An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Physical Education
REPORT

St Dominic’s Secondary School
Kylemore Road, Ballyfermot, Dublin 12
Roll number: 60720A

Date of inspection: 28 September 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

- Learning and teaching in the lessons observed was good overall.
- Lessons were well planned and delivered with some good developmental tasks to improve students’ movement ability and skill competency and confidence.
- The majority of students were enthusiastic and participated well in the planned tasks.
- Physical Education is adequately timetabled for classes who receive the subject; however, it is regrettable that the subject is not timetabled for all students.
- Very good efforts are made by the school community to promote students’ health and well-being through a range of initiatives, including regular opportunities to participate in a number of extra-curricular sports and physical activities.
- Good progress has been made in developing a comprehensive subject plan.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Management should work towards providing Physical Education for all students, in accordance with the recommendations of the Department of Education and Skills.
- When structuring skill-based tasks consideration should be given to optimising the space and resources available and to ensuring an appropriate work-to-rest ratio.
- The provision of additional opportunities for students to lead their peers and to regularly contribute to the review of their physical education programmes should be considered.
- The further development of a systematic approach to the assessment process should be undertaken.
INTRODUCTION

St. Dominic’s Secondary School, Ballyfermot, is a voluntary secondary school for girls with a current enrolment of 376 students. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative. It provides a broad range of curricular programmes to meet the educational needs of its students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- In the lessons observed, the quality of teaching and learning was good overall.
- The topic, content and intended learning outcomes of the lessons were clearly outlined at the outset. This good practice, which is in keeping with the principles of Assessment for Learning (AFL) helped to provide a context and direction for students’ engagement.
- One lesson involved students in the Transition Year Programme (TY) travelling to a nearby centre that provides tuition in adventure activities. This kayaking lesson, which took place on a local canal, was excellently organised in all aspects of transport to and from the venue, readiness of equipment and resources and the preparation of students to engage in the planned learning experiences. The practical activities on the water ensured a high level of engagement and provided students with very meaningful opportunities to develop their competency, confidence and interpersonal skills in a challenging environment. This activity was appropriately facilitated and proved highly educational and enjoyable for students.
- Initial warm-up activities in the games lesson were appropriately structured to ensure that students were prepared for the developmental tasks of the lesson. The demonstration of stretching exercises helped to ensure that most students rehearsed the relevant movement patterns in a mechanically efficient manner. Consideration should be given to providing students with opportunities to lead their peers in some aspects of the warm-up, where appropriate. This would encourage students to apply their previous learning and increase their sense of ownership and responsibility for their learning. This would also consolidate their understanding of movement terminology, basic physiological responses to physical activity and the components of an effective warm-up, in addition to improving their functional movement competency.
- Demonstration was used to good effect by the teacher and provided students with a visual reference and criteria on which to gauge their own performance. Developmental tasks worked best when there was an optimal work-to-rest ratio, short focused instructions and clear performance outcomes. This also reduced the challenges to classroom management. Some tasks would have benefitted from optimising the space available to provide more opportunities for students to acquire and apply their skills.
- Questioning was used effectively to engage students and to assess their understanding. A particularly positive feature was inviting students to provide feedback to the teacher on what worked well and what students felt should be improved. The further development of this strategy is encouraged as it contributes to a sense of shared ownership of the learning process.
- Good records are maintained of students’ attendance and participation in their physical education lessons. While participants engaged well with the lessons, optimising students’ participation is often challenging given the social context of the school population. It is commendable that the physical education department has engaged in ongoing professional
collaboration with other schools with similar social challenges to help identify strategies to address common issues.

- Regular affirmation and constructive oral feedback provided students with some guidance on their performance and areas for improvement. To build on the work undertaken so far, the further development of the assessment process is recommended. The implementation of a range of approaches to assessment should be undertaken, with a number of key assessment milestones established for each year group in line with the defined learning outcomes in the subject plan.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- The time provided to classes that are timetabled for Physical Education is adequate to support the implementation of a comprehensive physical education programme. However, it is regrettable that the subject is not timetabled for students following the established Leaving Certificate or the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). Similarly, while the option approach in TY works well, it is restrictive on all students’ potential engagement. Management is encouraged to work towards providing the subject in line with the recommendations of the Department, with at least one double period per week for all students.

- While the indoor space is small and restrictive, it is well maintained and is sufficiently resourced to support the delivery of a diverse programme of activities. A particular strength of the school’s physical education programme is the many links established with physical activity providers in the local community.

- The present range of resources and equipment to support teaching and learning is adequate, but additional planning for the use of the allocated grant will greatly enhance the delivery of the programme and support students’ engagement.

- The support of the school for a number of physical activity initiatives, such as the Healthy Living week, sports days, in addition to the provision of a number of extra-curricular activities is highly commended. The commitment and dedication of staff to the provision of these valuable experiences is acknowledged.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The quality of planning for programme organisation is very good, with a comprehensive and informative subject plan developed. A conscientious and considered approach has been taken to developing the programmes of work.

- The schemes of work developed to support each activity module provide sufficient detail to inform and guide their effective delivery.

- Self evaluation and professional reflection is well developed. The extension of this process of review to include students should be considered. This may help to further engage students and inform planning for the programme of activities to meet the interests and needs of students.

- A health and safety audit of the facilities and procedures should be included in the subject plan.

- A list of resources and equipment to support the expansion and delivery of the programmes of work should be identified and purchased.
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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

Published June 2012