

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Physical Education

REPORT

**Oatlands College
Stillorgan, County Dublin
Roll number: 60050E**

Date of inspection: 9 February 2010



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 Oatlands College. 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 representative of the subject teachers. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Oatlands College is a voluntary secondary school for boys with a current enrolment of 475 students. Participation in sport and physical activity is encouraged and a strong tradition has been established of competing at the highest level in many inter-school sports competitions, particularly in Gaelic games. This culture of participation and competing is encouraged by a supportive and proactive senior management. Management and the trustees have expressed a clear vision for school development and improvement, which includes significant improvements in curricular provision, staffing and facilities to accommodate Physical Education, school sport and physical activity.

Significant progress has been made in the provision for Physical Education, which is now a core subject on the curriculum for all students. The timetable provision for junior cycle students, of one double period per week, is adequate to implement a comprehensive programme. The additional provision of an aquatics module for first-year students is commended. Transition Year (TY) students receive three periods of Physical Education per week, which is good provision and is in line with the Department of Education of Science recommendation of two hours per week. Physical Education is part of a subject-combination grouping in fifth and sixth year. Three periods of Physical Education are timetabled concurrently, with students attending either one, two or all three periods depending on their other subject choices and levels. In this way, the subject can be accessed by all students. It was reported that more than fifty percent of senior cycle students can access at least two periods of Physical Education per week. While the efforts of the school to improve the level of provision and access to the subject for all students are commended,

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 department consists of two teachers, both of whom are graduates of the subject. The recent employment of a second qualified teacher adds considerably to the ability of the school to provide a coherent and meaningful programme to meet the needs and interests of its students. Management actively supports continuing professional development (CPD) and the school has engaged fully in the recent professional development programme provided by the Junior Cycle Physical Education Support Service (JCPESS). Teachers also continue to actively pursue additional certification in sport-specific courses and this commitment to ongoing professional learning, including affiliation with the Physical Education Association of Ireland (PEAI), and the locally organised community of practice of physical education teachers, is highly commended.

The facilities available for Physical Education include a sports hall, changing rooms, two pitches and access to a classroom when required. A significant extension and renovation project is under way in the school. A commitment to funding for the development of a new sports hall has been given to the school by the Department and a planning application has recently been lodged. This is welcomed as the present sports hall is in poor repair. While every effort is made to ensure that the sports hall is safe for use, there are significant problems including persistent leaks and condensation, no insulation or heating system and poor natural or artificial lighting. These substantial issues often result in the playing surface and environment being unsafe for use and alternative facilities have to be arranged, especially during adverse weather conditions. A number of posters and wall charts are displayed in the hall along with a whiteboard which attempt to ensure that the environment is functional and conducive to learning. The school has undergone a significant consultative process to ensure that the design of the new sports hall meets the future needs of the school. In addition, the engagement with the various local sports providers, as part of the planning process, ensures that the new facility will also serve the needs of the wider community. The trustees, senior management and the physical education department are highly commended for their vision, efforts and commitment in pursuing these facilities on behalf of the school and community.

The dressing-rooms building has recently been renovated and now ensures that students have access to a large number of individual shower cubicles, which facilitates students in changing quickly after their physical education lesson and greatly enhances the school's efforts to promote personal hygiene.

Additional or replacement items of equipment are purchased through the annual budget allocation, with extra-ordinary items purchased on a needs basis in consultation with management. This system works well and the subject department is well resourced with adequate equipment to provide for all of the activity strands of the syllabus. There is good access in the school to information and communication technology (ICT), including media players, and broadband access is available through wireless modem in the sports hall, if required.

Involvement in sport and physical activity is actively encouraged and promoted in Oatlands College and contributes to the very positive atmosphere in the school. The school takes great pride in its achievements and has developed an extensive programme in extracurricular sport. The school has developed a formidable reputation as one of the leading Gaelic football schools and more recently has had notable success with its soccer teams. It also provides a number of other sports and activities including athletics, badminton, basketball, hurling, table tennis and volleyball. Archery has recently been introduced as an additional activity for students and those

who wish to represent the school in other sports, such as golf, are also facilitated. The provision of opportunities for students who may not be competitively orientated, but who wish to be physically active, is also noteworthy. The provision of a large cycle rack for safe and secure parking of the significant number of bicycles also indicates a positive approach to facilitating students' engagement in physical activity. The contribution made by all involved, especially the large number of dedicated teachers, in the promotion, organisation and delivery of the extra-curricular sport and physical activity programmes is highly commended.

Engagement in physical activity is also positively used to support fund-raising efforts on behalf of local charities. The "fun-run marathon", where students cover the equivalent of a marathon over a one-month period by running laps of the school pitch, is an example of such an initiative, which may also yield long-term benefits by encouraging students to become more physically active. There is also a very visible promotion of sport and physical activity in the school including murals on the wall, video clips on the electronic notice board and the display of photographs of the many teams and individuals who have represented the school. This provides recognition and positive affirmation to students and contributes to the positive promotion of a physical-activity culture in the school.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The quality of planning in Physical Education is of a high standard. Management supports formal subject department planning meetings and teachers are afforded regular opportunities to meet and discuss the content, organisation and delivery of the programme. Teachers also meet and collaborate on a daily basis to discuss the organisation of groups and the sharing of facilities, resources and equipment.

An extensive subject department plan has been developed and this is excellently presented. The subject plan is a single, concise and informative document that details all aspects related to the provision, organisation and delivery of the subject in the school. The identification of short, medium and long-term goals for the subject is very good practice and it is clear that many of these objectives are actively being pursued and implemented.

The programmes of work for junior cycle and TY are well organised and indicate that a broad, balanced and relevant programme is provided for these students. All strands of the syllabus are provided, which often involve bringing students to external sports, leisure and recreation facilities, including outdoor education centres, a gym and swimming pool, and local sailing and skiing centres. The organisation of these trips and the integration of the learning experiences into the planned programme of work is very good practice. The provision of activity modules on an optional basis for TY students acknowledges these students' maturity and their interests and may lead to a greater level of engagement in the selected options. Detailed and progressive schemes of work have been developed for each activity module and are based on the achievement of identified learning outcomes and the completion of a defined rich task. Planning for the completion of a rich task helps to provide students with tangible goals for their learning and establishes criteria on which to measure their success. This is an effective approach to consolidate students' learning and promotes their engagement in the self-assessment process.

Considerable work has been undertaken to progress the programme of work for senior cycle, especially for fifth year. However, the senior cycle programme should be expanded and further developed for each year group, similar to the junior cycle and TY programmes, with an emphasis on the key learning outcomes that students will achieve by the time they finish their post-primary

education. The senior cycle plan should aim to further develop students' competencies to perform and participate in a range of physical activities, to develop their ability to analyse their own performance and that of their peers and enable them to design and implement their own training programmes. This will facilitate students to become more informed and engaged as participants, performers and spectators. The further development of the physical education plans, to include an emphasis on effective teaching methods that involve students in problem-solving through engagement in tasks that include detailed analysis and evaluation, will help to deepen their knowledge and understanding of human functionality and performance.

A significant range of resources to support teaching and learning have been compiled by the physical education department. A comprehensive list of useful websites that support research, planning, pedagogy and interactive tasks are documented in the subject plan. A number of digital video clips of students' performances in a variety of activities, in addition to criterion reference clips, have been developed to augment students' learning in a variety of practical performances. In addition, a "Physical Education Theory Book" has also been developed that includes information and tasks to support students' learning of basic anatomy, physiology, motor-skill development, principles of training, basic nutrition and the physical and psychological benefits of participation in regular physical activity. The compilation and development of these resources is exemplary.

A detailed health and safety audit is undertaken by the physical education department on a regular basis to identify the potential risks and hazards associated with the various facilities and procedures. Assessment of the goalposts is not included in the current health and safety audit. It is recommended that this be addressed to ensure that the goalposts are periodically checked for structural integrity and alignment. Information on the inspection of goalposts can be obtained from the National Standards Association of Ireland or by visiting their website at www.nsai.ie. There was good adherence to the principles of health and safety in all aspects of participation and tuition in the lessons observed.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

There was a good standard of teaching and learning in the physical education lessons observed. Teachers were well prepared with all the necessary equipment and materials set up prior to their lessons and this good practice ensured that lessons progressed expediently. Students changed quickly for their lessons and once attendance was recorded, teachers introduced the topic and purpose of the lessons. Links were created with previous lessons so that students had a sense of continuity in their learning. In some instances, the whiteboard was effectively used to display the learning outcomes of the lesson and the teacher gave the students clear targets for their learning. This effective practice ensured that students were focused on the specific requirements of each task in order to achieve the learning intentions. This practice should be extended to all lessons, with the desired learning outcomes expressed in terms of the specific knowledge and skills that students should acquire and develop as a result of their engagement and learning.

In the lessons visited, the topics taught were invasion games, court games and resistance training. Following the brief introduction phase, lessons began with appropriately structured, purposeful and progressive warm-up activities. Students completed a range of general mobility activities that promoted good body-management skills and assisted in their physiological preparation for more intense activity. Basic health-related fitness concepts were integrated into the warm-up activities to facilitate students' understanding of their physiological responses to physical activity. Students' understanding of their anatomy was also promoted through effective questioning that

related specific exercises and movements to the active muscle groups and joints. This good practice ensures that students have the knowledge, skills and understanding of how to prepare properly for participation in physical activity and its associated benefits. In most cases, teachers stressed the main technical points to encourage students to adhere to the correct technique when performing the various activities and exercises. This is important as it ensures that students learn to move effectively and efficiently.

A range of effective teaching strategies was used to assist students in their learning. Targeted questioning was effectively used to determine students' understanding and to establish links with their existing knowledge. Demonstration was also used by both the teacher and the students to illustrate the key teaching points for the correct technical execution of each skill or exercise or to develop students' tactical awareness. These demonstrations were well structured and very well performed to provide students with a clear representation and understanding of the execution and purpose of the activity. ICT was excellently used in one lesson to introduce the drop shot in badminton through the use of electronic video clips. Two short video clips were shown, one from a recording of a previous lesson of a fellow student as a novice performer, and one of a highly skilled Olympian. These video clips were manipulated by playing them in slow motion and freeze-framing to illustrate the key technical points. Excellent questioning encouraged students to compare and contrast the novice and skilled performers and to identify the relevant key performance indicators related to the technical execution and tactical application of the shot. Students were then required to practice the technical execution of the drop shot through co-operative drills with their partner, and then to attempt the application of this shot as part of a competitive game.

Through these very effective strategies, students were encouraged to develop their ability to critically analyse their own performance and that of their peers. The greater use of peer-review should be considered as this useful strategy helps to deepen students' knowledge and understanding. For example, in the lesson on body-resistance exercises, through the application of set criteria, students could be encouraged to observe and analyse their partners' execution of the selected exercises and then provide feedback on how to improve the performance. This will help students to relate their own internal kinaesthetic feedback with the augmented feedback provided by their relevant peers. In this way, as students move through the various sets of exercises they learn, through practical performance, analysis and discussion from the feedback, how to perform each exercise correctly.

Lessons were well structured and paced. The structure of the lessons ensured that students were also afforded regular opportunities to apply their learning in the games context. This good practice assisted students in their understanding of the relevance of focused skills and tactical strategies in the overall performance of the game. Some good examples of modified games helped to develop this level of understanding, such as conditioned games in basketball, which ensured that students understood the principles of defence. This approach 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. This use of this games-for-understanding approach is another useful strategy to provide students with an appropriate context for their learning.

Students were fully engaged throughout and teachers endeavoured to move around to all working groups to provide affirmation, support and advice. Students experiencing difficulty in participating in the various activities were afforded additional attention and practices were appropriately differentiated to accommodate these students, which is commendable. 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 have established a positive rapport with their students and lessons were characterised by an excellent standard of behaviour. Recapping took place at the end of all lessons, while students were engaged in the cool-down activities. Key learning points of the lesson were reinforced and, in some lessons, worksheets were handed out which helped to consolidate learning. Students demonstrated through their performance during physical education lessons, and in their responses to questioning, that they are achieving to a good level in Physical Education.

ASSESSMENT

Teachers maintain detailed records of students' attendance and participation in their lessons. Some very good discussion about the development of a comprehensive assessment process has taken place as part of the subject department planning process. This has resulted in the formulation of performance descriptors, appropriate to particular levels in specific activities, to evaluate practical performances. A range of assessment strategies with appropriate criteria have been developed to determine students' levels of engagement, progress and attainment for each activity module. This system is still in the planning phase and the challenge for the physical education department is to implement it effectively. It is commendable that the subject department has reviewed the work of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) on assessment for learning, as well as adopting JCPESS resources to assist in the assessment process. A system of retaining elements of students' work should be considered as part of the assessment process. In this way students will be able to generate and document evidence of their engagement, performance and completion of defined tasks and assignments to produce a portfolio of learning. Students may also include elements from their participation in co-curricular and extracurricular physical activities.

Comments regarding students' participation and progress in Physical Education are included in school's formal reports to parents. The student's journal also provides a useful communication tool to keep parents informed of participation and achievement in Physical Education. The physical education department is also available at parent-teacher meetings.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Physical Education is highly regarded in the school and is led by a well organised and proactive physical education department and supportive school management.
- Significant improvements have recently taken place in the curricular provision for Physical Education, including the employment of an additional qualified teacher and the securing of funding for a new sports hall.
- Management actively supports continuing professional development and teachers have a strong commitment to their own professional learning.
- There is a high quality of planning and preparation in Physical Education.
- Detailed attention is paid to health and safety issues relating to the sports hall.
- The quality of teaching and learning in Physical Education is good and lessons are characterised by high levels of student engagement both physically and cognitively.
- Lessons were well structured and appropriately paced, with all tasks sequenced in a clear and logical order to ensure progression in students' learning.
- Good progress has been made in developing the assessment process.

- A good range of extracurricular physical activities and sports is provided by the school and is organised and coached by a large number of dedicated teachers. The achievement of students in some of these sports is to a very high standard.

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

- Management should continue to work towards ensuring that every student has appropriate access to Physical Education in accordance with Department recommendations.
- The programme of work for senior cycle students should be expanded and further developed, within the current resources and curricular restrictions.
- It is recommended that the school's goalposts be included in the health and safety audit of equipment and facilities, and are checked periodically for structural integrity and alignment.
- The greater use of peer-review, where relevant, should be considered as an additional strategy to support students' learning.
- A system of retaining elements of students work should be considered as part of the assessment process.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with a representative of the subject teachers and 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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