

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Physical Education
REPORT**

**Saint Columba's College
Whitechurch, Dublin 16
Roll number: 60320H**

Date of inspection: 08 October 2010



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	08 October 2010
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discussion with the warden• Informal discussions with teachers• Review of documents and records	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Examination of students' work• Interaction with students• Observation of teaching and learning• Feedback to the warden and teachers

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main findings of the evaluation:

- The quality of teaching and learning in the physical education lessons observed was of a good standard, with instances of exemplary practice.
- All of the physical education lessons were well organised, appropriately structured and paced to suit the ability levels of students.
- A positive and affirming atmosphere was evident in all lessons and students were encouraged to participate to the best of their ability.
- An excellent range of facilities, resources and equipment are available to support students' learning and the delivery of the planned programmes of work.
- Sport and physical activity are core elements of the educational experience of all students in the school.
- Exemplary structures are in place to support a collaborative approach to subject department planning, which is of a high standard. The planned programmes of work provide students with a diverse range of learning experiences.

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

- Physical education lessons should be delivered by appropriately qualified teachers to ensure an appropriate level of technical expertise and instruction.
- Management should review the provision of Physical Education as an optional subject for fifth-year and sixth-year students and work towards providing the subject for all students in line with the recommendations of the Department of Education and Skills.
- The programme of work for each year group should be underpinned by key learning outcomes. The number of activity modules in each year group should be reduced to ensure greater depth of learning in each of the core areas of experience.
- The expansion of the assessment process is recommended to include a number of key milestones, based on the identified learning outcomes for each year group.

INTRODUCTION

St Columba's College is a co-educational fee-paying school, with a current enrolment of 295 students. The majority of the students are full time boarders. The school runs a six-day curricular programme. Physical Education is a core curricular subject for first-year and second-year students and is also a core element for third-year students, but is provided outside of the formal curriculum. Students in the optional Transition Year (TY) programme are provided with a seven-week module of Physical Education. The subject is provided as an option for fifth-year and sixth-year students. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation; the board chose to accept the report without response.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The quality of teaching and learning in the physical education lessons observed was generally of a good standard, with instances of exemplary practice. All lessons were very well planned and teachers have established a systematic approach to the organisation of their lessons. Equipment and resources required for the lessons were readily available and this prior preparation ensured that lessons progressed efficiently. Students assembled promptly and in an orderly manner for roll call and demonstrated good adherence to the established protocols for the commencement of lessons.

Teachers shared the content and direction of the lesson with their students and the board was well used for this purpose. Previous learning was revisited and this helped to provide a context for students and promoted a sense of continuity and progression in their learning. Good practice was observed when the teacher explicitly outlined the intended learning outcomes for students, which were displayed on the board and written in terms of the knowledge and skills that students were expected to develop as a result of their engagement. Effective questioning was then used to assess students' understanding of the purpose of the lesson and to clarify the criteria for successful learning. The extension of this practice to all lessons is recommended.

The practical components of the lessons commenced with a series of warm-up activities. Students were given responsibility to lead their peers and teachers ensured that appropriate anatomical references were correctly applied to indicate the joint and muscle groups targeted by each of the selected exercises. When demonstration was used by the teacher it was of a high quality, accompanied by clear and informative teaching points to provide students with a visual representation and the kinaesthetic cues to enhance their performance. Some basic physiological references were also made in one lesson, which greatly enhanced students understanding of the role of the warm-up and the acute and chronic impact of physical activity on their functionality and well-being. Teachers are commended for giving students the responsibility to lead their peers, as this good practice helps to promote their confidence, affirm their competence and challenges them to develop effective leadership and communication skills. To further enhance this practice, teachers should assist students to develop a number of general mobility and activity specific warm-up routines, which differentiate for the diverse range of fitness and motor abilities in the class group, and which can be selected and applied to a variety of activity situations as appropriate.

A range of effective teaching strategies was used in the lessons, which ensured that students were actively engaged in their learning and remained on task throughout. Appropriate work-to-rest ratios ensured that students had sufficient opportunities to develop their competency in the

focused tasks while also having time to reflect on their performance and to observe their peers. Effective questioning was an integral component of the lessons and was successfully used to assess students' knowledge and understanding of their participation and performance. Lessons also succeeded in promoting students' ability to analyse their own performance and that of their peers to perform the focused skills and tasks. Best practice was observed when the criteria on which to assess performance were clearly outlined to students, which ensured a higher quality and more informed response. Seeking feedback from students to improve the organisation of tasks and conditioned games was also most effective and increased students' sense of ownership of the learning process. The increased use of these assessment-for-learning strategies, including self-assessment and peer-assessment, whenever appropriate, is recommended. When assessing students' competency to perform a technically challenging skill such as a backward roll, particularly one that may impose a risk of injury, it is important that students are instructed carefully through staged progressions from simple to more complex movement patterns.

Lessons were well structured and paced. The structure of the lessons ensured that students were afforded regular opportunities to acquire skills and apply their learning in the appropriate context, either in producing a sequence in gymnastics or in situational-based practices in the game setting. This good practice assisted students in their understanding of the relevance of the focused skills and strategies in the overall performance of the game or sequence of movement. Conditioned games in rugby helped students to develop their overall sense of the game, as they were both physically and cognitively involved in the activity through perceiving and decision-making, whilst simultaneously developing their technical competence. The use of this games-for-understanding approach is a useful strategy to provide students with an appropriate context for their learning.

Students demonstrated a very good work ethic and were diligent in their application to all of the tasks and challenges set by their teachers. Teachers assigned and recorded an effort mark for each student based on his or her response to the class tasks and for level of effort and engagement. This very good practice contributes to the physical education department's assessment process.

Lessons concluded with a series of effective questioning to recapitulate on the main activities and to consolidate students' learning. Teachers also indicated the topic of the next lesson, which is good practice as it further reinforces students' sense of continuity in their learning. Teachers have established a positive rapport with their students and all aspects of classroom management and interactions were conducted in a most respectful manner. Students are achieving very well in Physical Education and a high level of enthusiasm and engagement was observed in all cases.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

The physical education programme is delivered by three teachers, one of whom holds recognised qualifications in the subject. The commitment of all teachers to the provision of the physical education, physical activity and games programmes in the school is acknowledged and highly commended. However, it is best practice for health and safety reasons and for the quality of delivery and experiences of students that all lessons are taught by an appropriately qualified physical education teacher. Therefore it is recommended that the school work towards a situation where all physical education lessons are taught by such a professional.

Management is fully supportive of teachers' engagement in continuing professional development (CPD). There has been good engagement with the in-service programme of professional

development for the implementation of the revised junior cycle physical education syllabus, in addition to a number of sports-specific coaching courses provided by the relevant national governing bodies. Consideration should also be given by the physical education department to participation in the professional development programme provided by the local community of practice of the PEAI (www.peai.org).

The structure of the school day at St. Columba's extends beyond the formal curriculum, with a comprehensive physical-activity and games programme provided for all students every afternoon, including Saturdays. It is expected that all students, both boarders and day students, participate fully in the planned daily programmes for their respective year groups. A high level of participation was reported, which ensures that the physical activity needs and interests of students are very well provided for. While acknowledging the exemplary level of provision for physical activity and games for all students, the level of provision for Physical Education as part of the formal curriculum should be reviewed, particularly at third year and senior cycle. A distinction should be made between the co-curricular games programmes and Physical Education. Students should be afforded the opportunity, through the formal curriculum, to develop a full and complete understanding of their physical functionality and the factors that underpin engagement in physical activity, exercise and sport. The extensive co-curricular programmes provide valuable opportunities for students to apply their learning and therefore complement, but should not replace, the physical education programme. It is recommended that the school works toward providing Physical Education on the formal curriculum for all students in line with the recommendations of the Department of Education and Skills, as outlined in the *Rules & Programme for Secondary Schools*.

Items of equipment are purchased through a requisition system. An excellent range of equipment is available to support the delivery of the planned programmes of activities. The dedication of a section of the school library to sport and physical activity is highly commended as it further informs students' participation, interest and motivation. There is good access to information and communication technology (ICT), including media players, digital cameras and broadband access.

An excellent and extensive range of outdoor and indoor facilities and resources, of the highest standard, are available in the school to support the provision and delivery of the physical education, physical activity and sports programmes. An expansive and stimulating environment supports students' engagement and learning, through both their curricular and co-curricular programmes. The trustees and management of the school deserve high praise for their commitment to providing and maintaining a campus of the highest quality.

A large number of clubs and societies have been established in the school to support students' interests in sporting, cultural and artistic pursuits. The organisation and involvement of students in the physical-activity and games programmes in the school is exemplary. Sport is highly valued and contributes to the positive atmosphere in the school and to a strong sense of school identity and affinity among students. The diversity of sports and activities, including both team and individual sports, health and fitness and non-competitive recreational activities, ensures that all students are supported to experience a wide range of activities, and to excel in their chosen sport or to enjoy physical activity for its many intrinsic and social benefits. Detailed organisation and co-ordination is required to ensure the effective implementation of the school's competitive sports programmes, with in excess of 350 fixtures per year. A number of additional personnel are also employed by the school to support students' engagement in the various co-curricular physical activity and sports programmes. The commitment of all involved in the promotion, organisation and delivery of the co-curricular programmes is highly commended.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Exemplary structures are in place to support the physical education subject department planning process. These include the appointment of a subject department co-ordinator and the timetabling of a common period on the teachers' weekly timetables to facilitate formal meetings to discuss and plan all aspects of the organisation and delivery of the subject. This very good practice also helps to ensure that appropriate guidance is given by the qualified physical education teacher to inform and support the work of the other teachers in the delivery of the programme.

The work of the physical education department is appropriately documented and a subject plan has been developed, which is of a high standard. This comprehensive plan addresses all elements related to the organisation and delivery of both the curricular physical education and co-curricular physical-activity and sports programmes. The plan is contextualised to the ethos and policies of the school, sets out the aims and objectives of the programmes and identifies the personnel, the relevant subject department policies including assessment and the effective inclusion of students with additional educational needs. A detailed subject department health-and-safety policy has been developed to include both the facilities and procedures to ensure the health and welfare of all participants in the programmes. A policy on ICT use in Physical Education has been developed. Consideration should be given to expanding this meaningful document to identify how ICT may be integrated into the teaching and learning process. The use of ICT should aim to enhance students' ability to analyse and interpret movement and to improve their movement competency.

The programmes of work for each year group are clearly outlined in the subject plan and each activity module is supported by a detailed scheme of work. The schemes of work ensure that students' learning is developed incrementally and provide a clear framework for the organisation of the learning experiences. While an extensive range of activities is provided and their delivery is well planned, consideration should be given to reducing the number of activity modules in each year group to ensure greater depth of learning in each of the core areas of experience. To build on the good work undertaken to date, it is recommended that the subject department also identify the key learning outcomes for each year group and activity modules and align these with the appropriate teaching and learning and assessment strategies.

A brief document has been drafted and included in the subject plan to identify the developmental plans for the subject department and include improving the curricular provision and the provision of additional equipment to support the delivery of the subject. Additional areas such as pedagogy and resources and strategies to support teaching and learning should also be considered as part of the subject department's future discussions and planning.

Planning for assessment is well advanced with a clear system in place for recording and reporting on students' progress. Teachers maintain detailed records of students' attendance and participation in their physical education lessons. Assessment grades are generated on a fortnightly basis to report on students' effort and attainment in class, with comprehensive formal reports sent to parents on three occasions per year. The frequency of monitoring and reporting is exemplary. To enhance the existing assessment process, it is recommended that the subject department also identify a number of key formal assessment milestones for each year group. These should be based on the identified learning outcomes for each year group and may include a practical performance, a project or key assignment and an assessment of students' physical education portfolio, personal profile or record of activities undertaken over the course of the year.

CONCLUSION

A summary of the draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation was presented to the warden and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. These were discussed with the inspector.

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