

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Physical Education
REPORT**

**Loreto Abbey Secondary School
Dalkey, County Dublin
Roll number: 60130C**

Date of inspection: 24 February 2010



REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Loreto Abbey Secondary School. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Physical Education 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 their teachers, examined students' work, and had discussions with 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. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Loreto Abbey Secondary School is a fee-paying school for girls with a current enrolment of 617 students. Classes are organised into mixed-ability settings. Supporting students' physical development is embedded in the school's mission statement and this is lived out through the range of supports provided for Physical Education, physical activity and sport in the school. Physical Education is provided as a core subject on the curriculum for all students. The school has recently increased the time provision for Physical Education, which is commendable. The timetable provision for all junior cycle, fifth-year and sixth-year classes, of one double period of Physical Education per week, is adequate to support the delivery of the subject. The Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools state that each student should be provided with a minimum of two hours of Physical Education per week. It is recommended, therefore, that the school continue to work towards increasing the current level of provision. The time provision for Physical Education for Transition Year (TY) classes is in line with the Department's guidelines. The timetable arrangement of this time, as a treble period per week and the concurrent timetabling of two class groups, is commended as it enables the physical education department to plan a broad programme of activities involving both on-site and external facilities, and supports an option-based modular approach to programme design.

The school has two qualified teachers of Physical Education who oversee the delivery of the programme in the school, as well as being centrally involved in the school's extracurricular physical activity and sports programme. A staff professional development policy has been established by the school, which is very good practice. Engagement in continuing professional development (CPD) is supported and encouraged by school management, who also contribute to the cost of affiliation to the Physical Education Association of Ireland (PEAI) and to the costs involved in participating in relevant courses. Teachers have undertaken significant professional development in a number of sport-specific areas and in first-aid. This commitment to professional

learning is highly commended. There has also been some engagement in the professional development programme provided by the Junior Cycle Physical Education Support Service (JCPESS). To further support the work of the physical education department in their planning and pedagogy, it would be beneficial to consult the website of the PEAI (www.peai.org) to identify the range of professional development events and courses available through the local community of practice. The JCPESS website (www.jcpe.ie) is also a useful reference to access resources that support the implementation of the revised syllabus.

School management and the trustees have been proactive in providing sports facilities to support the delivery of the physical education, physical activity and sports programmes. The facilities available include a small hall, external changing rooms, a large hard-court area and an AstroTurf pitch. These facilities are well maintained. While a new floor has been fitted in the hall to ensure a suitable and safe playing surface, the hall itself is restrictive in terms of the activities that can be undertaken due to the lack of width and the low height of the ceiling. Very good efforts are made to supplement the school's facilities and management sets aside a considerable budget for the hire of external facilities, such as a local sports hall, swimming pool and visits to outdoor adventure and education centres, to support the delivery of the physical education programme. Plans are currently being advanced to build a new sports hall on a designated site on campus. There is a strong commitment from the trustees and school management to advance this project as speedily as possible.

The subject department is well resourced with adequate equipment available to provide for all of the activity strands of the syllabus. A budget system is in place, which works well to meet the projected annual expenditure needs of delivering the planned physical education programme. The available storeroom space is very limited but is neatly arranged and organised to ensure easy access to equipment and materials. There is good access in the school to information and communication technology (ICT) and a portable system is available for use in the hall, when required. Consideration should be given to the provision of broadband access in the hall and to acquiring a number of digital video cameras, when resources permit, to support teaching and learning in Physical Education. Issues regarding the integration of this technology into teaching and learning may be addressed by consulting the website of the National Centre for Technology in Education (www.ncte.ie).

Extracurricular sport and physical activity is very well provided for by the school. A sports officer is employed, along with a number of specialist coaches, to support the involvement and development of students in a range of activities. This is a valuable resource and investment by the school in its students. The school also has a number of prefects for sport, which is an excellent initiative as it provides peer-led support and ensures that students feel intrinsically involved in the development of the sports programme and in the achievements of the school. The range of extracurricular activities includes aerobics, track and field athletics, cross-country and mountain running, basketball, cricket, hockey, sailing, soccer, swimming and tennis. The main aim of the programme is to support participation in constructive and formative training programmes that encourage students to develop their competency and enjoyment. This practice is praiseworthy as it accommodates students who may wish to maintain an active lifestyle but without the demands of a competitive environment. Participation records indicate that a significant number of students are actively involved in one or more of the sports and activities provided by the school. The physical education team, along with a number of dedicated teachers, is deeply involved in the organisation and coaching of the broad range of extracurricular physical activities available to students. Some students' achievements in some of these activities are to a very high standard, including the winning of regional and national titles.

An integrated approach is taken to promote health and well-being in the school and includes whole-school events such as a healthy eating initiative, mental health week and the annual sports fun day. It is highly commendable that staff well-being is also included with events, such as weekly yoga classes, provided. All of these positive initiatives support the social fabric and health of the school community.

The school has developed strong collaborative links with some of the sports clubs and physical activity providers in the community. These links further support students' opportunities for engagement in sport and physical activity within their own local community and promotes positive relationships between the school and the wider community. Consideration should be given by the school to applying for the Active School Flag (www.activeschoolflag.ie), which acknowledges schools that provide appropriate levels of curricular Physical Education and actively provide for and promote students' involvement in physical activity and sport in school and the community.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Significant progress has been made in the subject department planning process for Physical Education, which has resulted in a comprehensive subject plan and programmes of work for each year group. Management supports formal subject department planning meetings and teachers are afforded regular opportunities to meet and discuss the content, organisation and delivery of the programme. A subject co-ordinator is appointed and this role is rotated regularly, in line with good practice. A review of the minutes of meetings indicate that a good range of topics is discussed with tasks set and programmes agreed upon. Time should also be given during subject department meetings to discuss pedagogy, including the variety of strategies to support students' engagement in the learning process. Such strategies may include the further development of assessment for learning (AfL) practices, using the games-for-understanding approach, the integration of ICT to augment the learning process and the greater inclusion of the principles of physical development into each of the activity strands. These approaches will involve students in a variety of problem-solving tasks that include analysis and evaluation of human movement and performance. These will help to deepen students' knowledge and understanding of their functionality and the various benefits of participation in a physically active lifestyle.

The subject plan is well developed and presented, and follows the school development planning initiative (SDPI) template. A clear rationale is set out for the subject, which is appropriately set in the context of the school and the mission statement. All elements of good planning are evident in providing for the development of the subject and in the programme design and implementation. Planning for the full inclusion of students with special educational needs is commendable. It is recommended that the variety of strategies available to support the appropriate inclusion of students who may be unable to participate in the practical activities, should also be documented in the subject plan.

The programmes of work for each year group are well constructed and indicate that a relatively broad range of activities, incorporating most strands of the syllabus, are provided for. Detailed and progressive schemes of work have been developed for each activity module and are based on the achievement of identified learning outcomes, which is good practice. Consideration should be given to incorporating the rich-task approach as part of the planning process for each module. This will contribute to the assessment process and also provide students with tangible goals for their learning and establish criteria on which they can measure their success. This approach will also help to consolidate students' learning and promote their engagement in the self-assessment

process. It is also recommended that the activity strands at junior cycle be expanded to include adventure activities modules. The school grounds and facilities are ideally suited to provide for the adventure activities strand of the syllabus.

TY students are offered a broad range of diverse activities as part of their physical education programme. The provision of these activity modules on an optional basis appropriately acknowledges their maturity and their interests and gives them a sense of ownership over their choices. Many of the activities are in keeping with the aims of the TY programme and contribute to students' personal development. Some of the activity modules involve using external leisure and recreation facilities, including outdoor education centres and local sailing venues. Embedding many of the students' learning experiences in their own community setting is very good practice, as it increases students' knowledge of the various physical-activity opportunities that are accessible to them. A large majority of TY students undertake the *Gaisce* awards, which includes involvement in a variety of physical activity challenges and initiatives, which is highly commendable. TY students are also invited to review each of the activity modules provided as part of the overall programme review, which is very good practice. Consideration should be given to using a similar review process with senior cycle students. This will help to further inform the planning process and identify activities and approaches that meet the interests and needs of these students.

A good range of resources to support teaching and learning has been compiled by the physical education department including texts, DVDs and worksheets. These are centrally stored and easily accessible. A useful booklet has been developed for TY students to support their learning and to initiate the development of a personal fitness profile. A comprehensive list of useful websites that support the delivery of the various activity strands is also documented in the subject plan. There is some scope for the introduction of additional stimuli for students such as criterion-referenced video clips, task cards, posters and interactive websites. The physical education department is encouraged to identify areas in the physical education programme where the use of digital media and ICT may be used to support teaching and learning.

Very good attention is paid to health and safety issues. Details of a comprehensive audit that identifies the potential risks and hazards associated with each venue and activity, along with the steps to be taken to minimise the risk of injury, are included in the subject plan. There was good adherence to the principles of health and safety in all aspects of participation and tuition in the lessons observed.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

There was a good standard of teaching and learning in the physical education lessons observed. Thorough preparation was a feature of all lessons, with teachers having all materials and resources available prior to the beginning of the lessons. Students changed quickly and assembled in an orderly manner for their lessons. Following a roll call, teachers introduced the topic and content of the lesson. In one instance, the whiteboard was used to identify the purpose and learning outcomes of the lesson and this good practice, which is in keeping with the principles of AfL, ensured that students had a clear focus for their learning. This practice should be extended to all lessons and teachers should aim to identify the specific knowledge and skills that students should acquire and develop as a result of their engagement and learning.

In the lessons visited, the topics taught were principles of physical fitness and health-related fitness. All lessons began with comprehensive warm-up activities. These activities were well

organised and optimised the limited space available to ensure high levels of physical activity. Students completed a range of general mobility activities that promoted good body-management skills and assisted in their physiological preparation for more intense activity. There was good attention paid to joint range of motion and a variety of stretching exercises were executed with students demonstrating good technique. In the senior cycle classes, students were given responsibility to lead their peers in a systematic stretching routine, which is very good practice as it acknowledges their maturity, affirms their competency and provides them with the opportunity to demonstrate and apply their learning. Teachers should also encourage these students to talk through the techniques and describe the action of the various exercises as a means of reinforcing their anatomical and biomechanical knowledge and that of their peers. As the lessons observed were focused on the concepts of physical fitness, greater attention could have been given to incorporating basic physiology such as comparing resting, exercising and recovery heart rates into the lessons.

Lessons progressed through a series of tasks involving exercise stations or tasks designed to enhance students' understanding of a particular component of fitness. These tasks were appropriately organised and were clearly explained with some good technical instruction and demonstrations also provided. Questioning was effectively used at times and this helped to clarify and support students' understanding of the purpose and execution of the various exercises. In most cases, the time spent at each exercise station was appropriate to ensure that students could experience the exercise without becoming excessively fatigued or without losing interest. At times students would have benefited from additional resources to support their learning and such resources should be identified and developed. For example, task cards with various illustrations that demonstrate the correct technique for the execution of the circuit-training exercises could be used to aid teaching and learning. Task cards could be used to identify the stages of progression for each exercise and to set appropriately challenging targets for the successful completion of each exercise. This will assist students to select a level of complexity or intensity, from beginner to advanced, appropriate to their competency, which differentiates for the varying levels of skill and physical fitness within the class. Task cards, or the use of video, could also be used to engage students in peer-review, peer-assessment or self-assessment strategies. By applying the key technical points, outlined on the task card, students should be able to analyse their partner's execution of the selected exercises, and provide constructive feedback on how to improve subsequent performances. Involvement in this type of task would enhance students' ability to analyse and understand movement.

There was a good participation level in the lessons observed. Students were engaged throughout and teachers provided assistance, encouragement and affirmation to students as they worked through the various tasks. In a limited number of instances, students who were unable to participate in the physical activities of the lessons were asked to complete a non-participation lesson observation sheet, or to assist in the organisation of the lesson. This is good practice as it maintains these students' involvement in the physical education process, although there is some scope for the development of a greater range of resources and strategies to support these students. Teachers had established a supportive and affirming rapport with their students. Students were friendly and respectful of each other and their teachers. An inclusive, caring and supportive environment was very evident in all lessons. The use of appropriate music as part of some lessons helped to create a positive working atmosphere.

Lessons concluded with suitable cool-down activities and in some cases, reviewing the main teaching and learning points and outlining the topics to be covered in the next lesson. This good practice, which should be extended to all lessons, ensures that students view each lesson as part of a sequence that incrementally develops their learning. Some lessons included a novelty game as

part of the final set of activities, which was thoroughly enjoyed by students. In some instances, the teacher recorded students' self-rating of their participation and progress in the lesson, which is very good practice.

ASSESSMENT

Teachers maintain detailed records of students' attendance, participation and rating of their performance and progress in their lessons. A comment on Physical Education is included in school reports sent to parents. In addition, physical education teachers are available at parent-teacher meetings. Reports contain a comment to inform parents of their daughter's participation and progress in the subject.

The assessment process has been given good attention and a range of methods are used to determine the level of students' learning. The assessment process is more advanced in the TY programme where, in addition to the completion of activity module and their self-rating, students complete an assignment in small groups and make a presentation to their peers as part of their end-of-year assessment. Students also keep a record of any worksheets they complete in class, in a dedicated folder. Many of the elements of a comprehensive assessment system are in place in the school but a more cohesive and structured approach is required. The physical education department is encouraged to develop a broader range of assessment methods to reflect all aspects of students' learning, including practical performance and the completion of key assignments. Some of the methods recommended on the JCPESS website www.jcpe.ie may provide a useful reference for the further development of this work. The use of self-assessment and peer-assessment, as well as the completion of rich-tasks, will help to contribute to the development of a physical education portfolio.

Students demonstrated a good understanding of the concepts taught in the lessons observed and were informed in their responses to questions asked by the inspector at the end of the lessons. They were enthusiastic, enjoyed their lessons and are achieving to a good standard.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Management and the trustees have been proactive in providing for the delivery of the physical education, physical activity and sports programmes, which are highly regarded in the school.
- The school's plans to develop a new sports hall for its physical education, physical activity and sports programmes are commended.
- Teachers are committed to ongoing professional development, which is encouraged and supported by management.
- Significant progress has been made in the subject department planning process and a well-developed, comprehensive subject plan is in place to support the organisation and delivery of the subject.
- The quality of teaching and learning in physical education lessons observed was good and students were confident, competent and enthusiastic in their engagement.
- Teachers have established a good rapport with their students and there was a respectful, positive and affirming atmosphere evident in all lessons.

- Good progress has been made in developing the assessment process and good reporting strategies are in place in Physical Education.
- There is excellent support for extracurricular sports and the provision, involvement and achievement of students is of a high standard.

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

- It is recommended that the school work towards providing all students with two hours of Physical Education per week, in accordance with Department recommendations.
- Adventure activities should be included in the junior cycle programme.
- Consideration should be given to incorporating the rich-task approach as part of the planning process for each activity module.
- The physical education department should identify areas where additional resources may be developed to further support students' learning. There is also scope for the further integration of ICT as an aid to the teaching and learning process.
- The greater use of peer-review, where appropriate, should be considered as an additional strategy to support students' learning.
- There is scope for the expansion of the assessment process and a system of retaining elements of students' work should be considered as part of this process.

A post-evaluation meeting was held with the principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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