

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta
Department of Education and Science**

**Subject Inspection of Physical Education
REPORT**

**Midleton College
Midleton, County Cork
Roll number: 62370J**

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REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Midleton 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 lessons and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and teachers 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 teachers. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Midleton College is a co-educational school with boarding and day students among the enrolment of 299 students. Classes are usually of mixed ability with some higher and ordinary level classes created at senior cycle, usually in Gaeilge, English and Maths. The timetabled allocation for Physical Education has to be considered inadequate as it falls well short of the two hours per student per week recommended in the Department of Education and Science *Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools 2004-2005*. First-year and Transition Year (TY) classes have a double period of Physical Education and it is commendable that management always tries to timetable these lessons to end before lunch break or the end of the school day so that students don't lose too much activity time changing out of their physical education gear. It is of some concern, however, that there is currently no timetabled Physical Education provided to students in second year, third year, fifth year and sixth year. Although it has to be acknowledged that the extensive range of extracurricular activities on offer in the school goes some way toward making up this deficit, participation in extracurricular activities is voluntary with the consequent risk that a minority of students may have little or no physical activity for much of their school life in Midleton College. It is therefore recommended that all students be provided with timetabled lessons in Physical Education, in accordance with Department of Education and Science recommendations.

Physical Education in the school is currently being delivered by four teachers who, while they hold qualifications relevant to Physical Education and have expertise in a range of sporting disciplines, do not hold qualifications recognised by the Department of Education and Science for the purpose of teaching Physical Education. Although these teachers are dedicated, conscientious professionals, the fact that they don't have specialist knowledge in every aspect of Physical Education means that there are some shortcomings relating to the range of activities that they are in a position to deliver. In addition to this, the deployment of these teachers to take timetabled

lessons in Physical Education may have health and safety implications as they cannot be expected to have the same depth of understanding of health and safety procedures in Physical Education as a fully qualified physical education teacher would be expected to have. Despite this, it must be pointed out that no unsafe practice was seen during the inspection and very good health and safety procedures were followed in all lessons. Additionally, it is commendable, and considered prudent, that these teachers only teach activities with which they are familiar and in which they have some background or expertise, as this helps to minimise any potential health and safety risk. It is, nonetheless, recommended that the school consider recruiting the services of a fully qualified physical education teacher to oversee the delivery of a broad and balanced physical education curriculum.

The on-site facilities available for the teaching of Physical Education are good and include a full-sized astro turf pitch, a grass pitch, a cricket pitch, two tennis courts, a long-jump area and an outdoor swimming pool which is used in the summer months. In addition to these facilities, the school also has a very large rugby training pitch, adjacent to the local rugby club, which is used for the training of school teams. The school currently does not have a purpose-built physical education hall and this has placed considerable constraints on the range of activities that it can offer in physical education lessons, particularly during inclement weather. Although there is an old hall in the school, this facility was built primarily as a concert hall, is quite unsuitable for Physical Education and is only used for physical education lessons when there is no other option available. The ambitious, and highly commendable, developments that are planned regarding the upgrading of the school's physical education facilities, including the building of a new physical education hall, can be expected to be of significant benefit to the school and management is commended for the initiative and foresight shown in the development and promotion of this project. It is suggested that the recruitment of a physical education teacher will enable the school to maximise the educational benefit to students of these facilities.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The need for teachers involved in the teaching of Physical Education in the school to teach activities in which they have some background and training has inevitably led to a narrowing in the range of activities on offer in the school's curricular physical education programme. Games, especially team games such as hockey and rugby, have tended to dominate therefore. While it is acceptable and understandable that promotion of these games is emphasised as part of the essential ethos and tradition of the school, a broader and more balanced physical education programme is recommended to cater for the needs and interests of as many students as possible. The core areas of activity identified in the Junior Cycle Physical Education (JCPE) syllabus (www.jcpe.ie) are athletics, aquatics, adventure activities, gymnastics, dance, games and health-related activity and all schools should seek to provide as many of these as possible to all students. As previously intimated, the provision of this range of activities will require the recruitment of a fully qualified physical education teacher as the staff currently employed in the school are not in a position to deliver many of these activities. It is acknowledged that the school wanted to become involved in the formal implementation of the new Junior Cycle Physical Education syllabus but could not do so owing to the fact that it does not have a fully qualified physical education teacher on staff. It also has to be pointed out that the school recruits the services of external coaches to deliver activities in particular areas of Physical Education, notably in tennis, cricket and rugby. This is commendable as it broadens the range of experiences available to students.

The school has been involved in school development planning for a number of years and whole-school policies in the areas of enrolment, school ethos, code of behaviour and child protection are among those that have been developed. There is a subject plan in place for Physical Education and the physical education department is commended for the effort which has gone into its compilation. In addition to the detailed schemes of work regarding the range of activities offered in timetabled physical education lessons, the subject plan also includes the school's ethos statement, enrolment policies, code of behaviour, parent-teacher association constitution and information regarding child protection. This is considered good practice as it helps to ensure that the aims of the school's physical education programme are consistent with the overall educational aims of the school. Management is also commended for facilitating subject department planning as a number of opportunities are scheduled throughout the year for teachers in various subject departments to meet formally. Records of these meetings and of decisions taken are maintained by the physical education department.

The school's extensive range of extracurricular and co-curricular physical activities caters for a large number of students and the commitment of the many teachers involved in the provision of these activities is highly commended as these activities take place both after school and often at weekends. Among the many activities provided are rugby, hockey, table tennis, equestrianism, orienteering, cricket, athletics, tennis and basketball. Some recreational swimming, supervised by a fully qualified lifeguard, is provided in the school's swimming pool during late spring, summer and early autumn months and the annual sports day is one of the highlights of the school calendar. The provision of this range of activities is commended as it contributes in no small way to the positive, vibrant atmosphere in the school which was quite evident during the inspection. A range of interesting TY activities has also been planned, including an outdoor education trip to an outdoor education centre and modules in personal development, substance abuse and First Aid. It is commendable that learning in the latter activity is externally certified by the Order of Malta, as the provision of opportunities to gain external accreditation for learning is regarded as a key component of the TY ethos.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The quality of teaching and learning observed during the inspection was good and it is considered good practice that teachers only taught activities in which they have some background and expertise. All lessons began promptly with a roll call and some warm-up activities and students facilitated the prompt beginning of each lesson by assisting in the setting up of class materials and by warming up, often without being asked to do so by their teachers. An extensive array of class materials and equipment was prepared in advance of all lessons and the appropriate use of this equipment was a considerable benefit to learning. Stretching and mobility exercises were well performed and achieved the purpose of preparing students both mentally and physically for more vigorous physical activity. When performing warm-up activities, it is essential that all students are as active as possible at all times. Thus, any activities that involve students queuing, for all but the briefest periods, should be avoided.

Teachers structured a range of different learning activities during the development phases of the lessons and the nature of these sufficiently challenged all students and yet provided opportunities for all to achieve success. This is important as achieving success at even a basic level helps to foster a positive attitude to learning. Explanations from teachers were clear and concise at all times and focused students' attention on the key aspects of each skill and the concepts that were being taught. Although particular drills and practices were well designed and structured so that each posed an increasing challenge, some students found it a little more difficult than others to execute skills in a confined area. It is regarded as good practice that opportunities are provided for these students to

initially acquire skills in a non-competitive setting with ample space and time allowed to practice the skill. As proficiency improves, greater demands can be placed on students by limiting the space, and consequently the time, in which the skill has to be executed through the use of small-sided and conditioned games. This approach is regarded as appropriate to skill acquisition in team games and enables students to firstly acquire the basic elements of the skill and later to consolidate this learning by applying the skills learned in game situations.

Teacher recapping at the end of lessons was very well handled and succeeded in focusing students' attention on the key areas of learning of the lesson. This is considered very good practice as it not only helps to reinforce learning in the current lesson, but also helps students to link learning in one lesson to subsequent lessons and view each lesson as part of an integrated whole. In this regard, it is also considered good practice to share learning goals at the start of each lesson as this can be highly motivational for students and can help them to feel a greater sense of ownership of the learning process. It can also help students to become more self-analytical by encouraging them to assess their performances by referring to the stated goals of the lesson, in keeping with assessment for learning. Students' responses to questions from teachers and from the inspector indicated that they are achieving to a good level in Physical Education and that achievement is particularly good in the area of games. It is suggested that, whenever possible, greater use be made of opportunities to elicit learning from students through focused individual and group questioning rather than through teacher presentation of information. In lessons in which this questioning took place, it was an obvious benefit to students' understanding. Students had a very enjoyable learning experience in Physical Education and they were active, happy and co-operated fully with their teachers and each other at all times. The positive atmosphere in which lessons took place, and the genuine friendliness and respect shown between teachers and students, was evident in all lessons.

ASSESSMENT

Teachers informally assess students' learning in Physical Education through observation and information on student's learning is communicated to parents at parent-teacher meetings. These meetings take place once per year for each year group and the physical education teachers attend all of these. It is recommended that Physical Education should be included on all school reports sent to parents so that the substantial learning that is taking place in the subject can be formally recognised. This will necessitate the keeping of records of student performance and achievement in Physical Education, as well as the current records being maintained in relation to attendance and participation. It is recommended that the physical education department consider strategies to facilitate this as part of the developmental plan for the subject.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The teachers involved in the teaching of Physical Education make every effort to provide as broad a range of activities as possible to students.
- The school is commended for its willingness to use the services of outside personnel to provide instruction in areas of the curriculum in which the school's physical education teachers lack expertise.
- The facilities available for the teaching of Physical Education are good and commendable plans are in place to upgrade and develop these.
- Subject planning in Physical Education is good and is well supported by management.
- An extensive range of extracurricular activities is provided and this goes some way towards making up for the shortfall in timetabled provision in Physical Education.
- Transition Year provides students with a range of interesting learning opportunities not normally available in physical education lessons.
- Students are achieving to a good level in Physical Education and achievement is particularly good in the area of games
- All physical education lessons take place in an atmosphere of mutual respect and co-operation between teachers and students, and students are clearly enjoying their physical education lessons.

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

- The school should consider recruiting a teacher with physical education teaching qualifications recognised by the Department of Education and Science to oversee the delivery of a comprehensive curriculum in Physical Education.
- The timetabled provision in Physical Education should be increased as it currently falls well short of Department of Education and Science recommendations.
- Greater breadth and balance, with less emphasis on games, should be provided in the school's timetabled physical education programme.
- Learning goals should be shared with students at the start of lessons.
- Opportunities should be provided for weaker students to initially acquire skills in a non-competitive setting, with ample space and time allowed, before placing greater demands on skill execution by limiting space and time.
- Physical Education should be included, at least once per year, in formal written reports to parents.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the teachers 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.