

An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta

Department of Education and Science

**Subject Inspection of Physical Education
REPORT**

**Our Lady of Lourdes Secondary School,
Rosbercon, New Ross, County Wexford
Roll number: 636300**

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**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS
AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA** | **DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
AND SCIENCE**

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 Lourdes Secondary School. 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 teachers, examined students' work, and had discussions with the 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 subject teacher.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Our Lady of Lourdes, Rosbercon is a voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of the Diocese of Ossory, with a current enrolment of 348 girls. The Physical Education department consists of one qualified teacher who has extensive experience in teaching the subject. Physical Education is a core subject for all year groups with each class group receiving one double period per week, of between seventy to eighty minutes duration. Although this time provision is adequate for the implementation of the new Junior Cycle Physical Education Syllabus and to support the senior cycle programme, it is slightly below the two hours per week as recommended in the Department of Education and Science, Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools (Pages 7, 141). Management is encouraged to work towards achieving this level of provision. Students in the optional Transition Year (TY) receive a block of three periods one afternoon per week, in addition to their double-period of Physical Education, to accommodate participation in a variety of activities, many of which are physical in nature. This level of provision is highly commendable as it supports the organisation of off-site activities and the facilitation of courses requiring in-depth study.

Support for continuing professional development in the school is commendable. The Physical Education department has attended all strands of inservice for the new Junior Cycle Physical Education Syllabus. In addition, it is also involved in delivering the gymnastics strand of inservice to peers, through the associate presenters' network. The school has also been involved in the provision of teaching practice placement for undergraduate students of Physical Education, which is highly commendable and mutually beneficial to both the school and the teacher education college.

The facilities available to teach Physical Education consist of a large outdoor hard court area encompassing four basketball courts. The perimeter of this area has been lined with three lanes to create a walking and running track. It is reported that this track promotes physical activity as many students aim to complete a number of laps during break times. The surface of the courts is sprayed regularly to prevent the growth of algae and to ensure its safety for participation. The

school does not have its own indoor hall. As a result, a carpeted room has been made available to support the teaching of gymnastics and dance, while the canteen area is often used for aerobics and health related activity as this area has a suitable surface. There is no dedicated Physical Education storeroom and, as a result, several presses throughout the school are used to house equipment and resources. It is recommended that a dedicated area be found to centrally store equipment and resources for ease of maintenance and access. The school hires a local community sports hall and swimming pool to support students' learning through indoor games and aquatics. The Physical Education department is highly commended for its adaptability in maximising the available facilities and for organising additional facilities as required.

Computer facilities are available in the school and are available for use by Physical Education classes if needed. A digital stills camera is used frequently to take photographs of teams and events. However, there is currently no digital video camera available for Physical Education. It is reported that video has been used as a teaching and learning tool in the past to record and replay performances in gymnastics and proved very useful. This is commendable practice. The provision of digital video cameras would be a useful addition as a teaching and learning aid in Physical Education.

The school is commended for its involvement in extra-curricular activities. These activities include basketball and athletics. In addition, the school facilitates and enters students in equestrian and swimming competitions. Students have achieved to a very high level in these activities including winning an All-Ireland title in Basketball, a remarkable achievement considering that the school has only an outdoor training facility for this sport. The Physical Education department is also to be highly commended for undertaking to organise the south Leinster schools cross-country competition. This event involves collaboration with teachers from neighbouring schools and is a significant undertaking.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The school is commended for its involvement in implementing the new Junior Cycle Physical Education Syllabus and the subject plan reflects the various strands outlined in this syllabus. In addition, the Physical Education department has developed a comprehensive Transition Year and senior cycle plan, in line with syllabus guidelines. The subject document includes the aims and objectives of the Physical Education programme specific to the school and a detailed content plan. Activity blocks for each year group are outlined in the content plan. It is commendable that each activity strand recommended in the junior cycle syllabus is included in the subject plan, with aquatics being the only exception. The activity strands are well placed throughout the three-year cycle to ensure that a balance is achieved between individual and group activities. This commendable framework ensures that students have regular opportunities to focus on their own competency whilst also having opportunities to apply their skills in team-based activities.

The Physical Education department has documented issues of concern regarding the provision for the subject in the school due to the lack of suitable indoor space and resources. An example of this is the restriction imposed by the lack of space for the effective use of mats in teaching gymnastics. The detailing of these issues as outlined in the subject plan is illustrative of good reflective practice. To overcome some of these issues and to facilitate the range of activities planned in the Physical Education programme, particularly at senior cycle, planning includes the hiring of the local community sports hall or other available facilities. This organisation often involves liaising with another secondary school to coordinate times to avoid overlap between these groups using the same facility. Planning also involves the hiring of buses to transport

students and equipment. This level of detailed organisation to implement the planned Physical Education programme is highly commended.

The Transition Year plan includes many activities that promote personal development and leadership qualities in keeping with the aims of the programme. These activities include a trip to an outdoor education centre, swimming, self-defence, golf and aerobics. TY students involved in the Gaisce awards help to train teams at lunchtime and organise class tournaments. This is highly commended as it introduces students to the responsibilities involved in such events and promotes ownership of their own learning.

There is a strong emphasis on leisure and recreation in the subject plan for sixth years. The aim for this year group is to encourage students to participate in activities that can be played regardless of age, including golf, aerobics and yoga. This good practice ensures that students will leave school with some competency in these activities and an awareness of the facilities in their locality to promote enjoyable participation in physical activity.

Planning for the purchase of additional or replacement items of equipment usually occurs at the beginning of the year and the procurement system is reported to be working well. Resources available on the Junior Cycle Physical Education website www.jcpe.ie, are used as reference material and are included in the subject plan. These include planning for the inclusion of self and peer-assessment and assessment for learning. The adoption and implementation of these assessment methodologies is to be commended. The Physical Education department is encouraged to build on its good planning practice by expanding specific units of work for each year group. These units of work should be specific to each activity block and year group outlining the intended learning outcomes and the associated learning experiences. This will help to support the comprehensive subject content plan.

There is good recognition of relevant health and safety issues reflected in the subject planning document. This includes participation in a recently completed first-aid course, which is commendable. Additionally a first-aid kit is available at every Physical Education lesson and these kits are regularly serviced.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

There is a good standard of teaching and learning in Physical Education in this school. All lessons visited were well planned and prior preparation led to the efficient commencement of introductory activities. This preparation involved the assignment of students to duties including the set-up of facilities such as erecting badminton nets or placing gym mats on the floor. Students were very familiar with the set-up process and this ensured that time for teaching and learning was optimised. There was very good compliance to the established code of behaviour and students were well versed in the procedures for preparing for their Physical Education lessons.

Topics covered in lessons observed were badminton and gymnastics. The purpose and direction of the lessons were shared with the students prior to the warm-up activities and this good practice helped students to remain focused on the desired learning outcomes. Warm-up activities included mobility and stretching exercises. In some cases, students took responsibility for the stretching exercises, which is good practice as it promotes greater involvement in the learning process. It is recommended that students be challenged to use topic specific terms where appropriate, such as during the warm-up and when performing mobility exercises. These may include referring to the muscle group, joint, or action being performed.

Lessons were developed through a series of progressive tasks. Students were given opportunities to practise skills or movements learned in previous lessons and then new skills or tasks were introduced to build on previous learning. This good practice ensures that students understand the progression in their learning as an integrated process rather than a series of isolated activities. Tasks set were challenging for students of all abilities. For example, the setting of a series of open-ended tasks to incorporate assisted and counter balance into a sequence in gymnastics allowed students set their own level of difficulty commensurate with their competency. This approach also allows students to imprint their own creativity and interpretation on the task, thus engaging them in higher-order skills of applying knowledge.

Students who were unable to take part in the physical activities were given assignments that were related to the topic of study, including peer review of performance. This is good practice as it continues the students' education as informed observers. It is recommended that clear criteria be specified for students when observing and analysing performance. These may include aspects of body position, technical execution of a skill or tactical decisions in games.

Lessons were well structured and paced to ensure continuity and progress. There was a range of teaching methodologies used to promote student skill development including direct instruction, student and teacher demonstration. These were effective in providing clarification for students and ensuring their success in achieving set tasks. Students observed were confident in asking questions to clarify instructions related to set tasks. There was a good working atmosphere in all lessons and students were respectful of each other. Students were affirmed when warranted and there was a positive student-teacher rapport evident in the lessons observed.

ASSESSMENT

Students were positive and knowledgeable in their interactions during the inspection and it was evident, from responses to questioning, that students are achieving to a good level in Physical Education in this school. Students engaged well in the activities and there was a good participation rate in classes observed.

Records of attendance and participation were maintained for each class. These records help to provide a basis for informed comment on student progress to parents, who receive two reports during the year, at Christmas and summer in line with standard practice.

Involvement in the implementation of the new Junior Cycle Physical Education Syllabus has helped to expand the range of formative assessment possibilities. Some of these modes of assessment include peer and self-assessment, engaging students in the completion of rich-tasks and assessment for learning. It is commendable that some consideration has been given to providing informative feedback regarding student progress in the subject. The Physical Education department is encouraged to continue to develop the process of assessment that is relevant and informative to students regarding their progress in the subject.

Availability at parent-teacher meetings is commendable as it firmly establishes Physical Education as a core component of each student's education.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Physical Education is a core subject for all year groups.
- Students in Transition Year receive an additional timetable allocation each week for activities, many of which involve physical activity.
- There is good support for continuing professional development in the school.
- The school is advanced in implementing the new Junior Cycle Physical Education Syllabus.
- The school hires a local community sports hall and swimming pool, when required, to support access to a broader range of activities due to the limitations imposed by the lack of suitable facilities in the school.
- The school supports students' involvement in extra-curricular physical activities and has achieved to a high level in regional and national events.
- The Physical Education department has developed a comprehensive subject plan catering for as many of the activity strands of the syllabuses as possible.
- There is a good standard of teaching and learning in Physical Education.
- All lessons visited were well planned, organised and progressed at a pace commensurate with the abilities of the students.
- Students observed were confident participants and actively engaged in all tasks with enthusiasm.
- Students were educated in a positive, respectful working atmosphere and were regularly affirmed for their efforts.
- Students' progress and participation in Physical Education lessons are reported to parents twice per year and during parent-teacher meetings.

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 the level of provision for Physical Education as recommended by Department of Education and Science, Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools.
- It is recommended that a dedicated area be found to centrally store Physical Education equipment and resources.
- Planning for the use of digital video is encouraged as an aid to teaching and learning in Physical Education.
- It is recommended that units of work be expanded to support the comprehensive activities plan for each year group.

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