

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Physical Education  
REPORT**

**Saint Conleth's College  
Clyde Road, Dublin 4  
Roll number: 60590N**

**Date of inspection: 17 September 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**

<b>Date(s) of inspection</b>	16 and 17 September 2010
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discussion with principal</li><li>• Informal discussions with teachers</li><li>• Review of documents and records</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Examination of some students' work</li><li>• Interaction with students</li><li>• Observation of teaching and learning</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main findings of the evaluation:

- All of the physical education lessons observed were well organised, with a very good commitment to ensuring high levels of physical activity for all students.
- A positive and affirming atmosphere was evident in all lessons and students were encouraged to participate to the best of their ability.
- The range of pedagogical strategies observed was found to be somewhat limited. It is notable that none of the physical education teachers holds recognised qualifications in the subject area.
- The timetable adequately supports a comprehensive physical education programme.
- Despite the school's limited facilities for Physical Education, significant efforts have been made to secure access to a range of excellent facilities in the local community.
- Involvement in sport and physical activity is actively encouraged and promoted.
- Structures are in place to support a collaborative approach to subject planning. However, this is an area that requires development.
- A good range of equipment is available to support the delivery of the planned programme of activities. However, additional resources to support teaching and learning are required.

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

- A greater range of pedagogical strategies should be used to promote students' cognitive engagement, particularly the development of decision-making and critical-analysis skills.
- The development of a common approach to assessment is recommended, whereby students' learning can be assessed, based on attaining key learning outcomes each year. Attainment and progress in Physical Education should be included on reports to parents.
- Physical Education lessons should be delivered by appropriately qualified teachers.
- 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 subject plan should be further developed to ensure that all elements of the organisation and delivery of the subject are appropriately documented.
- The programme of work for each year group should be underpinned by key learning outcomes and involve a broader range of activities and learning experiences.

## **INTRODUCTION**

St Conleth's College is a fee-paying lay Catholic school, with a current enrolment of 267 students. The majority of students are male, with a number of females (currently 31) enrolled in the school at fifth year and sixth year. Physical Education is a core subject for all junior cycle and Transition Year (TY) classes and is optional in fifth year and sixth year. 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.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Teachers have established a good rapport with their students and all aspects of classroom management and interactions were conducted in a respectful manner. All lessons were well organised and teachers were fully prepared, with all items of equipment available and the lesson venue set up prior to the commencement of activities. This good practice ensured that lessons started promptly and also assisted in the organisation of students for each of the subsequent activity tasks. Teachers briefly explained the content of the lessons to their students and outlined the various tasks and games that would follow. While this is a worthwhile exercise in signposting the direction of the lesson, it is recommended that teachers also identify and share the intended learning outcomes with their students. These should be expressed in terms of the knowledge and skills that students are expected to develop as a result of their engagement.

All lessons commenced with appropriately structured warm-up activities, involving general mobility activities, stretching exercises and skill-rehearsal drills. Good attention was paid to the size of each group during skill-rehearsal drills to ensure that the work-to-rest ratio was appropriate to optimise students' opportunities to perform each of the focused skills. Good practice was observed in one lesson where students were asked by the teacher to lead parts of the warm-up activities. This contributed positively to the development of their leadership and communication skills, and their ability to demonstrate and apply previous learning. In addition, good use was made of basic anatomical references to reinforce students' understanding of the role and function of the various joints and muscles of the body. Teachers should also use the mobility phase of the lesson to constantly reinforce efficient movement mechanics, by focusing students on the placement and sound of their foot plant in the absorption and generation of force and the action and alignment of their limbs, torso and head throughout each of the activities.

Teacher instruction and direction were the predominant methods used to engage students in learning, with questioning used in a limited number of instances. Effective questioning should form part of the formative assessment process to enhance and evaluate students' learning. Opportunities to engage students in analysis of movement, which contributes to their understanding of the technical components of the focused skills, were not fully optimised when using demonstration or explaining the skills and tactics. In addition to questioning, additional pedagogical strategies, such as self-assessment and peer assessment, should be used to further develop students' ability to critically analyse movement and to enhance their understanding and decision-making skills. .

The structure of lessons should be considered when planning the placement of the various tasks. Most lessons progressed from one skill drill to another until students had completed a repertoire of the core skills required to play the game. Following the skill rehearsal drills students then participated in a match. Whilst these drills were explained and often demonstrated, students would have benefited from greater variation and more challenging progressions to allow them experience the perceptual consequences of successful execution in applied settings. Some

conditioned games were included in one lesson and these were quite successful in promoting students' mobility and skill application. However, most lessons would have benefitted from the inclusion of conditioned games that focused on the application of each skill prior to advancing to the next skill practice. For example when focusing on passing skills, conditioned games that require students to make a desired number of successful passes prior to scoring would ensure that this aspect of players' performance and understanding is developed. Similarly, a number of conditions that require each team member to receive and execute a desired number of passes prior to scoring would ensure that the weaker or less dominant students have greater opportunities to be actively involved in games. It is recommended that a balance be struck between unopposed skill practices and more challenging applied settings, such as opposed practice and conditioned games. This will help promote greater cognitive involvement in the activities through the development of analytical and information-processing skills of perceiving, deciding and executing.

There was a high level of participation amongst the class groups observed and teachers ensured that there was a very good commitment to high levels of physical activity in all lessons. Students were enthusiastic, energetic and fully engaged in their class activities. Teachers were mobile in all lessons and offered individual and group attention when required to motivate, encourage and affirm students for their efforts.

Good practice was observed in one lesson, where students were given a homework assignment to write up their class activities into their physical education notebooks. On inspection some of these notebooks contained formative and affirmative comments, which is also good practice. However, there is a need for the development and implementation of a common approach to the assessment process across the physical education department. Such a process should include a range of formative methods that should be used regularly as an ongoing component of the teaching and learning process, while summative assessment methods should be identified and implemented at key stages throughout the programme of work for each year group.

#### **SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

The physical education department consists of four teachers. It is notable that none of these teachers holds recognised qualifications in the subject area, which imposes significant limitations on the range of learning experiences possible in Physical Education. These teachers presented as highly committed to providing for the physical activity needs and sporting interests of their students. It is acknowledged that these teachers possess some coaching qualifications and have expertise in some areas relevant to Physical Education, mainly games, and make an immense contribution to the sporting ethos of the school. It is also commendable that management supports teachers' participation in various courses provided by the national governing bodies of various sporting organisations to improve their knowledge and skills in these areas. However, it is important that all students have the opportunity to benefit from the breadth and quality of experience which a qualified physical education teacher would be expected to provide. Therefore, it is recommended that the school work towards having all lessons in Physical Education taught by teachers who are appropriately qualified in the subject area as recognised by the Department.

The time provision at junior cycle is adequate to support the delivery of a comprehensive physical education programme. The timetable provision and organisation to support the TY physical education programme is exemplary. While all Leaving Certificate students have the opportunity to avail of the physical education option, it is preferable that the subject is a compulsory component of the curriculum. From both student-health and educational perspectives, management should work towards providing the subject for all students in line with the recommendations of the Department of Education and Skills.

Involvement in sport and physical activity is actively encouraged and promoted in St. Conleth's College and this contributes to a positive atmosphere in the school. Rugby is the principal sport and great efforts are made to encourage as many of the students as possible to participate in the school teams at all grades. The school has established positive and mutually beneficial working relationships with the local rugby clubs. One of the school's basketball teams has recently enjoyed success in its grade at All-Ireland level. This is a significant achievement for a school of this size. Opportunities for students who may not be competitively orientated include a short morning run twice per week and the option to participate in circuit-training. These provide students with valuable exercise in a structured environment with their peers. The involvement of former students of the school to assist with the organisation and coaching of the various sports and teams is an excellent initiative. The commitment of teachers and coaches to the promotion, organisation and delivery of the extracurricular sports programme is highly commended.

The school has some physical education facilities itself and has invested significant resources and time in expanding the range of facilities for its students through collaboration with Dublin City Council, including the management committee of Herbert Park and University College Dublin. Such links serve to embed students' physical-activity experiences in their locality and may also serve as an access route into sport and physical activity for many and increase their levels of participation.

Items of equipment are purchased through a requisition system, which was reported to work well. A good range of equipment is available to support the delivery of the planned programmes of activities. There is good access in the school to information and communication technology (ICT), including media players, digital cameras and broadband access. The greater use of this equipment to support teaching and learning in Physical Education is recommended.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

Formal structures have recently been established to support subject department planning for Physical Education. A member of the team acts as the subject co-ordinator in a voluntary capacity and has begun to document the programmes of work for each of the year groups. It is commendable that the subject department has consulted the resources available on the website of the Junior Cycle Physical Education Support Service (JCPESS) to assist in this work. The physical education department's health-and-safety procedures are well documented to ensure the welfare of students participating in the curricular and extracurricular programmes.

While some progress has been made in the area of subject department planning, much of the good work currently taking place in Physical Education is undocumented. For example, there is no rationale or record available for the comprehensive TY physical education programme involving modules in self-defence, sailing, fitness development and games. Similarly, there is no record of the extensive planning that is required to access the various sports and leisure and recreation facilities in the community. There is a need to document clearly all aspects related to the provision, organisation and delivery of the physical education programmes in the school. A subject plan should be developed collaboratively by all of the teachers involved in the delivery of the programme, and the subject department should refer to the subject department planning resources available on the website of the School Development Planning Initiative ([www.sdpi.ie](http://www.sdpi.ie)).

The programmes of work for each year group should also be included in the subject plan. Current programmes are predominantly games orientated and lack sufficient attention to providing a diversity of learning experiences. They should incorporate the physical, psychological and social

concepts that underpin human movement and functionality. The programmes of work for each year group should be expanded to include as many of the strands of the syllabus as possible, within the resources available to the school. For example, the inclusion of an adventure-activities module involving team challenges, orienteering and camp craft should be considered given the school's access to Herbert Park. When documenting the programmes of work, the physical education department should identify key learning outcomes for each year group and these should be linked to the programme content and to the appropriate teaching and learning and assessment strategies. Strategies such as teaching games for understanding and using the sport-education model approach should be considered, where appropriate, to promote students' learning.

A very good review of the school's rugby programme was recently undertaken and an action plan to improve the provision, quality of coaching and achievements of the various teams is clearly outlined in this document. A similar review process should be undertaken to inform the work of the physical education department. Students' experiences and opinions of their physical education programme would provide a useful reference point from which to commence the subject department planning process.

While there was good evidence that the subject department plans for the purchase of new and replacement items of equipment, there is a need to develop a range of resources that support teaching and learning in Physical Education. The use of video as a strategy to improve performance in the extracurricular games programme is commendable and this, along with the use of additional electronic resources, should also be considered to support students' learning in their physical education lessons.

Teachers maintain good records of students' attendance and participation in their physical education lessons. Members of the physical education department are available to discuss students' attendance, participation and engagement in the physical education programme at parent-teacher meetings. At present, students' attainment and progress in Physical Education is not included in the school reports to parents. This is an area for development, particularly once a common approach to assessment in Physical Education has been developed.

## **CONCLUSION**

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

*Published April 2011*