

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Physical Education
REPORT**

**Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School
Ozanam Street, Waterford
Roll number: 64971W**

Date of inspection: 11 May 2010



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | 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 Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School, Waterford. 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, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School, Waterford has a current enrolment of 585 girls. The school offers five curricular programmes: the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). A previous subject inspection in Physical Education was conducted in 2005 and a whole school evaluation (WSE) in 2008.

The time provision and timetable arrangements for Physical Education remain areas for development for management. While all junior cycle students receive eighty minutes of Physical Education per week, the timetable arrangement, of two single periods, should be addressed. Single-period lessons for Physical Education may impose significant restrictions on the depth of engagement in practical activities and learning possible in each lesson. Notwithstanding the curriculum pressures at junior cycle, it is recommended that the timetable arrangements be reviewed to provide for a minimum of a double period per week. This will facilitate the full implementation of the revised junior cycle physical education syllabus as outlined in Circular Letter M15/05, and afford students sufficient time to engage fully with the subject matter. The evidence from observing a single period is that it is not sufficient to allow for in-depth engagement with the practical exploration of the key concepts of the lessons.

The timetable provision in TY of a double period per week for Physical Education, and an additional three periods one afternoon per week for activity modules which often involve sport and physical activity, is commended as excellent provision. The time allocation and the timetable arrangements for the delivery of the LCA leisure and recreation course at years one and year two are in line with the recommendations of two hours per week.

It is regrettable that Leaving Certificate and LCVP students continue not to have access to a physical education programme. All students should be afforded the opportunity, through the

formal curriculum, to develop a full and complete understanding of the factors that influence human movement. As previously highlighted to the school, a comprehensive physical education programme aims to support students as they mature and develop to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable them to choose a physically active lifestyle that's sustainable and healthy. This is particularly important for adolescent females, who are the most vulnerable age group and gender to drop out of physical activity and sport and to adopt sedentary behaviours that are less conducive to health and well-being. As recommended in the previous subject inspection and WSE reports, the school should work towards and prioritise providing quality Physical Education for all students in line with the recommendations of the Department of Education and Skills as outlined in the *Rules & Programme for Secondary Schools*.

The physical education department consists of three teachers, two of whom are graduates of the subject. The school has experienced some difficulties with staffing arrangements arising from recent curricular constraints, which has impacted on the availability of appropriately qualified teachers to deliver the subject. In addition, the school continues to pay some teaching hours from its own financial resources on a part-time basis, which is a considerable and commendable commitment. However, the quality of Physical Education that can be offered to students in the absence of appropriately qualified teachers may be quite limited and there may also be a health-and-safety risk associated with such deployment. Such a potential risk is mitigated somewhat when teachers only supervise and coach activities in which they themselves have some background and expertise. It is acknowledged that non-qualified personnel offer a significant support to the provision of the extracurricular sports programme in the school. Nonetheless, it is important that all students benefit from the broader, education-based approach to the delivery of the subject as is provided by appropriately qualified physical education teachers. It is recommended that only teachers who possess recognised qualifications to teach Physical Education be deployed to teach the subject.

Management is supportive of continuing professional development (CPD) and some members of the physical education department have engaged in the in-service programme for the implementation of the revised junior cycle physical education syllabus, as well as the recent 'Action for Life' courses. A member of the physical education department has recently been appointed as an associate presenter to support the delivery of the professional development programme provided by the Junior Cycle Physical Education Support Service (JCPESS). Such a commitment to the subject and to professional development, including the support of management to facilitate this involvement, is highly commended.

The facilities available to support the delivery of the subject include a large sports hall, a small grass pitch and a small hard-court area. All of these facilities are well maintained and presented. The viewing balcony over the sports hall remains undeveloped and some consideration should be given to optimising this space to support teaching and learning in the subject. The subject department is adequately resourced to deliver the planned programmes of work. A requisition system operates for the purchase of new and replacement items of equipment and resources. There is good access to information and communication technology (ICT), and broadband access is also available to support research, planning, and teaching and learning.

The provision of a range of extracurricular sports remains strong in the school. Great credit is due to the teachers and external personnel who continue to promote, organise and coach the variety of sports provided. Basketball continues to be the principal and most prestigious sport provided, and the school is the home venue of the Wildcats Basketball Club, a member of the women's National Super League. Excellent structures have developed as a result of the relationship that exists between the basketball club and the school to support students to excel in this sport. The school's

basketball teams compete at the highest level in the various inter-schools competitions. In addition, the school continues to prepare athletes and teams to compete successfully in athletics, camogie and ladies' Gaelic football, and also facilitates students to represent the school at equestrian events. As well as catering for the competitive interests and talents of students, physical-activity initiatives, such as the recent skipathon and danceathon events, often feature as part of students' efforts to raise funds for various charities. Any effort to provide physical-activity programmes and events at a recreational level, for the many students who are not competitively orientated, is most welcome, as these can often serve to develop and nurture an interest in physical activity for its intrinsic value.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Subject department planning in Physical Education is well advanced and of a good standard in this school. Formal structures are in place to support the subject department planning process, with the appointment of a subject co-ordinator and a schedule of formal meetings, which are facilitated by management. The proceedings of formal subject department meetings are appropriately documented and included in the subject department planning folder.

A subject plan has been developed to support the organisation and delivery of the subject in the school. This plan is well presented and is informed by the planning frameworks advocated by the school development planning initiative (SPDI) and the JCPESS. The subject plan includes an outline of the programmes of work for each year group and schemes of work have also been developed to support the delivery of most of the planned activity modules. This is commended as it ensures consistency in the delivery of a common programme for all students. To build on the planning work already completed, it is recommended that the physical education department identify the key learning outcomes for each year group, which should be expressed as the knowledge and skills that students are expected to acquire and develop as a result of their engagement and learning. The intended learning outcomes should also be linked to the programme content, teaching and learning methods, and forms of assessment. This will ensure that students' learning is progressed incrementally over the course of their physical education programme.

The planned programmes of work at junior cycle are in keeping with the syllabus and offer students a broad and balanced programme of activities. The TY programme offers students a good range of activities that are appropriate and relevant to their age and interests. These include modules in choreography, salsa dance, martial arts and a variety of team and individual sports such as athletics, court games and invasion games. Surfing is used as a team-building activity and this has proven to be a most enjoyable experience for students. Initiatives that introduce students to the facilities, resources and opportunities to engage in physical activity in their own community are commended. LCA students follow the modules outlined in the leisure and recreation course and complete a number of planned key assignments.

A recent review of the physical education programme by the subject department identified areas that were working well and also highlighted issues of concern that impede or impact on the effective delivery of the subject. Areas such as curriculum provision and timetable organisation were highlighted as significant barriers affecting the delivery of the subject. The provision of single-period lessons was identified as having a negative impact on some students' attitudes towards the subject, which may also adversely affect their participation levels. Engagement in self-evaluation is commended as it assists the physical education department to identify its priorities and ensure that subsequent planning and interventions are appropriately focused. As a

means of advancing this work and monitoring the effectiveness of the programme in meeting its objectives, the physical education department should include some formal element of student input to further inform the review process.

A good range of resources has been acquired and developed to support teaching and learning. A number of useful websites have been identified where resources can be easily acquired or ordered or that provide guidance on areas of pedagogy. The compilation and use of electronic resources is commended as these have the potential to greatly enhance students' learning experiences. Planning for the purchase of large items of equipment, such as additional gymnastics mats, should be included in the medium to long-term plans of the department.

While good health-and-safety practices were observed during the course of the inspection, it is recommended that the physical education department include in the subject plan a risk audit of the various facilities, including its procedures and practices that ensure the health and welfare of participants in the physical education programme.

There was a good standard of individual planning for each of the physical education lessons observed over the course of the inspection.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The standard of teaching and learning varied from satisfactory to good in the physical education lessons observed. Students changed quickly for their lessons and teachers have developed an efficient system to record attendance and participation and to complete any class administration duties. This good practice helped to optimise the time available for teaching and learning. Teachers introduced the topic of the lesson and in some cases also set the context and purpose of the lesson. Good practice was observed in one lesson where the learning intentions were also shared with students, and were expressed in terms of the knowledge and skills that they were expected to acquire and develop as a result of their engagement. This practice, which provided students with a clear focus and established high expectations for their learning, is in keeping with the principles of assessment for learning. Greater use of this strategy is recommended. Consideration should be given to the placement of a whiteboard in the sports hall as this can be a valuable tool to aid the teaching and learning process.

The topics taught in the lessons visited were invasion games, net and fielding games, and circuit training for volleyball. Most lessons commenced with warm-up activities. Good practice was observed in some lessons where the initial warm-up activities were controlled and gradually increased in intensity. When flexibility exercises were included in the warm-up, these were very well demonstrated by the teachers and some very good use was made of anatomical and physiological terminology. In one lesson, students organised themselves into teams and commenced playing a game, without appropriately engaging in any preparatory warm-up activities. While the game was played at a relatively low to moderate intensity and it is welcome to see students being afforded the opportunity to take responsibility for their lesson and activities, it is important that they are also aware and reminded to follow best practice in preparing appropriately to engage in moderate or vigorous physical activities. Furthermore, it is also important that sprint-type activities or games are reserved to the latter stage of the warm-up when students are better prepared physiologically for the intensity involved. It is recommended that the physical education department discuss and plan a variety of approaches to warming up that are appropriate to the planned activity modules and to the age and ability levels of students.

A range of effective teaching strategies was used to assist students in their learning in most lessons. A mixture of recall and higher-order questioning was used effectively to assess students' understanding, to assist them to establish links with previous learning and to encourage analysis of the execution of skills or tactics. Demonstration was effectively used in the majority of lessons by teachers and students, to illustrate the key teaching points and ensure students' understood the correct techniques for each skill or task. Lessons were most effective in promoting learning when they facilitated students, through deliberate strategies, to be involved cognitively as well as physically.

Most lessons involved an incremental approach to developing students' competency in the basic skills of the activity and good opportunities were provided for students to apply their skills in the game context. Students were given sufficient time to work independently to practise their skills and to work in pairs or small groups. A circuit-training class designed to improve fitness for volleyball was well designed and organised. The various exercise stations provided students with opportunities to practice the core skills of the game interspersed with a variety of exercises and activities to improve their speed endurance, agility and local muscular endurance. There was excellent use of task cards, which provided students with a good visual representation and explanation of the key performance indicators to guide their successful execution of each skill or exercise. Consideration should be given to including some element of peer review when developing students' technical competence. For example, the key performance indicators identified on the task cards could be used by students to analyse the movement competency of their partners and to provide constructive feedback. The amount of time available in the single-period lessons is acknowledged as having a significant limiting impact on the use of such pedagogy to promote learning.

All lessons involved a very good commitment to ensuring high levels of physical activity. Students who were unable to participate in the physical activities were often included in some elements of their lessons through focused observation, organising equipment or umpiring. Such efforts to include these students are commended and should be adopted in all lessons. The physical education department should document and further develop their strategies and resources to include students who are unable to participate in the physical activities of their lessons.

All lessons took place in a friendly, positive and affirming atmosphere. Teachers have established a good rapport with their students, who were most cooperative and enthusiastic in their participation.

Questioning was used to good effect at the end of most lessons to consolidate students' learning. Students responded confidently to questioning and demonstrated a good understanding of the focused topics. In some cases, students demonstrated a high level of competency in their execution of the skills involved in their lessons, in their level of physical fitness and in their application to their learning

ASSESSMENT

Teachers maintain good records of students' attendance and participation in their physical education lessons. An appropriate formative comment on students' progress and attainment in Physical Education is included in the school's formal reporting system to parents. Physical education teachers also attend parent-teacher meetings.

Good attention has been given to the development of the assessment process in Physical Education. There are elements of good practice in use to provide valuable feedback to students to guide their learning. Formative assessment takes place in each lesson through observation and feedback from the teacher, and through the use of oral questioning. The use, by some teachers, of established criteria, from the *Assist Record Book*, is good practice, helping to provide evaluative comments on students' engagement and participation, skill acquisition, application and performance, knowledge and understanding. However, the application of a common and consistent approach to the assessment process by all members of the physical education department is required. To further develop the assessment process, it is recommended that a number of assessment milestones be identified as part of the planning process for each year group. Assessment may include the completion of planned rich tasks; specific key assignments such as a research project; a written, picture or video diary of competency development in a selected activity; and also involve a practical performance assessment at least once per year as is already taking place in some classes. The communication of the assessment criteria to students should help in providing a focus for their learning as well as making the assessment process open and transparent. A system to retain elements of students' work, such as individual folders, similar to that currently being used by students in the LCA leisure and recreation course, would also enhance the assessment process.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- A good range of facilities supports the delivery of the physical education and extracurricular sports programmes in the school. The physical education department is appropriately resourced to deliver the planned programmes of work.
- Teachers are committed to ongoing professional development, which is encouraged and supported by management.
- Subject department planning in Physical Education is well advanced and of a good standard. The planned programmes of work for each year group are in keeping with the syllabuses and offer students a broad and balanced programme of activities.
- Classroom management was effective and supportive of students' participation and learning. All lessons took place in a friendly, positive and affirming atmosphere.
- Most lessons were well structured and appropriately paced, with a good range of effective teaching strategies used to involve students both physically and cognitively. All lessons involved a very good commitment to ensuring high levels of physical activity.
- Good attention has been given to the development of the assessment process in Physical Education.
- A good range of extracurricular physical activities and sports is provided by the school and is organised and coached by dedicated teachers. The achievement of students in some of these sports is to a high standard.

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 prioritise a review of timetable provision of Physical Education for all students in line with the recommendations of the Department.
- Only teachers who possess recognised qualifications to teach Physical Education should be deployed to teach the subject.

- Key learning outcomes outlining the knowledge and skills that students are expected to learn should be identified for each year group as part of the planning process.
- The physical education department should discuss, plan and implement the use of a variety of assessment-for-learning strategies, approaches to warm-up and strategies to further include students who are unable to participate in the planned physical activities of the lessons.
- A risk audit of the various facilities, including the established procedures and practices that ensure the health and welfare of participants in the physical education programme, should be included in the subject planning documents.
- Common approaches to the assessment process in Physical Education and a system of retaining students' work are recommended.

A post-evaluation meeting was held 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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Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management acknowledges the value of this inspection report and is especially conscious of the recommendations contained in it. This school is committed to the promotion and development of excellence in the provision of physical education. This commitment is given positive expression in the payment of teaching hours from its own financial resources. The Board concurs with the report's observations in respect of subject provision for Leaving Certificate students and the recommendation in relation to the deployment of appropriately qualified teachers to teach the subject. However, the situation which currently prevails reflects the reality of the impact of what the report describes as 'recent curricular constraints'. The reality is that such constraints have resulted in the shortage of teaching hours in this subject. Cutbacks have had an adverse impact on the PE Department of the school, and this is evident in staffing arrangements and in the construction of the time table for this subject. The Board will prioritise the matter of the provision of double classes and will seek to provide these as soon as is possible and practicable. Recommendations in relation to planning and assessment for learning will be prioritised by the PE Department. A risk audit will be carried out in the context of a whole school review of health and safety.

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

- A white board has been acquired for the gym, as recommended.
- The PE Department will as part of its on-going planning pay particular attention to the various recommendations. In particular attention will be paid to assessment-for-learning strategies and common approaches to the assessment process.
- In the matter of recommendations relating to staffing and time tabling these will be given priority attention when work begins in these areas in January.