An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Physical Education
REPORT

The Abbey School
Tipperary Town,
County Tipperary
Roll number: 65490L

Date of inspection: 9 December 2015

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	9 December 2015
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal and teachers • Interaction with students	• Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning observed was very good with students interested and engaged in all lessons.
- High quality questioning by teachers facilitated a very good level of student understanding.
- Provision for Physical Education in Transition Year (TY) is particularly strong with opportunities provided for students to acquire a range of sports organisational and leadership skills.
- There is a very healthy provision of extracurricular sport and physical activity in the school.
- The school has two qualified teachers of Physical Education and one other teacher involved in the delivery of the subject.
- An extensive, wide-ranging programme of activities has been planned in Physical Education.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Reporting in Physical Education should focus on student's learning rather than performance in fitness tests.
- All physical education lessons should be taken by teachers who hold qualifications in the subject recognised by the Teaching Council.
- An assessment of practical performance in Physical Education should take place once per year for all year groups.

INTRODUCTION

The Abbey School is an all-boys secondary school under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust. The school is located in Tipperary town and has an enrolment of 436 students in the current school year. The school offers the Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme as well as an optional Transition Year (TY) programme to its students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning observed during the evaluation was very good. Particularly impressive were the opportunities which were provided to students to engage in peer learning and to provide feedback to each other using aspects of assessment for learning (AfL). The high quality of demonstrations provided by both teachers and students and the clear, concise instructions provided by teachers, were also a considerable aid to students' learning.
- The quality of student learning was very good in all lessons with the standard of play in a hurling lesson and a rugby lesson, during very inclement weather, being particularly good. Lessons proceeded at an appropriate pace and, through high-quality questioning and keen observation of students' performances, teachers were very alert to changes that had to be made to tasks set or conditions attached to games, to ensure a very positive learning experience.
- Clear introductions to lessons, together with efficient recapping and affirmation of students' efforts at the end of lessons, helped to provide coherence to the learning experience. It is suggested that, in addition to sharing of lesson content at the start of lessons, the sharing of the learning intention with students should also take place. This can be very effective in promoting self-reflection among students.
- Tasks set for students ensured high levels of activity in all lessons. However, it is recommended that some differentiation in tasks set, to allow for a variety of responses and varying levels of ability, be incorporated into lessons. This is preferable to differentiating at the level of lesson content, whereby students of differing ability levels cover different material, as happened during one lesson.
- There were positive and clearly established classroom routines in place which aided the smooth running of lessons. Students willingly assisted, often without a direct request from teachers, in the setting up and storing of equipment. The assistance provided by TY students, participating in the school's sports management programme, was beneficial in this regard.
- Classroom atmosphere was very positive in all lessons. Students were very well engaged by the learning experiences provided and clearly enjoyed participating in lessons. Students co-operated fully with their peers and their teachers.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is good provision for Physical Education on the school's timetable with all year groups having access to a double-period of the subject each week.

- Sport and physical activity are given a very high priority in the school and the commitment of management and teachers in this regard is clearly evident. The school's extensive range of co-curricular and extracurricular physical activities is particularly commendable.
- There are good whole-school structures in place for reporting in Physical Education and it is positive to note that the subject features on written reports. The use of fitness testing as a basis for reporting in Physical Education should be reconsidered, however. Where such tests are used, they should have a developmental rather than a competitive focus whereby the emphasis is on the helping the individual to understand their performance in relation to their own growth and maturation rather than in competition with their peers. This helps to ensure that learning, rather than absolute performance, is emphasised as the main purpose of these fitness tests.
- The facilities and resources available for the teaching of Physical Education are very good, with the lack of a suitable indoor facility being the only shortcoming. However, it is positive to note that the school's plans for the development of a physical education hall are well advanced at this stage. It is also positive to note that the school makes use of locally available facilities, notably the local swimming pool and sports complex, as required.
- Despite the strong commitment and positive contribution that many teachers are making to the culture of health and physical activity in the school, it is recommended that all physical education lessons are taken only by teachers who hold qualifications in the subject recognised by the Teaching Council.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- There is a very good subject plan in place and an extensive range of activities feature on the school's physical education curriculum.
- A wide range of innovative activities has been planned in TY including the Physical Education/Sports Management programme in which all TY students participate. While the aims and objectives of this programme are well-considered and laudable, care should be taken to ensure that activities in which students are involved continue to have an educational emphasis.
- It is positive to note that planning has incorporated opportunities for student choice, particularly at senior cycle. In order to further develop student autonomy, the use of the rich task approach should be considered as a teaching methodology. This could be incorporated into a developmental section of the subject plan.
- Individual lessons benefited from thorough, considered planning which ensured a positive learning experience for all students.
- The school should incorporate an assessment of practical performance in Physical Education once per year for all students. The success criteria for such an assessment event should be shared with students in advance, and results should be used as a basis for providing formative feedback to students and reporting to parents.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

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Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

We welcome the very positive report which endorses the quality of teaching and learning, extra-curricular provision, cross-curricular provision, planning and whole school support for our physical education department in the abbey school as experienced by the inspectorate.

In particular we are very pleased that the inspectorate highlighted the positive classroom atmosphere, high level of student engagement and enjoyment experienced by the students which accurately represents what happens on a daily basis within the subject.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

1. Reporting

Rather than reporting the results of the "Beep Test" to parents, physical education reporting in future will focus more on student learning as part of a classroom activity.

2. Qualified Teachers

The principal will where possible assign a qualitied teacher to teach all physical education classes. As retirements occur into the future it is the school's intention to recruit another physical education teacher.

3. Assessment of Practical Performance.

The physical education department will introduce a once per year practical performance assessment which will be report to parents as part of the existing student reporting system.