

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Physical Education  
REPORT**

**St Andrew's College  
Booterstown Avenue, Blackrock, County Dublin  
Roll number: 60650F**

**Date of inspection: 16 March 2010**



**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 St. Andrew's 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. The inspector reviewed the facilities and resources available for the subject. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and representatives of the subject department. 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**

Physical Education enjoys a valued status as a core subject on the school's curriculum for all students in St. Andrew's College. Junior cycle, fifth-year and sixth-year students receive one double period of Physical Education per week, which is adequate provision to implement a comprehensive physical education programme. Management is encouraged to work towards providing the subject for these students for two hours per week, in accordance with the *Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools*. The timetable provision and arrangements for Transition Year (TY) students is exemplary. All TY students receive a treble period one afternoon per week for their physical education programme. This arrangement ensures that ample time is provided to support the organisation of on-site and off-site activities. A number of option modules, many of which include learning in Physical Education, are also offered to TY students for an additional treble period one afternoon per week.

The school is commended for the significant time it has invested in ensuring that the construction of the physical education timetable optimises the learning opportunities for students. The concurrent timetabling of classes is appropriately organised in this school as all students are from the same year group and the numbers involved optimise the facilities and available teaching resources. This approach facilitates the organisation of a modular approach to the programme design, which greatly contributes to the quality of students' learning experiences.

The physical education department consists of four teachers, all of whom hold recognised qualifications to teach the subject. As part of the organisation of the senior cycle physical education programme, additional coaches or teachers are deployed to support the delivery of some aspects of the programme. In all cases, these coaches or teachers are timetabled concurrently with a qualified physical education teacher, which may help to offset any potential

health and safety risk. It is recommended that this aspect of programme delivery be more closely monitored by the physical education department to ensure that students' learning, in each of their optional modules, contributes to the attainment of the key learning outcomes for the year as part of a coherent physical education programme.

There is a good commitment to continuing professional development (CPD) and management actively supports teachers in this regard. Physical education teachers have been facilitated to attend inservice events and courses. A CPD bulletin is issued regularly to inform teachers of additional courses of interest that are available, which is exemplary practice. Management also provides financial assistance towards the cost of subject-association membership and towards attending courses relevant to the needs of the subject department. There is a high commitment amongst physical education teachers towards their own professional learning. Teachers are to be commended for pursuing additional certification from national governing bodies of various sports organisations that enhance their knowledge and competency, all of which contributes to the quality of delivery of the physical education programme. Consideration should be given to participating in the local community of practice, organised through the Physical Education Association of Ireland (PEAI), whose website can be found at [www.peai.ie](http://www.peai.ie), as the expertise of the school's teachers would make a valuable contribution towards the work of this group.

Excellent facilities are available to support the delivery of the school's physical education and sports programmes. These include a large sports hall, two astroturf pitches, two playing pitches and a large container that has been customised to provide a dedicated weights room. All of these facilities were found to be well maintained. Good attention is paid to health and safety issues and all facilities and equipment are regularly audited to ensure that they continue to be fit for purpose. A development currently being completed will add a dedicated fitness suite and additional changing room facilities. The proactive and visionary approach to providing these facilities, which will further enhance the quality of provision for students, is exemplary.

Access to the school's broadband facility is available in the physical education office. The extension of this facility to the sports hall, along with the acquisition of additional information and communications technology (ICT) equipment to support teaching and learning, has been identified in the subject plan for further development. Good structures are in place to support the purchase of additional or replacement items of equipment and resources. A good range of resources and equipment is in place to support the delivery of all aspects of the planned programmes.

Sport and physical activity are integral to the life of the school. The organisation of the after-school training schedules is exemplary, as is the employment of dedicated experts to provide the highest standard of coaching for students across the various sports provided. A large majority of students participate in the extracurricular programmes, which is highly commendable. The school has enjoyed considerable success across all of the sports provided, most recently in hockey. The promotion of the involvement of students is excellent, with a well-designed website that provides news, information, photographs, video clips and reports of the various events. Several notice boards in the school are also dedicated to promoting students' involvement in the sports and physical activity programmes in the school. A large number of photographs adorn the walls, displaying teams and individuals that have represented the school, Leinster and Ireland at various events from local competitions up to the highest international level, including the Olympic Games.

Whilst the school enjoys success at the highest level across the various sports provided, the quality of provision and inclusion in the programmes is extended to all students. Of particular

note during the inspection was the recognition by management of the need to continue to engage the minority of students who, for whatever reasons, do not participate in any of the programmes provided. It is hoped that the new fitness facility will provide additional opportunities for these students to become physically active and enjoy the benefits that accrue from engaging in physical activity in an environment in which they feel comfortable. All those involved in providing the extracurricular programmes are to be highly commended. Consideration should be given to applying for the Active School Flag ([www.activeschoolflag.ie](http://www.activeschoolflag.ie)), which is awarded to schools that actively support quality Physical Education, school sport and physical activity.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

An excellent standard of subject department planning and preparation for Physical Education was observed during the inspection. Management is commended for providing regular opportunities for formal subject planning meetings, which take place approximately once per month. The role of the subject co-ordinator for Physical Education is a dedicated post. A collaborative approach is taken to subject department planning and all aspects of programme content, organisation and delivery are discussed and documented. This good practice ensures consistency, through a common approach by teachers, to programme design and delivery for each year group.

A comprehensive subject plan has been developed and this is a well organised and accessible document. All elements of good planning are clearly evident in the subject plan and include the school context, the aims and objectives of the subject within the overall educational experience of students, and the programmes of work for each year group. Appropriate provision is also made for the inclusion of students with special educational needs, cross-curricular planning links with other relevant subjects, health and safety procedures and the development of the assessment process.

The identification of short-term and long-term developmental goals which has been undertaken is very good practice and indicates a positive engagement in constructive reflective practice as a subject department. The subject plan identifies the goals recently achieved by the subject department and the school, and indicates the significant progress that has been made to ensure the highest quality provision for the subject. Recent goals achieved include increased curricular provision for senior cycle students and the redevelopment of the senior cycle programme, the full implementation of the revised junior cycle syllabus and the development of schemes of work to support the delivery of each of the planned activity modules. It is highly commendable that the identification of future goals for the delivery of the subject concentrate on the quality of teaching and learning, such as the incorporation of assessment-for-learning (AfL) practices and the greater integration of ICT as an aid to teaching and learning. The expansion of the programmes of work at junior cycle to include an adventure activities module is also noteworthy, as it will ensure greater breadth and balance in the physical education programme for these students.

Extensive programmes of work have been developed for each year group. The programme of work developed for junior cycle students is in keeping with the syllabus. The availability of option modules at senior cycle provides students with a choice of activities to meet their needs and interests. Substantial progress has been made in developing detailed schemes of work and lesson plans to support the delivery of each of the planned activity modules. To build on this considerable level of planning, it is recommended that the physical education department identify the key learning outcomes for each year group. These should then be aligned to each of the schemes of work to ensure that students' learning is supported in a coherent and incremental manner as they progress through the planned programmes of work. The incorporation of a rich-

task into each of the planned schemes of work should also be considered as a means of assessing students' ability to apply their learning.

The programme of work for TY students is very well organised and provides an extensive range of positive learning experiences, which promote students' knowledge and understanding of physical fitness, health and well-being and develops their competency in a number of diverse physical activities. A number of outdoor adventure modules are included in the TY "outbound" programme including hill-walking, orienteering, canoeing and camping. All of these activities are appropriately challenging to students and expose them to the physical-activity opportunities that are easily accessible in their locality and that can be sustained well into old age. The inclusion of certified officiating and coaching courses as part of the TY programme is also good practice as they support the development of students' social, communication and leadership skills.

The physical education department operates a system whereby students are organised into class groups by gender. Whilst this system was stated to work well in this school, it is important that it is grounded in a clear rationale and such a rationale should be included in the subject planning documentation. It is commendable that opportunities are provided to promote gender integration during relevant modules across the strands of the syllabus, whenever appropriate.

A considerable array of resource materials has been developed and purchased to support teaching and learning, including texts, videos, DVDs and a variety of worksheets and task cards. These are centrally stored in the physical education office and are easily accessed by all teachers to support their planning and preparation. The availability of networked computers in the physical education office is a valuable resource to assist in the planning and preparation of lessons, and also ensures that electronic records and planning files are easily accessible to teachers.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

There was a high quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed, which were underpinned by thorough planning and preparation. Students changed quickly for their lessons, during which time the roll was also taken and this practice helped to optimise the time available for learning. Students assembled in an orderly manner and lessons began promptly. The learning intentions of the lessons were clearly outlined to students at the outset and were also linked to learning in previous lessons. Questioning was effectively used in many instances to enhance students' recall of previous learning and to assist in developing an association with and understanding of the focused topic. This good practice helped to contextualise the topic for students and create a sense of continuity in their learning experiences. Good use was made of the whiteboard during lessons that took place in the sports hall to display the intended learning outcomes, which were then visible to students throughout their lesson and helped to ensure that they remained focused on their learning.

All lessons began with appropriately paced and well-constructed warm-up practices. In all cases, the warm-up activities provided students with ample opportunities to rehearse previously learned skills and patterns of movement. Range-of-movement activities were systematically introduced and were accompanied by appropriate terminology. This practice is commended as it challenges students to improve their knowledge of anatomical and movement vocabulary. Students demonstrated a good ability to use relevant key words and appropriate phrases when describing their movement.

Team teaching was a feature in some of the lessons observed and this model of instruction provision was very well executed, whereby one teacher assumed responsibility as the lead teacher, while the other teacher provided supportive instruction and also provided assistance and monitoring of students' progress. It was noted that teachers have established a good working relationship and interchange roles according to their strengths to provide the best possible tuition to students, which is exemplary practice.

Lessons progressed through a series of well-structured, purposeful and progressive tasks. Each task was directly linked to either the game or activity context and this good practice ensured that students' understanding of the relevance of the task to their performance was greatly enhanced. Conditioned games were excellently structured to ensure that students' learning of core skills and concepts of defence were firmly situated in the game context. Differentiation of tasks was also a feature of the lessons, which ensured that students were challenged at a level commensurate with their ability and continued to make progress at an appropriate pace. In a senior cycle body-combat lesson, students were guided through a comprehensive repertoire of blocks, strikes, kicks and punches that increased incrementally to challenge their body management and spatial awareness skills and also their physical fitness. The attention to students' health and safety during the body combat lesson was exemplary and the provisions of the appropriate protective equipment ensured that all students felt comfortable and secure participating in this lesson.

Teachers expertly demonstrated each new task and provided clear and focused instructions to assist students' learning. Students were also afforded some opportunities to demonstrate their competency and to provide focused feedback to each other on areas for improvement. The use of this focused peer-teaching is exemplary practice, particularly when students are engaged in providing constructive feedback that contributes to a deeper understanding and improved competency. The provision of specific key performance indicators also ensured that students had clear criteria for what constituted an acceptable level of performance. The continued use and expansion of this practice is recommended.

A lesson involving all sixth-year students was also observed during the inspection, which was organised as part of *Seachtain na Gaeilge*. The purpose of the lesson was to provide students with an experience of learning traditional Irish folk dances and to promote their understanding of Irish culture. This was an excellent cross-curricular initiative and the attempts of both the Irish and physical education subject departments are to be commended for their efforts in organising this enjoyable event.

Lessons concluded with a series of effective questions to recapitulate on the main activities and to consolidate students learning. Teachers also indicated the topic of the next lesson, which further reinforces students' sense of continuity in their learning. This is good practice.

Students are achieving very well in Physical Education and a good work ethic and high level of engagement was observed in all cases. A respectful and positive rapport between teachers and students was in evidence in all lessons.

## **ASSESSMENT**

Teachers maintain detailed records of students' attendance and participation in their lessons. The facility to electronically store students' assessment and progress records enhances the monitoring and assessment process. 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 and may use the student journal as an effective means of ensuring that parents are well informed of their son's or daughter's progress.

There was evidence that significant progress has been made in the development and implementation of an assessment process for Physical Education. The physical education department has also begun to use some AfL strategies to help promote students' learning, which include the use of self-assessment and peer-assessment methods. Descriptors appropriate to levels of competency have been developed and are applicable to each of the planned activity strands, which is to be commended. Students may be assessed on a number of variables including effort, technical ability, knowledge, application and improvement over the course of a module. It is recommended that this system be further developed to include discreet modes of assessment and criteria for students' practical performance, knowledge and application, and level of engagement and progress. This will ensure that student profiles, which may be developed from teachers' records and observations and from the completion of a set number of assessment events, provide an informed evaluation of student engagement, progress and attainment.

A number of assessment milestones should 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 a practical performance assessment at least once per year. 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.

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

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Physical Education enjoys a valued status in this school. Significant progress has been made in the provision of curricular time and in the arrangement of the timetable to optimise the delivery of a comprehensive physical education programme for all students.
- There are excellent facilities and ample resources available to support the delivery of the physical education, school sport and physical activity programmes.
- The quality of planning and preparation, both at a subject department and individual teacher level, was excellent.
- A significant level of organisation and planning takes place to ensure that all students are provided with a broad and balanced physical education programme.
- A high quality of teaching and learning was evident in the physical education lessons observed.
- Lessons are very well structured and appropriately paced and a good range of effective teaching strategies was observed during the inspection. Students were facilitated through progressive and challenging tasks to be physically and cognitively involved in their learning.
- Students' participation, effort and progress in Physical Education are reported to parents.
- There is exemplary provision, promotion, involvement and high achievement in extracurricular sport and physical activities.

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

- Management is encouraged to work towards providing Physical Education in line with the Department recommendations of two hours per week for all students.

- The delivery of the modular programme at senior cycle should be closely monitored to ensure that students' learning is congruent with the planned learning outcomes.
- The identification of the key learning outcomes for each year group should be included in the subject plan. These should be expressed as the specific knowledge and skills that students are expected to acquire and develop as a result of their learning.
- The continued development and expansion of the assessment process is recommended. Consideration should be given to incorporating a rich-task approach into the schemes of work for each activity module.

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

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