

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Physical Education  
REPORT**

**Loreto Secondary School  
Spawell Road, Wexford  
Roll number: 63660A**

**Date of inspection: 10 May 2010**



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF  
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION  
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

**REPORT  
ON  
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

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**SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT**

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Loreto Secondary School, Wexford. 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**

Loreto Secondary School has a current enrolment of 707 girls. The school offers four curricular programmes: the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

It is commendable that Physical Education is a core subject for all students. However, the time provision for the subject should be reviewed as it is significantly below two hours per week, which is the time recommended for all students by the Department of Education and Skills, in the *Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools*. While a double period once per week for first-year and TY students is adequate to support the delivery of a comprehensive physical education programme, the provision of a single period per week for all other year groups imposes significant restrictions on the learning experiences possible for these students. Practical lessons in Physical Education require sufficient time for students to change into suitable attire for physical activity and to engage in structured and progressive tasks that improve their knowledge and competency of the focused topic. It is recommended that management review the provision of Physical Education for all students in line with the recommendations of the Department.

It is acknowledged that the lack of adequate indoor facilities for Physical Education presents a particular challenge to the curriculum provision for the subject. The school has an outdoor grit pitch, a hard-court area and a small grass area, which are the main facilities available to deliver the physical education programme and to support extracurricular physical activity and sport. The availability and use of these facilities may be adversely affected during times of inclement weather. The available indoor space, which doubles as the school's concert hall, is very restrictive with regard to the type of activities that can be provided and is not conducive to any form of high intensity activity that involves dynamic movement. A lack of suitable changing facilities imposes

further restrictions. At present, students change in a small room that is also used as an equipment store. Storage is also problematic, with little adequate facilities, which results in equipment and resources to support teaching and learning being stored in a number of locations around the school. Health-and-safety concerns regarding the current facilities are well addressed by both the physical education department and management, with all hazards appropriately identified and procedures in place to minimise risk of injury. The school has recently repaired the surface and replaced the basketball posts on the hard-court area to ensure that they are safe for participation. The school has been actively engaged in protracted discussions with the Department to upgrade and expand its existing facilities, including the provision of suitable facilities for Physical Education, physical activity and school sport. Such a development would be most welcome and provide the sizable student population with the facilities conducive to supporting their learning in Physical Education.

Despite the lack of suitable facilities, the physical education department is adequately resourced to provide for all strands of the syllabus. A budget system operates on a projected basis, which requires detailed advanced planning by the physical education department to meet its future equipment and resource needs. There is good access to information and communication technology (ICT), including a laptop and a ceiling-mounted data projector in the physical education classroom. Broadband access is also available to support research, planning and teaching and learning.

The physical education department consists of two teachers, both of whom are graduates of the subject. Management actively supports continuing professional development (CPD) and the school has engaged in the professional development programme provided by the Junior Cycle Physical Education Support Service (JCPESS). Teachers have also pursued additional certification in sport-specific courses in addition to attending subject association conferences. This commitment to ongoing professional learning is commended. Consideration should also be given to engaging with the regional community of practice of physical education teachers. Information about this and other CPD events can be obtained on the website of the Physical Education Association of Ireland (PEAI; [www.peai.org](http://www.peai.org)), in addition to the JCPESS website [www.jcpe.ie](http://www.jcpe.ie).

Loreto Secondary School aspires to be a health-promoting school and through its policies and practices aims to create an environment that is conducive to health and well-being. Extracurricular activities are strongly supported and students' participation in the broad range of activities is widely encouraged and promoted. A broad range of physical activities and sports is provided during lunchtimes and after school to offer as many opportunities as possible for students to engage in physical activity and sport. Every effort is made to meet the recreational and competitive interests of students. Activities such as aerobics and fitness sessions are organised for the competitive and non-competitive student, in addition to the range of sports. These include athletics, badminton, basketball, camogie, Gaelic football, hockey, tennis and soccer. Students are also facilitated to represent the school at inter-schools competitions in sports such as swimming and equestrian events. The school is very competitive in many of these sports and has enjoyed considerable success at regional and national level in many of the sports provided. Great credit is due to all involved in the organisation and delivery of these activities, as they can be immensely rewarding for participants and the whole school community, and make a significant contribution to the well-being of students.

## **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. The role and duties of the subject co-ordinator have been agreed and this position is rotated regularly between teachers. A clear system of recording and reporting on the proceedings of formal meetings has been established. Items for discussion appropriately focus on the design and organisation of the programmes of work for each year group, planning for resources and monitoring student progress and assessment.

An informative, well-structured and concise subject plan has been developed. This plan addresses all aspects relevant to the organisation and delivery of the subject in the school, including timetable provision and arrangements, professional development undertaken, the equipment and resources available to support teaching and learning, the programmes of work for each year group, effective teaching and learning methods, the strategies and resources to support the inclusion of students of all ability levels, the assessment process, cross-curricular links and health-and-safety procedures. As means of advancing this considerable work, the physical education department should also focus on developing strategies to monitor and review the effectiveness of the physical education programme. Some element of student review should be incorporated into this process, which may be useful in informing future planning. This may prove helpful in identifying barriers to participation in the programme, particularly at senior cycle.

The planned programmes of work at junior cycle are in keeping with syllabus guidelines and offer students a broad and balanced programme of activities and diverse learning experiences. The physical education department plans to implement six of the seven strands of the syllabus during the junior cycle, with the exception of aquatics, which is not possible to provide due to the lack of sufficient time and the availability of the local swimming pools.

The TY physical education programme provides a wide range of activities that aim to develop leadership qualities and enhance personal development in keeping with the aims of the TY programme. TY students experience physical activities such as self defence, dance, yoga and fitness programming, in addition to team or individual sports. Of particular note is the provision of a youth leadership programme in basketball and a Gaelic games foundation level coaching course, both of which provide TY students with the basic knowledge and skills to organise and assist in the delivery of training programmes for young people. In addition to the technical aspects of learning skills and playing the sport, participation in these courses also facilitates the development and application of effective communication skills and inculcates an understanding of group organisation and dynamics. A residential trip to an outdoor education centre is planned as part of the TY programme and students also participate in the President's *Gaisce* awards programme. The provision of these activities and courses in TY is commended as they offer students the opportunity to learn valuable and transferable life skills.

A range of activities is provided for fifth-year and sixth-year students. It is commendable that some element of student choice is built into the programme of work as this acknowledges students' maturity and gives them some ownership over their programme. A twelve-week programme in sixth year, focusing on health-related fitness, is laudable as it aims to support students in making positive health-related decisions to include physical activity as part of a balanced lifestyle. The provision of this module in fifth year rather than sixth year should be considered as it may form the basis for greater engagement in physical activity from a younger age for some students. Furthermore, a study of the principles underpinning human functionality and performance and the physical, psychological and social factors that influence participation in physical activity and sport should be integrated into the programme of work for senior cycle students.

Schemes of work have been developed to support the delivery of the activity modules for each year group. This is commended. To further develop this work, it is recommended that the key learning outcomes for each year group be identified. These 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 physical education department should link these intended learning outcomes 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.

There was evidence of good planning for resources to support teaching and learning. The compilation and use of electronic resources is commended as these have the potential to greatly enhance students' learning experiences. Short video clips, such as the *Hakka* or *Thriller* in dance, provide excellent stimulus and criterion references for students to engage and guide their performance and learning.

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

#### **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

There was a good standard of teaching and learning in the physical education lessons observed. Teachers have developed efficient systems to optimise the time available for learning, which ensured that classes commenced promptly. Teachers revisited previous learning and used students' responses to questions to introduce the topic of each lesson. The purpose and content of the lessons were also shared with students at the outset. To build on this good practice, it is recommended that teachers also identify the learning intentions of the lesson with their students and that these be expressed in terms of the knowledge and skills that students are expected to acquire and develop. This practice helps to provide a focus and direction for students' learning.

Practical activities began with progressive warm-up drills, most of which were skill-based and related to the topic of the lesson. Excellent practice was observed in one lesson when first-year students took responsibility for their own warm-up routine. In this instance, students divided into small groups to complete a brief warm-up involving general mobility, and dynamic and static stretching exercises. This task was very well organised and managed and students responded excellently to the responsibility given.

A wide range of effective methods was used in lessons to promote students' movement competence and understanding of the activity. In addition to the regular use of higher-order questioning, teachers used individual and group demonstration to illustrate the requirements of each of the set tasks and to further develop students' understanding. Peer-review of performance was used in one instance and this was effective in enhancing students' confidence to analyse movement and to provide formative feedback for improvement. Goal setting was effectively used to encourage students to successfully complete a set number of repetitions of a skill with technical proficiency. Questioning was used to very good effect to encourage students to focus on the mechanics of the various skills in order to improve their technical ability and understanding.

Lessons progressed through well-structured and ordered tasks that promoted skill acquisition and understanding. In most cases, teachers used opportunities to engage students in analysis and evaluation of their own performance and that of others. Good practice was observed when TY students had to experience and then discuss the suitability of a variety of mini-games to promote

skill acquisition in younger children. Involving students cognitively in this way is commended as it enhances their understanding of the phases of skill acquisition and the design and implementation of appropriate practices. The further integration of key concepts related to participation and performance, such as the components of health-related and skill-related fitness or factors affecting team work, is recommended, when appropriate.

Practical activities culminated in students playing full-sided games, which provided them with the opportunity to apply their skill-based learning in the game context and also to experience and enjoy playing the game. Despite the short duration of some lessons, there was a good commitment by teachers to ensuring that students remained active and on task throughout. This involved an appropriate balance between the amount of instruction and explanation that was provided and the time spent engaging in the practical activities. Those who were unable to participate in the physical activities of the lessons were assigned organisational and observational tasks. This is good practice as it maintains these students' involvement in the physical education process.

Teachers have established a friendly and respectful rapport with their students and, in all cases, classroom management was very effective. Teachers were actively involved with their students throughout the lessons, providing feedback to individuals and small groups and offering technical advice and assistance when necessary. Students were also affirmed regularly for their efforts, engagement and standard of performance.

Questioning was effectively used at the end of the lessons to consolidate students' learning. In keeping with good practice, teachers also indicated the topic of the next lesson, which further reinforces students' sense of continuity in their learning. Students responded confidently to questioning during the inspection and demonstrated a good understanding of the focused topics.

## **ASSESSMENT**

Teachers maintain records of students' attendance and participation in their physical education lessons. Some engagement in the assessment process was evident during the inspection. Formative assessment is used to determine students' knowledge and understanding of the focused topics through oral questioning, whilst students' engagement and progress is assessed through teacher observation. In addition, strategies such as self and peer assessment are used to promote learning. All students maintain a personal fitness profile, while certification is provided for TY students on the successful completion of some of their courses.

There is scope for the further development of a more comprehensive and systematic approach to the assessment process. Notwithstanding the time constraints in some year groups, the physical education department should plan to include a number of assessment milestones for each year group, based on the attainment of key learning outcomes. This can be achieved by expanding the use of self-assessment and peer-assessment strategies, the completion of rich tasks and key assignments at the end of each module of learning and the inclusion of a practical performance component at least once a year. Performance descriptors appropriate to particular levels of attainment should be developed for each of the planned activity modules. The communication of these descriptors to students should help in providing a focus for learning as well as making the assessment criteria open and transparent. The weighting assigned to each element of the assessment process for each year group should also be decided by the physical education department.

The further development of the student folder system to retain relevant elements of students' work is also recommended. Information regarding the development of an assessment process for Physical Education can be obtained from [www.jcpe.ie](http://www.jcpe.ie) and [www.curriculumonline.ie](http://www.curriculumonline.ie).

Students' progress in Physical Education should also form part of school reports that are sent to parents. It is important that students' learning in physical education is acknowledged and validated.

## **SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- All students are provided with timetabled lessons in Physical Education, which is delivered by appropriately qualified teachers.
- Teachers are committed to ongoing professional development, which is encouraged and supported by management.
- Appropriate attention is paid to health-and-safety issues to ensure safe participation in the physical education programme.
- The physical education department is appropriately resourced to deliver the planned programmes of work.
- An informative, well-structured and concise subject plan has been developed to support the organisation and delivery of the subject.
- The quality of teaching and learning in physical education lessons observed was good and students were confident, competent and enthusiastic in their engagement.
- Lessons were well structured and appropriately paced, and a good range of teaching strategies that involved students both physically and cognitively was effectively used.
- Learning took place in a positive, supportive and affirming environment.
- 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 review the timetable provision of Physical Education for all students in line with the recommendations of the Department.
- Key learning outcomes outlining the knowledge and skills that students are expected to learn should be identified for each year group. The physical education department should link these intended learning outcomes to the planned programme content, teaching and learning methods and forms of assessment.
- To enhance the planning process, the physical education department should develop and implement a system to monitor and review the effectiveness of the physical education programme.
- The development of the assessment process in Physical Education and a system of retaining students' work are recommended.
- Students' progress in their physical education programme should be included in the school's reports to parents.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

*Published December 2010.*

# **Appendix**

## **School response to the report**

### **Submitted by the Board of Management**

#### **Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The board warmly welcomes this report as it offers considerable affirmation of the work done in the school to promote physical education and other sporting activities.

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

The subject development plan will be broadened in the current school year to incorporate the inspector's recommendations relating to the identification of key learning outcomes as well as to an assessment of the overall Physical Education programme.

Students' progress in Physical Education will be recorded on school reports with effect from December 2010.

School management is in complete agreement with the recommendation that timetable provision for Physical Education should be in line with the recommendations of the Department. This will only happen, however, when the Department provides the school and its 706 students with such basic facilities as an indoor sports hall, associated equipment, dressing rooms and shower facilities. The school has been pursuing this matter with the Department since 1998. In the absence of these facilities, teaching Physical Education is like asking Science teachers to work without a laboratory and Home Economics teachers without a kitchen!