consequently few opportunities exist to move or adapt the furniture arrangements to suit different music-teaching settings. The piano is situated at the back of the room, which is fine for small groups as students can gather around the piano, but can be problematic with larger numbers.

> Aside from the fact that non-specialist rooms limit the amount of time available for preparation, the design of the room is such that the cumbersome furniture militates against any flexibility in relation to the arrangement of different music-teaching settings.

> Although the room is spacious and airy, as it is also used for other lessons, there are more desks than are needed for a music lesson. These desks are arranged in a traditional layout,

which means that ways in which the teacher and students can interact are restricted and this also militates against any flexibility in relation to the arrangement of different music-teaching settings. The furniture takes up most of the available space, so the organisation of a permanent performing area is not feasible, which curtails group performing quite considerably.

Other resource requirements, including information and communication technology (ICT) and the appropriate positioning of such facilities, are discussed under separate headings below.

Features of good practice

- A specialist music room that is well-resourced, equipped, and maintained, with a print-rich environment that includes students' work
- Room design and layout are flexible enough to allow for a variety of music-teaching settings
- Where practicable, the room has a separate performing area

Concerns

- Lack of an appropriate specialist music area
- Lack of a separate performing space
- Designated music areas being used for other lessons also

2.5 Resources

The proper provision of resources is vital to ensuring an effective teaching and learning environment for Music. Building up substantial resources requires good long-term planning, while the acquisition, maintenance and replacement of equipment pose continuous challenges. Together with generic teaching resources and suitable accommodation, as outlined above, a basic resource list for music lessons should include classroom instruments, a sound system, a piano, audio resources, sheet music and texts, and some type of stave board. A proper functioning stave board is difficult to acquire, and unfortunately the design of this resource is often flawed and unsuitable for school use, with mechanisms that are too flimsy to cope with everyday use or lines that wear out. A possible substitute is an overhead projector with staves projected onto an existing whiteboard or screen. ICT can also be used to provide a visual display of musical notation.

All schools visited had some form of audio equipment and audio resources, and the majority had a piano and some form of print-rich environment. However, the availability of other resources varied considerably, both in quality and quantity. Some investment in audiovisual resources, overhead projectors or other presentation media was evident, but only in a small number of schools. Thirty-six schools had acoustic pianos, of varying quality, while some had digital pianos instead. This kind of substitution is not considered good practice: a digital piano has many practical advantages (tuning is unnecessary, for example, and such pianos are portable), but it is preferable to use digital pianos to enhance existing music-making devices rather than substituting them for more traditional sound sources.

Many inspection reports drew attention to some basic shortcomings in resources, such as glare from classroom windows, poor projection areas for overhead projectors, worn blackboards, pianos in need of repair, the poor quality of sound systems, and poor positioning of speakers. The inspectors also discouraged the use of chalkboards, as dust is not kind to either electronic equipment or to musical instruments.

While some schools were commended for their commitment to acquiring resources, others were advised of ways in which shortcomings could be addressed, as outlined below.

> The classroom atmosphere was richly enhanced by the vast provision of professionally produced printwork materials and with work produced by the students themselves. Such displays emphasised the fact that visually stimulating material produces a useful source of learning for students and is an additional strategy for reinforcing learning.

The school is to be commended for the manner in which this department is resourced, given the small numbers currently studying Music. It is important to state that a continuing enhancement of the available resources would also help foster an interest in Music and possibly contribute to a significant increase in its uptake.

This well-resourced room also has an overhead projector (OHP) correctly positioned with a suitable projection area and allowing good visibility for the students. However, the arrangement of the other teaching resources in the room is [a] cause for concern . . . The sound system is positioned in the far left of the room in a storage cupboard with the speakers directly on top, thus implying that all audio sources come from one direction from the students' point of view. In addition, the doors of this cupboard open out in such a way that the signal from the remote control is obstructed. The computer workstation is also crammed into this space. This means that for a significant amount of each lesson, all teaching takes place over in this area. It is recommended that the room be re-arranged to optimise the use of resources. Some suggestions include . . . re-designing or re-positioning the storage cupboard with the sound system so that the remote control signal is not obstructed, thus allowing the teacher to move freely around the room. Additionally, it is recommended that the computer workstation be moved to the back of the room where sockets are available and there is more space.

2.6 Information and communication technology

The acquisition of ICT resources remains a challenge for most music departments in schools. Generally, music departments had acquired some form of ICT but were slow to upgrade or improve the equipment. Equipment varied from a basic computer and software in the music room to a wide range of software installed in the computer room on at least fifteen machines. The most common software in use was that which fulfilled the requirements of the optional module for the Leaving Certificate programme.

Despite some discernible growth in its use as a teaching and enabling tool, and the fact that thirty-three of the forty-five schools inspected had access to some form of ICT, the development of this resource varied, with a very small number of schools using music technology in lessons. Some teachers used technology as an aid to the production of suitable hand-outs and music materials, and they used the internet for downloading material for class. They also frequently directed students to appropriate web sites but this work was almost exclusively done outside the classroom.

The development of ICT resources was consistently recommended in reports, and it was widely acknowledged

that these powerful resources were under-used in music lessons.

Features of good practice

- Appropriate and effective use of resources
- Well-maintained and updated resources
- Access to a good range of ICT resources, both within and outside the music room

Concerns

- The positioning of resources, especially the piano and speakers for the sound system
- No overhead projector
- Lack of a suitable projection area
- Poor-quality stave boards
- Poor development of ICT resources in many schools
- Available ICT resources being used only to a limited extent

Chapter 3

The quality of planning and preparation

3.1 Collaborative planning

Collaborative planning broadly took two forms in the schools evaluated. Twenty-two schools had departments with more than one teacher, and some type of collaborative planning within the department had been established. Most schools had engaged in school development planning (SDP) and had advanced from curriculum planning, which dealt initially with core subjects, to the point where they were ready to formalise plans for departments of optional subjects, such as Music.

Generally speaking, this type of planning encompassed at least one formal departmental meeting a year, the production of broad subject plans for each class group, the use of some common assessments, and planning for the acquisition of resources. Some subject departments had documented minutes of meetings, detailed plans, inventories, and plans drawn up using the SDP guidelines on subject department planning. One report described such planning as follows:

> An impressive level of collaborative planning supports the development of Music in this school. This planning takes cognisance of the relevant curricular principles of performing, composing and listening. Comprehensive programmes of work scheduling the topics to be covered were presented. These were relevant to the syllabus and the requirements of the examinations, and took into account the level and the ability of the students in question. Subject planning with broad

plans for each class group, a summary of work to be completed and proposed assessments were also presented. These plans were thorough, showed evidence of much deliberation and were interesting and challenging for the students.

However, while schools recognised this level of planning as valuable, the inspectors noted that it was in its infancy, with the bulk of collaboration taking place informally.

Features of good practice
- Good balance between formal and informal collaborative planning
- Collaborative planning both within the music department and with other subject departments

Concerns
- Professional isolation in one-teacher departments
- Collaborative planning exclusively informal and undocumented

The other type of collaborative planning involved the music teacher liaising with other subject departments for shows, fund-raising and other events taking place during the school year in which Music had some involvement. It was interesting to see that those schools that had one music teacher were those that engaged most in this type of planning. This not

only helped to prevent professional isolation but also contributed to the development of a collegial ethos within the school.

3.2 Individual planning

Individual plans were devised by teachers in a significant majority of instances, with these personal plans based on the teacher's individual working style. These were broadly in line with syllabuses and the requirements of the examinations and were often an outline of work to be covered throughout a term or the year as a whole. The more successful individual plans concentrated on teaching methods and learning outcomes, but instances of these were rare. In general, teachers had not documented in their written planning the methods they used in their teaching.

Features of good practice

- Plans concentrating on teaching methods and learning outcomes

Concerns

- High incidence of plans that were no more than general lists used from year to year

3.3 Planning documents

The majority of schools evaluated were making use of some form of written plans in line with the continuous development of subject departments and subject plans. Where best practice was found, these plans included the following:

- long-term planning, with programmes of work for all year groups and an agreed list of topics, where applicable
- schemes of work that had been devised for each year group and
  — were in line with curricular requirements
  — provided for the integration of performing, composing, and listening
  — identified suitable teaching methods, resources, homework exercises, and modes of assessment
- the recognition of students' ranges of ability
- the use of a wide range of resources
- material from the State Examinations Commission that informed but did not dictate planning
- a regular review of programmes and schemes of work.

Some excellent examples of planning were noted by the inspectors.

> Comprehensive programmes of work scheduling the topics to be covered were presented. These were relevant to the

syllabuses and the requirements of the examinations, took cognisance of the relevant curricular principles of performing, composing and listening, and took into account the level of the ability of the students in question. Subject planning outlining the broad plan for each class group, included a summary of work completed, assessment sheets and worksheets and an organised and comprehensive stock of support material suitable for all levels.

From discussion with the teachers it was found that considerable thought has been given to the accurate and effective delivery of all music courses in the school. There is regular contact and co-operation between them in the sharing of collective facilities and resources and in the day-to-day implementation of the syllabuses with their classes. There is evidence of good planning in senior cycle with purposeful sequencing of material and with elements of the course covered at appropriate times throughout the two-year cycle.

However, while most schools presented planning documentation, much of this planning fell short of best practice. Most of this documentation was content-based and outlined coursework to be covered but frequently lacked any rationale for why certain areas were to be covered at particular times in a developmental sequence. Such purposeful sequencing of material was rare, as were details of the length of time allocated for particular topics, resources to be used, and modes of assessment employed. In schools where the time allocation for Music was considerably

constrained, the balance between coursework and music education experiences was stymied by lack of time, and teachers had difficulties in planning to fulfil even the basic requirements of the State examinations. A report from such a school contained the following:

> The planning documentation reviewed outlined programmes of work with insufficient time allocated to each topic and no scope for re-visitation, reinforcement or consolidation. It is a tribute to the teacher that courses are covered, but the students rarely experience meaningful music-making activities, as everything is taught to the examination and without an exploration of the essence of Music. These intense programmes of work for the individual classes leave little opportunities for musical development and creative initiative. There is little opportunity provided for students to internalise and integrate their musical experiences. This is contrary to the underlying principles of music education and to learning in general. There is always the risk that in both junior and senior cycles these students will not move beyond a basic level of competence in terms of their understanding and use of knowledge, which is of considerable concern.

There was evidence that while the planning process had begun to be embedded in schools, teachers did not fully appreciate the need to keep the plans under review. The inspectors commented that schools and music departments needed to formally review their plans in a regular, systematic way so that the contents of the plans remained relevant and purposeful. It is important to allow for the modification of

aims and objectives as the work progresses, and all plans should be open to revision in the light of new experiences and changing circumstances.

Features of good practice

- Long-term planning, with programmes of work for all year groups and an agreed list of topics, where applicable
- Schemes of work that have been devised for each year group and
  — are in line with curricular requirements
  — provide for the integration of performing, composing, and listening
  — outline suitable teaching methods, resources, homework exercises and modes of assessment
- Planning that takes account of students' range of ability
- The development of a wide range of resources
- Material from the State Examinations Commission informing but not dictating planning
- Regular review of programmes and schemes of work

Concerns

- Plans exclusively content-based
- No rationale for certain areas covered at certain times in a developmental sequence
- Purposeful sequencing of material is rare
- Lack of any formal review systems

3.4 Planning for continuing professional development

The majority of planning documents reviewed by the inspectors included a reference to planning for continuing professional development (CPD). Most plans recognised the need for further training in ICT in order to make use of technological resources to reach a wider audience and not merely to fulfil the requirements of the optional technology module in the Leaving Certificate. The inspectors reported that managements were very supportive of the need for continuing professional development and facilitated attendance at any available opportunity as much as was practicable and equitable within the school context.

A valuable support for teachers noted by the inspectors was membership of the Post-Primary Music Teachers' Association (PPMTA). This allowed for a productive interchange of ideas and professional dialogue, something that was particularly significant for teachers of Music, who often found themselves isolated in a one-teacher department. It also contributed in significant ways to teachers' CPD through timely newsletters that heightened awareness of developments in music education and alerting teachers to forthcoming courses. The inspectors noted the range of activities, meetings and in-service training provided by the PPMTA and the way in which

this facilitated the networking of ideas and the introduction of innovative music-teaching methods. As slightly more than half the schools visited reported some form of involvement in the association, membership of the PPMTA was encouraged where applicable.

> The music teachers are also members of the Post-Primary Music Teachers' Association (PPMTA) and attendance at its meetings affords them the opportunity to keep abreast of all information pertaining to music education at second level, to keep up to date with ongoing curricular innovation and to network with other music teachers. In addition, the teachers avail of any ongoing training courses which contribute to their overall continuing professional development (CPD). This is commendable and it is hoped that [the] management will continue to support and facilitate any opportunities for CPD in music education that arise in the future.

Features of good practice

- Membership of the PPMTA
- Planning for CPD in evidence

Concerns

- No contact with the subject association
- Limited opportunities for CPD

Chapter 4

The quality of teaching and learning

4.1 General methodology

Despite curriculum and examination constraints, a music teacher's main aims should include a strong focus on building the role of Music and giving students the opportunity to take part in and enjoy practical music-making.

> Classroom work should be about music-making . . . and in the forefront of all activities, the development of aural sensitivity and awareness. (Paynter, 1982, p. 28)

Where the inspectors observed successful lessons they noted that they involved a synthesis and integration of the three curricular areas of performing, composing, and listening. Appropriate links were made within and outside the music curriculum, the more powerful being where material was introduced aurally, manipulated by the students and reinforced through performing, and subsequently consolidated through a composing activity. An example in one school was described as follows:

> Strategies linking aspects of the curriculum were utilised to very good effect especially through appropriate practical elements. In a lesson focusing on a set song from the Songs from Operas, Operettas, Cantatas, Oratorios and Stage Musicals category for example, links were made with the recent production of *Les Misérables*. As many students had seen the musical, meaningful connections were made between this and elements of the Junior Certificate syllabus. The teacher skilfully elicited information from the students and

forged links with their own experience in order to reinforce the concepts introduced. Thus students watched excerpts on DVD, listened to attractive extracts from a variety of pieces, studied brochures and programmes from many musicals, recalled their own experiences of watching different shows and, after an interesting discussion with insightful comments from the students, successfully categorised these according to type—operetta, musical etc. The repertoire introduced ranged from such pieces as *Don Giovanni*, *The Magic Flute* and *Cosi Fan Tutte* to *Calamity Jane*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *The Wizard of Oz* and *Grease*.

Where good practice was observed, teachers established curricular and cross-curricular links in a variety of ways as these examples demonstrate:

> When introducing Haydn's *Trumpet Concerto* as part of the repertoire for the choice listening category Orchestrally Accompanied Instrumental and Vocal Music, links were made with the performer on the video (Wynton Marsalis) with a recent iPod advert (Sparks), something that would have been familiar to the students.

> When revising Smetana's *Vltava* (Moldau River) a link with local rivers and subsequent homework asking students to describe the type of music they would use to capture the course of either of these rivers was made. This linking of activities and active participation by the students is commendable and does much to ensure a broad musical development rather than a narrow focus on examination material. It would also be worthwhile to introduce a more aural approach to these tasks where the students could produce soundscapes of the rivers rather than just providing a

verbal description. This would allow further integration and synthesis of the three areas of performing, composing and listening.

The "sound before symbol" approach, where the emphasis is always on the sounds themselves and not the notational signs, was judiciously employed by some teachers.

> Examples of good music methodological practice were observed . . . with an emphasis on "sound before symbol" whether the lesson focused on performing, composing, listening or a synthesis of these three curricular areas. Materials were well prepared and the teaching was supportive of all students. The teachers skilfully engaged the students through the use of topical extracts, imaginative approaches, and open-ended creative initiatives.

However, the inspectors were disappointed to see many lessons involving traditional "skill and drill" techniques and lessons based on mechanical exercises with no reference to the sound itself.

> In order to optimise learning, it is recommended that ways in which . . . methods could be expanded to include more active involvement by the students be explored. In some instances, too much emphasis on mechanical exercises and the theoretical nature of Music meant that the main objective was lost. There was a tendency to approach concepts in reverse order, providing all the information first and then introducing the sounds.

A variety of appropriate music methodological practice was seen in many of the schools visited. Most teaching observed employed a range of generic methods, which one would expect to see in effective lessons. In the main, lessons were well structured, with appropriate pacing and a variety of content. The classroom atmosphere was generally positive, with a warm, friendly rapport between teachers and students. High expectations of attainment and behaviour were set in the majority of instances, and students displayed good levels of motivation, with a positive attitude towards music. Starter activities frequently encompassed some type of brainstorming, a short recapitulation of previously introduced material, and lower-order questioning, which involved all students regardless of abilities. When lessons dealt with revision material, best practice was observed where teachers and students engaged in music-making activities, as opposed to an automatic recollection of factual material.

> Good teaching was characterised by engaging and motivating the wide range of abilities of the students through well-structured and varied activities. This was fully borne out during a revision session for example, which encompassed a table quiz format covering all aspects of the Irish Traditional Music component for Junior Certificate and made effective use of resources to ensure that students were actively engaged and informed of their learning. In all lessons observed, there was active involvement of students in practical work and/or short worksheet activities.

The teachers' subject knowledge and skills impact well on students' musical thinking, attitudes and skills, and when listening activities were utilised, a wide range of interesting musical extracts were introduced. These musical extracts were by and large well known and appealing to the students, for example *My Heart Will Go On, Ode to Joy, Moonlight Sonata, My Baby Just Cares for Me* and some Irish traditional tunes. Strategies like these which extend the range of musical experience of the students are highly effective in developing critical listening skills and are to be commended.

Very good links were made between some of the excerpts and music that students had performed during choir lessons and also between musically technical concepts and some of the music extracts that were played.

Features of good practice

- A variety of teaching strategies and methods used
- Clear, accurate instruction by the teacher
- Positive atmosphere
- Integration of the three curricular areas of performing, composing, and listening
- The "sound before symbol" approach consistently employed

Concerns

- An aural focus not always maintained in lessons
- Imbalance between examination focus and musical development

4.2 Student-centred approaches

To optimise the learning outcome in situations other than preparation for the practical examinations, slightly more than half the schools visited employed some form of student-centred approach, such as the pair work and group work used in this example:

> In a lesson designed to reinforce rhythmical concepts, students clapped simple patterns. A handout with a three-part rhythmic pattern was then provided and worked through with students. All three parts were clapped in succession before the students were divided into three groups. The teacher explained the style of music which was a round. In this way, students had now encountered this new style of music aurally. Percussion instruments were then successfully integrated in the lesson and the students' level of enjoyment during the task was very clear.

Although the level of students' engagement was good in most instances, opportunities to promote an atmosphere of autonomous learning were missed when teachers relied on the more traditional didactic methods, with an emphasis on teacher talk. Incidences of very successful lessons involving purposeful peer-peer interaction and a high degree of collaborative and independent learning were also witnessed:

> Lessons focusing on prescribed material for the State examinations were particularly effective as students engaged

in such activities as preparing parts for performance, rehearsed these parts, or in one case were encouraged to compose and create their own parts and play along by ear. In one lesson, all this work was consolidated with students comparing their performance to the original recording, in this case the Beatles' *When I'm 64*. This is commendable practice.

One activity involved the comparison of three performances of the song *One* sung by U2, Johnny Cash and Mary J. Blige. While listening to these extracts, the students answered questions on a worksheet. These questions were open-ended enough to allow students' opinions to impact on the discussion of these performances. The students commented perceptively on the different moods invoked by the performances heard and proceeded with their own performance of the song, which reinforced and consolidated the activity.

In a lesson focusing on rhythm for example, students were encouraged to suggest different types of patterns and to come up to the whiteboard to notate same. The final set of patterns was subsequently used to reinforce and consolidate learning through questioning and performing by both the students and [the] teacher. Support material available included students' own "rhythm envelopes" where students identified patterns played by the teacher by referring to their collections.

Differentiation was observed where students at different levels of attainment were assigned work at levels appropriate to their ability, with examination classes working on different aspects on both the ordinary and higher-level past papers and referring to Departmental marking schemes.

Methods that made use of the students' expertise and particular talents and embedded these in the learning process, allowing the teacher to be more of a facilitator and enabler, were notably successful, as in this example:

> An example of peer learning ensued when students became involved in the teaching. In order to resolve some uncertainties the students were having in identifying Irish dance types, the teacher called upon two students to perform examples on the accordion and the banjo. These students then "tested" the other students to ensure [that] they had learned how to differentiate between, in this case, a jig and a hornpipe. The manner in which this was introduced is commendable. In addition, this atmosphere of autonomous learning with the teacher as facilitator and enabler is highly commendable and contributes to students taking responsibility for their own learning.

Features of good practice

- All students engaged and enjoying the lessons
- Different learning strategies used, including activity-based learning, peer learning, and independent learning

Concerns

- Pair work and group work used in little more than half the schools visited

4.3 Music-making activities

It is only when the emphasis in the classroom is on music-making activities that the fundamental aim of music education can be realised.

> The teaching of Music . . . is best organised, especially in the school-going years, through direct experience of the three main musical activities themselves. (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1991, p. 3)

> Performing, composing and listening are meaningful and creative ways of organising musical learning. These activities may be either vocal and/or instrumental in approach. Involving students actively in these musical tasks promotes a positive and confident attitude to the subject. (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1997, p. 22)

It was heartening to see that more than half the schools visited based all lessons on music-making activities, keeping teacher talk and didactic instruction to a minimum. In successful lessons, the focus was placed on building the role of Music as a subject and giving students the opportunity to take part in and enjoy practical music-making.

The more skilful teachers used this focus to weave in associated musical elements, such as timbre, texture, and form, to extend the level of music experience for their students, and to ensure that this fundamental aim was not lost. One report described this practice in this way:

At all times, an aural focus was maintained with elements of music-making central to the learning process. Students and their teacher discussed possible solutions, with decisions made as a result of keen listening rather than justification of the theoretical parameters. Comments like "Listen to it again and see what you think" abounded, with students playing a range of chords on guitars and piano and proffering insightful opinions as to the suitability of these progressions. When the decisions were made, a performance of the exercise ensued, consolidating the work covered and integrating the three components of performing, listening and composing.

Even when preparing for the State examinations, skilful teachers provided frequent and regular performing opportunities for their students as in the following examples:

> The development of skills to undertake the dictation question in the Junior Certificate examination was approached in a musically focused rather than mechanical way. This is commendable as it once more allows the focus to remain on the music as opposed to the "skill and drill" tactics usually associated with this area. The teacher gave sufficient guidance to tackle the four-bar pattern with student contributions welcomed and affirmed.

> The revision of prescribed material was carried out through student performances with the set songs for example being performed by the entire group. Supportive and assured accompaniments by the teacher and students on piano, guitar and drums enhanced the quality of the playing and singing, which is commendable. After each performance of such songs as *Amhrán na Cuiginne, Click Go the Shears, Yesterday* and *Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man*, the students were questioned on

the features particular to each, with an elaboration of the answers by the teacher.

A lesson on African music was very thought provoking. Students were provided with detailed information regarding the music and the performers. Students listened to four very appropriate and varied pieces and then answered questions from a worksheet . . . Opportunities to perform during the lesson were provided to students, a factor which helped sustain their motivation for the lesson.

Features of good practice

- An emphasis on practical music-making experiences
- Good standards of school-based music-making

Concerns

- Lack of practical music-making experiences

4.4 Use of resources and support materials

The resource most used in music lessons is undoubtedly the sound system. The sound system was used most effectively in the lessons observed when excerpts of a suitable length had been prepared in advance (with repeats if needed) and the remote control was used to facilitate the teacher's mobility and to provide opportunities for the teacher to circulate freely and to monitor students' progress and learning.

Most schools had a range of classroom instruments, mainly percussion, but instances of these being used as a teaching tool, rather than a performing tool, were rare. The piano was also used as a support both for demonstration purposes and to accompany performances. Few classrooms were spacious enough to allow students to gather around the piano when needed. However, when the piano was positioned so that the teacher was facing the students, this disadvantage was overcome, and teacher-student interaction was readily achieved. Teachers who enjoyed access to a specialist music room that allowed flexibility for different settings had students sitting at music stands or had areas where composing and performing work-stations were set up quickly and efficiently.

Effective use was made of the classroom space and, notably, correct posture was insisted upon regardless of levels. Junior students used music stands positioned in front of their desks, while older students stood on the choir steps when playing in ensembles. This is good practice and is commended.

Audiovisual equipment was used intermittently for video clips or DVD extracts. Many of the extracts were quite short, and unless the room was equipped with suitable video or DVD facilities the teachers felt that booking the equipment for an entire lesson could not be justified when it might be used for a small portion of the time. However, when warranted, audiovisual resources were in the main used very effectively,

with prepared worksheets and a satisfactory degree of interaction with the students.

When an overhead projector (OHP) or other presentation device, such as a data projector, was used, effective teaching and learning were observed. However, as fewer than half the schools visited used some form of overhead projector or data projector, a recommendation to consider the use of these resources appeared in many reports. As mentioned above, stave boards can be a problem, and many designs are unsatisfactory. The type of writing on whiteboards or chalkboards required in a successful music lesson can take up an inordinate amount of the teacher's time before it has any impact on the learning outcome. An overhead or data projector is therefore invaluable to music teaching. Materials can be prepared in advance, with, for example, accurate musical hand-outs, complicated harmony questions and both listening and composing examination questions presented clearly, ensuring an effective use of the teacher's time and optimising students' learning.

Although many of the schools evaluated had access to ICT, either in the classroom or in the computer room, only a small proportion used it effectively. In the main, ICT was used to fulfil the requirements of the optional technology module of the Leaving Certificate. ICT can be used to provide valuable resource material that can be amended, revised and adapted according to need with relative ease. It can also be used to arrange music for performing, an electronic stock of which would allow for further modification at a later stage to suit differing students' ability.

The inspectors commented that the limited use of ICT as a teaching tool was linked to lack of training opportunities in the use of the technology. However, they also noted that teachers were keen to avail of any available training and that managements were generally willing to facilitate training and offer support whenever opportunities arose.

Features of good practice

- Music resources are used appropriately, both as teaching and as performing tools
- The OHP and ICT are used effectively to facilitate teaching and learning

Concerns

- Limited use of music technology as a teaching and learning tool
- OHP not used, ineffective use of teacher's time

4.5 Students' learning and achievement

In the schools visited, the inspectors noted a satisfactory degree of learning by students in various areas. Purposeful and meaningful engagement in music-making activities ensured a high level of experiential learning, and good standards of music-making were evident. This learning was even more apparent when teachers enabled a further consolidation of previously learnt material, allowing students to exhibit more overt learning behaviour. Examples from reports included the following:

> It was good to note that students work from sheet music at all times, and when correcting errors or shortcomings in the performance, the teachers interspersed their explanations with appropriate technical terms, thus contributing to a further consolidation of the more theoretical aspects of Music. Thus, for example, rather than stating that the singers were flat in a particular bar, the students were informed that the section containing a "leading note" or a series of "rising fourths" required more acute listening.

> This linking of activities and active participation by the students is commendable and does much to ensure a broad musical development rather than a narrow focus on examination material, extends the range of musical experience of the students and is highly effective in developing critical listening skills.

> The variety of repertoire from slow airs and laments to jigs, reels and hornpipes not only extends the range of musical experience of the students but is also highly effective in developing critical listening skills and ensures that students are suitably prepared for many aspects of the State examinations.

In the area of acquisition of skills the inspectors noted successful progress in lessons where a judicious use of rote learning strategies was employed, coupled with a challenging learning environment with appropriate expectations:

> Good learning was seen through listening and analysis, skill development, trial and error, and progressive refinement in all activities. Strategies linking aspects of the curriculum were utilised to very good effect with the areas of performing, composing and listening integrated in a musically-focused way. Lessons focusing on theoretical aspects were reinforced and consolidated through practical activities and listening exercises.

> Many 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. The variety of competent performances combined with different arrangements, such as beginning with a student solo and others joining in, or two and three-part tunes, ensured total engagement by all students. This total student participation, with supportive and assured accompaniments by the teachers, enhanced the quality of these performances and was commendable. Observation of students' practical work, at all stages, showed that whilst some were challenged, few students were unable to cope with the demands of the music.

Through immersion and exposure to a diversity of musical experiences, students broadened their learning and demonstrated their musical understanding through the level of engagement observed and in the manner in which they approached specified tasks.

> This allowed for a very interesting discussion with insightful comments from the students on the nature of musical arrangements. The ease with which the students used expressive and technical language not only to analyse what they heard, but also to suggest ways of performing and arranging music, demonstrated that significant learning is taking place.

> Student engagement was high and the students were secure in asking questions during the course of the lessons. The appropriateness of those questions and the spontaneity of students' responses to the teachers' questions indicated that they have gained a sound understanding of musical concepts.

> Throughout each lesson, student knowledge and experience were used to support learning wherever possible, and this was broadened and expanded through detailed questioning, explanation, clarification and encouragement from the teacher.

A successful learning outcome was also exemplified in lessons where collaborative, individual and self-directed learning was encouraged.

A high degree of collaborative and independent learning was very much in evidence. This was borne out in lessons where students organised their own notes, monitored by the teacher for accuracy, and were involved in choosing their own musical extracts to consolidate previously learnt material. Students were encouraged towards self-directed and autonomous learning and were shown how the skills that they acquire could be applied to not just other parts of the music course, but other subject areas as well.

Whether it was a rehearsal for the Arts Week concert, or working on the more theoretical aspects of Music, consistent cross-referencing with other parameters of Music was evident and contributed to the development of the students' own self-learning skills. This was exemplified by linking such songs as *Black Is the Colour* with texture and form, working on backing chords for *Water Come a Me Eye,* and co-ordinating and layering percussion accompaniment for *Fix You*.

Chapter 5

The quality of assessment

5.1 Assessment in the classroom

The inspectors reported that the more common informal modes of assessment used in music lessons were oral questioning, graded worksheets, judging students' level of engagement during lessons, and monitoring their progress while involved in practical activities. Only a small proportion of music education is quantifiable, mostly information retention and certain technical skills, while such qualities as musicianship and creativity are more difficult to measure.

When assessing students' progress in the three curricular areas of performing, composing and listening in the classroom, most teachers employed the methods described above, with a particular emphasis on listening skills. A range of tasks was set in class, such as identifying musical styles and other aspects of Music, such as texture and timbre, and performing individually or as part of a group. Other tasks involved engaging in some form of composing activity, mostly working out a harmony question or continuing a melody, while the teacher circulated to provide guidance and monitor progress.

Where best practice was observed by the inspectors they noted that the outcome of these informal assessment methods was often used to review and adjust the curriculum. The outcome was also used to aid the teacher in adapting and extending materials and in altering their style of teaching and formal assessment models in order to ensure students' progress. However, as discussed in section 3.3, this use of assessment outcomes in the planning process was uncommon, and further consideration of this issue by schools and teachers would be worthwhile.

Features of good practice

- Regular class tests and end-of-topic tests
- Assessment outcome used in reviewing and adjusting the curriculum

Concerns

- Lack of regular assessment in the performing and composing skills
- Assessment outcome not used to enable students' progress

5.2 Homework

In keeping with the diversity of musical skills and activities encountered in the classroom, a variety of homework assignments was set and monitored in the majority of schools

evaluated. Students were frequently assigned instrumental or vocal practice, listening exercises and worksheet or workbook tasks similar to examination questions, theory exercises consolidating work done in class, project work and essay-type answers akin to examination questions, and—less often—internet research. Homework dealing with composing almost exclusively involved melody writing and harmony exercises. These exercises fulfilled the requirements of the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations. Examples of exercises in free composition and creative expression were very rare.

Students generally stored all their work and materials in folders and loose-leaf binders, but the level of monitoring of these by teachers was somewhat varied. The monitoring of these materials fulfils two functions: ensuring that all relevant work is filed and stored appropriately, and monitoring the standards of work completed. The teachers who regularly examined these materials often operated a rewards scheme for junior classes to ensure that the files were well organised and generally neat in appearance.

The inspectors noted that more progress had been achieved where exercises had received more than just a tick or a grade. It appeared that students placed more value on feedback that included comments or words of encouragement.

Some student folders and manuscripts showed evidence of good organisation and were generally neat in appearance, while others were disorderly and contained loose sheets and handouts. Careful monitoring of student materials is recommended especially with junior classes, as valuable supplementary information and work will invariably go astray if not documented properly.

It was good to note that in addition to a grade, many of these assessments received a comment or words of encouragement from the teachers. This is to be commended.

Features of good practice

- Homework assigned and regularly monitored
- Students' materials and work organised appropriately
- Constructive comments provided to enable better learning and improvement, and appropriate reward systems adopted

Concerns

- Haphazard monitoring of students' work by teachers
- Work receives only a grade or a tick, with no accompanying constructive comments

5.3 Monitoring students' progress

The degree to which students' progress was monitored by teachers varied considerably. Regular testing was a feature in all schools visited, and the traditional range of Christmas and summer tests, classroom tests and mock examinations for Junior and Leaving Certificate students was in use.

Monitoring specific musical competencies, such as aural development and critical listening skills, can sometimes be problematic, as quantifying progress in these areas is difficult. While most teachers relied on the traditional examination-oriented modes of assessment, a few used more creative methods, such as quick-fire tests to ascertain the level of students' understanding, project and art work, CD compilation, and table quizzes. Few teachers had built up profiles of each students' musical competence. Where this had been done, for example where regular assessment of students' rhythmic skills had been completed, a more formative approach to assessment was apparent. The inspectors reported that this type of monitoring and assessment for learning was not widely practised and advised that establishing and maintaining students' progress reports and building up musical profiles should be included as objectives in the planning of subject departments.

Examples of good practice in the monitoring of students' progress observed by the inspectors included the following:

[The] monitoring of students' work occurs very frequently and as a result, presentation standards were very good while clearly illustrating students' personal development within their own capabilities. All written assignments that were monitored were accompanied by useful and encouraging comments.

Students' aural ability is monitored through regular assessments, which enables the teacher [to] build a profile of students' rhythmic and melodic competencies.

Commendably, students receive comments on written work which indicate strategies for improvement.

The teacher has also set up a stock of material in *Mediamax*, a central place to store, access and share files and digital media. This allows students to work on projects and improve general listening skills, and enables the teacher to build a profile of students' listening competencies.

Features of good practice

- Profiles of students' musical competencies developed
- Formative assessment procedures adopted
- Homework and assessments inform the student's profile, which is not simply an account of marks or percentages

Concerns

- Lack of any consistent profiling of students' musical competencies

5.4 Practical assessment

The inspectors emphasised in their reports the importance of the performing component of the subject in both the junior and the senior cycle, pointing out that up to half the marks in the Leaving Certificate examination can be obtained for this element of the course. Schools that allowed students to experience practical assessments akin to the State examinations were commended, but this occurred in only half the schools inspected.

The inspectors commended instances where teachers first used practical assessment with students in unobtrusive ways and then introduced them to conditions similar to the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate practical examinations. This allowed students to become familiar with the process by the time they came to undertake their own examination:

> The performing component of the music syllabus is attributed significant importance by the music department. For example, on the day of the evaluation, students were invited to participate in one of many lunch-time recitals in order to, for example, gain further experience at performing under pressure.

> Students also experience practical assessments similar to those encountered in the State examinations. These methods allow for careful monitoring of a student's progress, provide sound guidelines for performance in the State examinations, and are

indicative of the commitment of the teacher to helping all students achieve their potential in Music.

The inspectors also commented that school assessment was more meaningful where a systematic approach to practical assessments was undertaken by the teachers, with the resulting mark forming part of the students' end-of-term reports.

> Formal written assessments are held for first, second, TY and fifth-year students . . . Practical activities currently do not form a percentage of these assessments. As practical work is a significant percentage of examinations in Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations, it is recommended that the music department now plan for its inclusion.

Features of good practice

- Practical activities in lessons are regularly assessed
- Practical activities form a proportion of formal assessments

Concerns

- Students rarely experience practical assessments similar to those encountered in the State examinations

Chapter 6

The quality of subject provision and whole-school support

Main findings

Music has a satisfactory profile generally in schools and in most instances is available as an option to all students.

There is a considerable gender imbalance in the uptake of Music, with significantly more girls than boys studying Music.

The range of extracurricular and other music activities available to students was mentioned as a strength in a significant majority of schools.

In general, the inspectors found that the provision and use of resources was appropriate.

The provision and, more particularly, the use of ICT in teaching and learning was limited.

The lack of an appropriate specialist area for music activities in many schools is regrettable.

Recommendations

Uptake and gender balance

Schools should regularly monitor the impact that the arrangements for subject choice have on the uptake of Music by boys in order to redress gender imbalance in the subject.

School managements should continue to monitor closely the subject choice available in the senior cycle to ensure equitable access to Music for all students.

Specialist music room

Whenever feasible, schools should consider establishing the music room in a site with sufficient space to allow for a flexible teaching area, a permanent performing area, and ample storage.

A section of the music room should be designated as a permanent performing space, to allow for a more fluid learning environment where performing, composing and listening activities may be undertaken with minimal upheaval.

As far as practicable, the use of the music room for other lessons should be minimised, to ensure more efficient co-ordination of the music department.

Where a well-resourced music teaching area is available in a school, consideration should be given to designating the area exclusively for music teaching.

Enhancement of resources, including ICT
Schools should review the resources available for Music in a regular, planned way.

Schools should plan for the acquisition, renewal and updating of resources, including suitable ICT equipment and software.

The quality of planning and preparation

Main findings
While some level of collaborative planning was in evidence in schools, inspectors' reports rarely described planning as a strength in schools.

Subject departments had recently been established in a small number of schools.

Most written plans were exclusively content-based.

Short-term, individual planning by teachers was mostly satisfactory.

The commitment of teachers and schools to the continuing professional development of teachers was evident.

Membership of the Post-Primary Music Teachers' Association was evident in half the schools visited.

Recommendations
Teachers of Music should collaborate and plan together to enhance and co-ordinate the provision of the subject in their schools. In doing so they would be building on the good individual planning already undertaken by most teachers. Collaborative planning should seek to foster co-operation in preparation for teaching and learning, the sharing of expertise and the wider use of effective teaching methods, and the use of broadly based assessment practices.

The content of the school's subject plan for Music should
• be in line with curricular requirements
• facilitate the integration of performing, composing and listening in the teaching and learning of Music
• address the needs of students regarding the State examinations but not be determined entirely or mainly by examination considerations
• consider the teaching methods to be used in the classroom and facilitate greater use of active-learning methodologies

- encourage the development of a range of learning strategies among students and ways in which students can be enabled to reflect on their own learning
- help to ensure that the school encourages broader aspects of musical development.

The school's plan for Music should be reviewed regularly and should include specific medium-term and long-term targets for the music department.

The planning process should include systematic planning for the acquisition, use and renewal of resources for the teaching of Music.

The quality of teaching and learning

Main findings
In more than half the schools visited the three curricular areas of performing, composing and listening were successfully integrated and synthesised.

A range of music-making activities was observed in the majority of schools.

Good standards of music-making were evident. Students' engagement was good, with a positive attitude towards music in the majority of schools.

In the main, resources were used effectively, but lack of use of overhead projectors or data projectors and ICT was noted in a significant number of schools.

Recommendation
Schools and teachers should strive to ensure a better balance between students' general musical development and the study of examination-related topics. This will involve the provision of more opportunities for students to experience a broad music education.

Teachers should seek to use active learning methodologies to a greater extent in music lessons.

Greater attention should be paid to integrating and synthesising the three curricular areas of performing, composing and listening in music lessons.

Students should have more opportunities to display initiative and creativity through active and collaborative learning.

The use of the overhead projector or data projector in many classrooms would allow more efficient use of teachers' time and would enhance teaching and learning.

The use of ICT should be incorporated to a greater extent in the teaching and learning of Music. Further opportunities for teachers to develop their own ICT skills would be beneficial in this regard.

School managements should continue the support that they offer for the continuing professional development of teachers of Music.

The quality of assessment

Main findings
Students displayed a high level of motivation and had a positive attitude towards Music. The observation of students' work, both practical and written, showed that the skills developed were appropriate and were of a very good standard.

A variety of homework assignments was set and monitored in the majority of schools evaluated.

The formal monitoring of students' work was inconsistent, and the profiling of their abilities and progress in the subject was limited.

Practical assessments formed a component of formal examinations in slightly less than half the schools visited.

Constructive comments provided in addition to a grade, enabling students to progress their learning, were evident in the majority of instances.

Recommendations
Schools and teachers should use both practical assessments (similar to those used in the State examinations) and the more commonly used listening and written tasks when assessing the progress of students.

Schools should maintain records of students' work and progress in the full range of music competencies.

When monitoring the work of students, teachers should use written comments (in addition to marks or grades). These comments should advise students how they can improve their own learning and progress.

Appendix

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Paynter, John (1982). *Music in the Secondary School Curriculum: Trends and Developments in Class Music Teaching.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, for the Schools Council.

Useful web sites

General education web sites

www.education.ie	Department of Education and Science
www.examinations.ie	State Examinations Commission
www.ncca.ie	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
www.sdpi.ie	School Development Planning Initiative
www.slss.ie	Second-Level Support Service
www.ncte.ie	National Centre for Technology in Education
www.scoilnet.ie	General on-line resources for schools

General information on music education

www.ppmta.ie	Post-Primary Music Teachers' Association
www.curriculumonline.gov.uk	British on-line curriculum site
www.mtrs.co.uk	Music teaching resources
www.musicteachers.co.uk	
www.musicatschool.co.uk	
www.copiable.com	
musicmoz.org/Education/Resources/	

Specific areas of music education

Sites providing specific resources for topics and themes in the music syllabuses

www.classical.net

www.queenonline.com

www.hberlioz.com

www.beatles.com

www.comhaltas.ie
www.cmc.ie
www.musicnetwork.ie
www.nch.ie
www.mididb.com (MIDI file database)
www.musicrobot.com (MIDI search engine)
www.vanbosco.com (MIDI search engine)