An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Physical Education
REPORT

Presentation Secondary School
Grogan's Road, Wexford
Roll number: 63661C

Date of inspection: 28 April 2010

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Presentation Secondary School, Wexford. 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 one day 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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Presentation Secondary School, Wexford is a voluntary secondary school for girls with a current enrolment of 684 students. Physical Education is a core subject on the curriculum for most students, with the exception of sixth-year students who opt to follow the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). Students in first year, second year and most in fifth year receive a double period of Physical Education per week, which is adequate time provision to support the delivery of a comprehensive physical education programme for these year groups. Students in the Transition Year (TY) programme are timetable for a treble period one afternoon per week, which is exemplary provision as it facilitates the organisation and delivery of a range of optional activities both on and off the school campus. The time provision for third-year, fifth-year LCVP and sixth-year students of a single period per week is significantly below the time recommended by the Department, of two hours per week. Furthermore, practical lessons of single-period duration impose significant restrictions on the possible range and depth of students' learning experiences. It is regrettable that sixth-year students who follow the LCVP are not provided with any timetabled Physical Education. The practice of reducing or withdrawing curricular time for Certificate examination students may, inadvertently, create the perception amongst students that Physical Education and engagement in physical activity is a low priority. Physical activity is essential for this age cohort and gender to develop positive attitudes and sustainable health-related lifestyle behaviours, especially at such an important stage in their development. It is recommended that management review the provision of Physical Education for all students in line with the recommendations of the Department as outlined in the *Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools*.

The physical education programme is currently delivered by three teachers who are graduates of the subject and who bring a diversity of experience and knowledge to its organisation and delivery. Teachers' commitment to ongoing professional learning is highly commended. There has been good engagement with the professional development programme provided by the Junior Cycle Physical Education Support Service (JCPESS), in addition to attendance at relevant courses

and conferences organised by the National Governing Bodies (NGB) of various sports and by the Physical Education Association of Ireland (PEAI). It is also commendable that the physical education teachers have engaged in first-aid training.

The range of facilities and resources available to support the delivery of the physical education, physical activity and sports programmes are of a high quality. A new sports hall and a large storeroom have been provided as part of the school's recent extension, in addition to the upgrading of the external hard courts and playing pitch. These facilities are well maintained. Community leisure and recreation amenities and facilities, such as a gymnasium, swimming pool, parks and beaches, are also used by the school to support the delivery of the physical education programme. This is good practice as it serves to embed students' physical-activity experiences in their local community and may increase their levels of participation in the various sports and physical activities.

The storeroom is well organised and fully equipped to deliver the planned strands of the syllabus. The requisition system for the purchase of additional and replacement items of equipment was reported to work well and management is fully supportive in this regard. Regular health and safety audits are carried out on all the sports facilities and equipment, which is good practice.

Access to information and communication technology (ICT) equipment such as computers, digital video and still cameras is available to the physical education department and there is broadband connectivity in the physical education office and sports hall. The availability of these facilities and resources provides an important mechanism to further support students' learning in Physical Education.

A good range of extracurricular sports and physical activities is organised by the school including athletics, basketball, camógie, Gaelic football, hockey, rounders and soccer. In addition, students interested in competing for the school in inter-school golf and equestrian competitions are also facilitated. The achievement of individuals and teams in some of these events is to a high standard. A number of opportunities are also provided for students, who may not feel competent, confident or interested in the competitive sports programmes, to participate in recreational activities such as aerobics and circuit-training or to take part in various in-house leagues. These events can play a significant role in encouraging students to become more physically active and to gain the many positive physical, psychological and social benefits as a result. Sports days are also organised for some year groups. It is very good practice that students in TY or LCVP are given responsibility for the organisation of these events, as this can provide valuable opportunities for the application of learning and the development of key leadership, communication and social skills. The physical education department plays a central role in the promotion and delivery of the extra-curricular activities along with several dedicated members of staff. The experience, expertise and commitment of all of these teachers in providing for the recreational and competitive sporting interests of students are highly commended.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The quality of planning in Physical Education is of a high standard. Management supports formal subject department planning meetings, which are appropriately documented. Teachers also meet daily to discuss the organisation of groups and the sharing of facilities, resources and equipment. The role of subject co-ordinator is rotated at regular intervals amongst the teachers and there was clear evidence of a collaborative approach to all aspects of planning and preparation for the physical education programme.

A comprehensive subject plan has been developed to support the organisation and delivery of the subject in the school. The junior cycle plan includes most of the activity strands of the syllabus. The planned programme provides good breadth and balance in terms of knowledge and skills that students will acquire to inform their participation in physical activity, exercise and sport.

The range of activities planned in TY provides excellent opportunities for personal development through the completion of a number of challenging modules and courses. These include a module in outdoor education involving school-based activities and a number of residential and day trips to adventure activity centres. In addition, students complete modules in aquatics, self-defence, yoga, contemporary dance, health-related fitness and first-aid. TY students are also involved in planning and implementing a number of fun activity days. The diversity of the activities and the opportunities provided all contribute to the development of students' organisational, social and leadership skills. Exposure to these activities also enhances students' understanding of their physical abilities and the range of opportunities available in their local community that may contribute to their well-being.

Providing senior students with a choice of activities is good practice as it acknowledges their maturity and gives them ownership of their physical education programme. The range of planned activities also provides them with a good balance between team games and individual activities. Consideration should be given to expanding the programme to include opportunities for students' to design and implement their own training programmes to meet their specific needs and based on the principles of fitness development. In this way students will learn to differentiate between performance and health-related fitness and to evaluate, plan, implement and assess the effectiveness of their own programmes. Students' who are actively involved in competitive sports may choose to develop specific performance-related variables, whereas sedentary students may plan to raise their activity levels and increase their basic physical fitness. Lessons should be able to accommodate students' engagement by establishing specific training zones in the sports hall or outside areas.

Detailed schemes of work are planned to support the effective delivery of many of the blocks of learning. Many of these schemes identify the learning outcomes, learning experiences, teaching methods, resources and modes of assessment. The further development of this well-structured and informative approach to planning for all activity modules is recommended. This careful and considered approach will ensure that a structured and progressive approach is taken in planning students' learning over the course of their post-primary education.

Planning for the inclusion of students with additional or special educational needs is well organised and appropriate links have been established with the learning-support department. The integration of ICT as an aid to teaching and learning, including the sourcing of resource materials from a variety of websites is commended. The continued development of this good practice is encouraged.

There was good evidence that members of the physical education department engage in constructive self-evaluation. To build on this good work, some element of student review of the physical education programme should be considered to enhance this review process.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

There was a good standard of teaching and learning in the physical education lessons observed, with students actively engaged in a range of well-planned physical activities. Following roll call, the purpose of the lessons was shared with students and good practice was observed when teachers also used the white board to identify the intended learning outcomes. This is in keeping with the principles of assessment for learning, and helps to motivate students and provide them with the criteria to evaluate their own learning. In most cases, links were created with previous lessons so that students had a sense of continuity in their learning.

Following the introduction phase, students were engaged in warm-up activities which were appropriately structured, progressing from general mobility activities to stretching activities and skill rehearsal practises. It is recommended that teachers frequently encourage students to develop their movement mechanics when performing simple mobility exercises such as skipping, side-stepping, carioca step, high knee lifts, heel raises and turning. Students should focus on their functional posture and foot plant to ensure that they develop the correct and most efficient biomechanics. This will help them to develop their kinaesthetic awareness, which is essential for good joint health and injury prevention in addition to developing their movement competence and athletic performance. Good attention was paid to anatomical references during stretching activities with clear, precise demonstrations by the teacher and guided demonstrations by students being used to good effect. Key technical points were delivered in a language that was accessible to students and which provided them with an appropriate level of detail concerning matters such as the effect of exercise on the body and the associated benefits to health and wellness.

All lessons had a clear structure and proceeded at a pace that was appropriate to students' ability levels. Questioning was used to good effect in all lessons to engage students cognitively and to develop their movement-analysis skills. Peer coaching was used in one lesson where students were asked to provide feedback to improve their partners' pitching techniques. This is a valuable strategy to engage students in critical analysis. However, when using this strategy it is recommended that students be given two to three key performance indicators as a guide to their analysis and to ensure that their feedback is clearly focused. Tasks were appropriately structured to provide students with incremental steps in acquiring and developing their mastery of the basic skills of the activity. There were some good examples of differentiated practice to accommodate students with poor co-ordination in a tennis lesson. To build on this good practice, it is recommended that teachers consider the inclusion of modified equipment, such as graduated racket heads and slower moving high-density foam tennis balls. A sport like tennis may be difficult to master for students with poor mobility and co-ordination, and the availability of scaled or modified equipment may assist them to acquire the basic skills necessary to be able to access and play the game.

Participation levels were excellent in all of the lessons observed. In one case, a student who was unable to participate in the physical activities of the lesson was appropriately included through a number of strategies such as peer observation, umpiring and assisting with the organisation of the class activities. The atmosphere in all lessons observed was excellent and it was evident that teachers endeavour to create a positive learning environment for all students. Teachers moved around the sports hall or courtyard to affirm students' efforts and to provide guidance when appropriate. Students completed all tasks with enthusiasm and applied themselves diligently.

At the end of lessons teachers used questioning effectively to reinforce the key points of the lesson, which helped to consolidate students' learning. Each teacher also outlined the content of the next lesson, which is good practice as it helps students to view their physical education lessons as part of a learning continuum rather than a series of isolated experiences. Students

demonstrated through their performance during their physical education lessons, and in their responses to questioning, that they are achieving to a good level in Physical Education.

ASSESSMENT

Teachers maintain good records of students' attendance, participation and progress in their physical education lessons. There was evidence that significant progress has been made in the development and implementation of an effective assessment system for Physical Education. Informal assessment takes place through teacher observation and questioning in class. It is commendable that the subject department has reviewed the work of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) on assessment for learning, as well as adopting JCPESS resources to assist in the assessment process. The physical education department has begun to use some assessment-for-learning strategies to help promote students' learning, which include the use of self-assessment and peer-assessment methods. A system of retaining elements of students' work has also been developed and folders are maintained for each class group. It is recommended that this system be expanded to individual files whereby students maintain their own folders, which may be stored in school, to record all elements of their work and progress.

To build on the significant progress to date, a number of assessment milestones should be identified as part of the planning process for each year group. Such milestones may include the completion of a planned number of rich tasks; specific key assignments such as a research project; a written, picture or video diary of competency development in a selected activity; and a practical performance assessment at least once per year. The communication of the assessment criteria to students, including descriptor levels of performance, should help in providing a focus for their learning as well as making the assessment process open and transparent.

Written reports on students' progress in Physical Education are sent home at Christmas and summer. Reporting to parents also takes place through the use of the student journal. The physical education teachers attend all parent-teacher meetings and are available to meet privately with parents by appointment.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The facilities and resources available to support the delivery of the physical education, school sport and physical activity programmes are of a high quality.
- Continuing professional development is promoted and fully supported by management.
- A high standard of planning and preparation was evident for all aspects of the organisation and delivery of the physical education programme.
- There was a good standard of teaching and learning in the physical education lessons observed. Students' learning was developed in an incremental manner and in a positive, respectful and affirming environment.
- Lessons were purposeful, challenging and well structured and were paced commensurate with students' age and ability.
- Significant progress has been made in the development and implementation of an effective assessment system for Physical Education.
- A good range of diverse sports and physical activities are provided as part of the school's extracurricular programme.

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

- It is recommended that management review the provision of Physical Education for all students in line with the recommendations of the Department as outlined in the *Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools.*
- Some element of student review of their physical education programme should be considered to enhance this planning process.
- To develop their movement competency and efficiency, students should be frequently reminded and encouraged to focus on their movement mechanics.
- Students should be given specific key performance indicators as a guide to their analysis when using peer-review as a strategy to enhance learning.
- To build on the assessment process, a number of assessment milestones should be identified as part of the planning process for each year group.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the subject teachers and also 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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