An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Physical Education
REPORT

Rosary College
Armagh Road, Crumlin, Dublin 12
Roll number: 60841M

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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 Rosary College, conducted as part of a whole school evaluation. 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 and deputy principal.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Physical Education is a core subject on the curriculum in Rosary College and enjoys a valued status in the school. This is reflected in the timetable provision, the deployment of teachers and the support provided for the extra-curricular physical activity and sports programmes.

The school is commended for providing a minimum of a double period of Physical Education for all students. This provides adequate time for students to engage fully in lesson activities and to enjoy a meaningful learning experience. The provision of two hours of Physical Education per week for first-year and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) students is in line with the recommendations of the Department of Education and Skills. Management should continue to work towards ensuring that every student has access to two hours of Physical Education per week, as outlined in the *Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools.*

The physical education programme is delivered by two teachers who are graduates of the subject. Recent efforts to employ a substitute teacher with recognised physical education qualifications were unsuccessful. However, short-term arrangements have been made to continue the physical education programme with a substitute teacher. Whilst this is not ideal, it ensures that students affected by this situation continue to be provided with timetabled classes and experience a range of structured physical activities and sports. It is commendable that only activities that do not present a high health and safety risk are taught by the substitute teacher. Concurrent timetabling for some classes ensures that these students also receive tuition from the qualified physical education teacher as classes are rotated between teachers.

Physical Education teachers have been supported by management to attend in-service training provided by the Junior Cycle Physical Education Support Service (JCPESS). A number of significant challenges that impact on students' engagement and participation in the physical education programme have been identified by the physical education department. In response to these issues, a member of the physical education department applied for involvement in the Urban Schools Initiative (USI), which was established by the JCPESS, to provide professional support for teachers in similar circumstances and facing similar challenges. This proactive and self-reflective approach is highly commended. It is recommended that the physical education department, as a team, should share this involvement. This will ensure familiarity with the

learning experiences and initiatives arising from involvement in this important aspect of professional development.

A system is in place to support the purchase of additional or replacement resources or equipment. There is no a dedicated storeroom, but the physical education department optimises the use of several presses, shelving and corner space to store all of the resources and equipment. The facilities to support the delivery of the physical education programme, including the dressing rooms, are quite restrictive. The school has a small indoor hall, with a timber floor. Some of the floor boards are chipped or loose and these should be repaired as soon as possible to prevent accidents. The school dressing rooms and access to these facilities are also restrictive. There is a large outdoor hard court area and a small grass area, which are adequate to support a number of physical activities. The surface of the hard court should be brushed periodically to ensure that it remains free of grit and other trip hazards. Resources permitting, the school should consider relining the markings for various sports on the court areas, including the indoor hall. This measure will help to improve the appearance and functionality of the playing areas. Furthermore, broadband access should be extended to the hall and a whiteboard erected to support teaching and learning.

Involvement in sport and physical activity is promoted and supported by the school and a variety of extra-curricular sports and activities is provided for the students. These sports include athletics, basketball, camógie, Gaelic football, hurling, netball and soccer. Of particular note is the provision of dance classes that encourage students, including those who may not be competitively orientated, to engage in physical activity. Photographic displays of school teams, including those successful at national level, provide positive affirmation of students' efforts and enhances their identity with the school. The involvement of the physical education teachers, along with several other staff members and external coaches, in the organisation and coaching of the range of activities is highly commended.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The quality of planning for the physical education programme is of a high standard. Appropriate structures are in place to provide opportunities for formal subject department planning meetings during the year. A subject convenor has been appointed on a voluntary basis and the responsibility for planning is shared amongst the teachers.

The subject plan for Physical Education is a comprehensive and focused document reflecting considerable effort on the part of the physical education department. Good use is made of the planning framework developed by the JCPESS and the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI). All aspects related to the organisation and delivery of the subject are outlined in the subject plan. The subject plan contains appropriate information on the distinctive school context and identifies the aims and objectives of the physical education programme and how it aspires to contribute to the educational development of each student. Planning for the full inclusion of students with special educational needs is commendable.

Detailed programmes of work have been developed for each year group. The level of detail in preparing these plans is exemplary, including schemes of work for each module and accompanying lesson plans to support teaching and learning of each unit of work. The schemes of work clearly identify the desired learning outcomes, the learning experiences, the resources required, the appropriate methodologies and the modes of assessment. The development and incorporation of the rich task approach into the planned schemes of work is highly commended, as these identify tangible goals for students to demonstrate their learning. The planned

programme of activities is in line with the syllabus requirements, within the resources and facilities at the school's disposal.

To build on the excellent planning work undertaken, it is recommended that the physical education department now focus on pedagogy. This will ensure that the planned programmes of work can be implemented fully in practice and manifested in the quality of learning experiences provided for the students. The range of appropriate pedagogical strategies should be aligned to the learning outcomes of the planned units of work. Strategies should provide students with opportunities to develop their individual competency by setting high expectations for their engagement and performance. They should also provide opportunities for students to apply their learning and to lead learning. For example, students should be given responsibility for warm-up practices, for involving their peers in movement analysis and for providing constructive feedback to them. It is acknowledged that teachers currently use a wide variety of strategies to engage students, to promote their participation and to support their learning. However, there is a need for a concentrated approach to planning for the constructive use of these strategies. This will help to establish a pattern of engagement and achievement, which will contribute to the motivation and willingness of students to participate in the programme.

Participation levels in the physical education programme are relatively low and the physical education department is endeavouring to identify and overcome students' lack of engagement in the programme provided. Considerable thought has been given to the inclusion of students who may be unable or unwilling to participate in the practical activities. From discussions with students and a review of school documentation, it appears that adherence to and enforcement of wearing the school physical education uniform is often time-consuming and a source of conflict. Whilst a focus on ensuring that students have the appropriate school physical education uniform is commendable, it may be more beneficial that students have appropriate attire for physical activity. The issuing of detention and exclusion from class should be avoided as this often alienates students further from the physical education and activity environment. The inclusion of these students should be encouraged by teachers through careful and structured planning. Focused peer-review, video recording or digital photography to support movement analysis, and umpiring are a few strategies that are often successful. It is important in the context of the school that students are actively involved in the physical education process rather than being passive or excluded from class activities. Including a review of students' experiences of their physical education programme and their preferences may also contribute to the planning process.

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 list of useful websites that support the delivery of the various activity strands is also documented in the subject plan. The physical education department is encouraged to identify areas in the physical education programme where the use of digital media and information and communications technology (ICT) may be used to support teaching and learning. Furthermore, additional biofeedback and monitoring equipment such as heart-rate monitors and pedometers may be useful to support elements of the planned programmes and support students learning of physiological principles and response to physical activity.

Good attention has been paid to health and safety issues and these are documented in the subject plan. To build on this good work, it is recommended that a risk assessment be conducted of all the playing surfaces including the hall floor, the dressing rooms, any protruding edges and the hard court surface. Procedures to minimise the risk of injury should be aligned to each of the hazards identified.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Lessons were well prepared with all the necessary equipment and materials available prior to the arrival of the students. Attendance and participation records were taken prior to the commencement of lessons. The level of attendance in some of the lessons observed was poor, while in other lessons some students were unable or unwilling to participate in the practical activities. This is a challenging situation for the physical education teachers and requires a concerted effort to try and establish high patterns of involvement. The benefits of involvement in physical activity are well documented and it is essential that the curriculum time devoted to Physical Education is availed of by all students. A systematic approach should be taken to ensure that students who are unable or unwilling to participate in the practical activities are appropriately included in the lesson. Strategies that involve these students in the physical education process through officiating, analysing movement, supervising the execution of set tasks and the provision of formative feedback to peers and the class group are some examples that have been found to be beneficial in this regard. The involvement of students in researching specific aspects of physical activity, surveying their class about their preferences for activities, focusing on the development of their personal competency and progress, may help to increase interest and participation levels and further inform the planning process to meet the needs of students. Programme design that ensures an appropriate balance between competitive and non-competitive games and activities and that focuses more on students' personal development may also help to improve participation levels.

Lessons commenced with the teachers introducing the topic of the lesson to the students. It is recommended that the key learning outcomes of the lesson also be communicated to students at the outset. This will help to provide students with a focus and tangible targets for their learning in terms of the knowledge and skills that they are expected to acquire and develop. The availability of a whiteboard in the hall would be useful for this purpose and also to highlight some of the important points of the lesson.

Warm-up activities were conducted in all lessons observed. In many cases, the initial activities were of a high intensity and anaerobic in nature. Such activities lead to the early onset of fatigue and a noticeable reduction in the level of activity of students. The purpose, structure and placement of the warm-up physical activities should therefore, be reviewed to ensure that they follow sound physiological principles and appropriately prepare students for the main class tasks. Sprint type and competitive activities are best placed towards the end of the warm-up when students are physiologically prepared for more intense activity. In some instances, students completed stretching exercises as part of the warm-up and were able to link these exercises to the specific joint and muscle groups involved, which is beneficial to their understanding of basic anatomy. Good practice was observed when some students led the stretching exercises and demonstrated and explained the correct techniques to their peers. The greater use of this approach to class tasks is recommended, as it provides opportunities for students to apply their learning and develop a deeper understanding of the topic, in addition to enhancing their self-esteem through developing leadership, communication and inter-personal skills.

In the lessons observed the topics were health-related fitness and basketball, team challenges, athletics, completion of projects on leisure and recreation facilities available in the local community and novelty games. The concepts involved in these topics were very worthwhile and provided students with opportunities to learn valuable and transferable skills. However, these concepts were not explicitly identified or developed. While students enjoyed these activities and many found them physically challenging, the pedagogy employed failed to focus on the quality of

students' engagement in the tasks and on their learning of the important concepts underpinning their participation. A greater use of strategies that involve students cognitively in their lessons is required. Questioning should also be used more often and focus on developing and assessing students' understanding of the key concepts, and the technical and tactical aspects of the lesson.

While it is acknowledged that some students may present with challenging behaviour, there is a need to establish higher expectations from students in terms of their adherence and compliance to the tasks set. This should be achieved by providing opportunities for co-operative or skill practices to allow students to rehearse the requirements of the tasks prior to engaging in competitive situations. These opportunities will enable students to develop their understanding of the task set, to practice the required skills and to improve their competency and also to establish how best to complete the task. For example, students would have benefitted from time to discuss and establish how best to complete the various team challenges and to practice their strategies prior to competing against another team. By providing time for students to work through the task, the inherent concepts of effective communication, co-operation, the roles and responsibilities could be identified and applied to developing a successful team strategy to complete the various tasks. Similarly in another lesson, students were required to complete a relay consisting of four skill-based tasks, with a set number of repetitions to be completed for each task. Students were placed into teams, which then competed against each other to complete the relay. Rather than having teams race against each other initially, these students would have benefitted from opportunities to practice the required skills and complete the task under certain conditions that focused on the technical execution of the skills and the completion of the desired number of repetitions. This would have resulted in greater adherence to the set task, whilst also providing a focus for students to improve their competency.

All lessons had a strong emphasis on providing high levels of physical activity for students and teachers made good efforts to ensure that their students stayed on task throughout. Good relationships were evident between the teachers and their students. Individual attention was given to students when required and their efforts were often affirmed. Teachers also encouraged students to observe the rules of behaviour and health and safety instructions, to which the attention of the students was drawn from the outset.

Cool-down activities were conducted in some lessons and brief questioning was used to recapitulate on the main activities of the lesson. The greater use of this practice is recommended to ensure that students' learning of key concepts is consolidated and to ensure that students gain a sense of progression from their engagement.

ASSESSMENT

Good consideration has been given to the development and implementation of an effective approach to assessment in Physical Education. The completion and retention of a personal profile and worksheets by each student in an individual folder is good practice. Involvement in the implementation of the revised junior cycle Physical Education syllabus has seen the planned introduction of self and peer-assessment methods, and the completion of rich tasks for some classes, which is commendable. Students following the LCA Leisure and Recreation programme are required to complete key assignments for each activity module and to maintain folders for their work. There is a need to address the fact that when questioned many of the students in the LCA programme were unsure of which modules they had completed and did not have their folders in class. To further develop the assessment process, it is recommended that the assessment system be extended to develop student portfolios of learning and to include a number of key events such as the completion of planned rich tasks and a practical performance at least once per

year. The assessment process should be informed by the key learning outcomes identified for each year group. The physical education department should work towards identifying descriptors of performance levels that can be used to formally assess students' learning in practical activities. Sharing the criteria for assessment with students and the descriptors of performance levels will also enhance the assessment process.

Teachers maintain records of attendance and participation for each physical education class. The physical education department attends all parent-teacher meetings and a comment on students' attainment in Physical Education is included in formal reports to parents at Christmas and summer, all of which is commendable.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Physical Education is provided as a core subject for all students.
- Management has supported teachers' engagement in ongoing professional development and there has been good involvement with the Junior Cycle Physical Education Support Service.
- There was evidence of a strong commitment to providing for the physical activity and sporting needs of students.
- 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 lessons observed had a strong emphasis on providing high levels of physical activity for students and teachers made good efforts to ensure that students stayed on task throughout.
- Teachers have established a good rapport with their students and there was a respectful 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.
- Sport is an important feature of school life and there is a good commitment by teachers to organise and coach school teams involving a significant number of students.

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

- The school is encouraged to work towards providing Physical Education for all students in accordance with the recommendations of the Department of Education and Skills.
- To build on the very good subject department planning to date, future planning should now focus on establishing key learning outcomes for each year group; aligning planned learning experiences with effective pedagogy; the implementation of strategies to engage students who are unable or unwilling to participate in the practical activities; and the expansion of the assessment process.
- Involvement in the Urban Schools Initiative professional development programme should be shared by all members of the physical education department.
- A health and safety audit should be conducted on all facilities and procedures. Resources permitting, consideration should be given to relining the court markings and to the placement of a whiteboard in the hall to support teaching and learning.

- Intended learning outcomes should be shared with students at the start of lessons, and a greater use of strategies that engage students cognitively, including higher-order questioning, should be employed when appropriate.
- The purpose, structure and placement of warm-up physical activities should be reviewed.
- High expectations should be set for students in their adherence and compliance to all tasks set.
- Further development of the assessment process is recommended.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the principal and the deputy principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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