

An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta  
Department of Education and Science

Subject Inspection of Physical Education  
REPORT

FCJ Secondary School  
Bunclody, County Wexford  
Roll number: 63550Q

Date of inspection: 23 October 2008

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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 FCJ Bunclody, conducted as part of a whole school evaluation. 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 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 teachers.

Subject provision and whole school support

Physical Education is provided as a core subject for all junior cycle and Transition Year (TY) students and as an optional subject for fifth-year and sixth-year students. The subject is listed as 'Games' on the school timetables. It is recommended that this title be changed to Physical Education which is the curricular subject approved by the Department of Education

and Science (DES), and also to reflect the comprehensive nature of the programme provided by the school, which is far more expansive than a games programme.

The timetable provision for the subject at junior cycle is adequate to provide a comprehensive physical education programme and is in line with circular M15/05, which requires schools to provide a minimum of one double period per week to support the implementation of the revised junior cycle Physical Education syllabus. The timetabling of three periods of Physical Education for each TY class group, one afternoon per week, is exemplary provision. In addition, the concurrent timetabling of the three TY class groups facilitates the provision of a broader range of activities to cater for the diversity of students' needs and interests.

Physical Education is an optional subject for Leaving Certificate students, who select the subject from a subject option line that also includes Music and Computer Studies. Those fifth-year and sixth-year students who opt for Physical Education are provided with one double period per week, which is adequate time provision. However, it is regrettable that not all Leaving Certificate students study Physical Education. Whilst many of the students who do not opt to study Physical Education may be involved in physical activity to some extent in the school through the extra-curricular sports programme, all students should be afforded the opportunity to develop a full and complete understanding of their physical functionality and the factors that underpin engagement in physical activity, exercise and sport. Physical Education aims to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes for lifelong involvement in physical activity and sport as part of a balanced health-promoting lifestyle. It is recommended that the school reconsider its provision as part of its next curriculum review and work toward providing Physical Education for all students in line with the DES recommendations, as outlined in the Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools.

Physical Education is currently delivered by six teachers, four of whom hold recognised qualifications to teach the subject. In all cases, the teachers without physical education teaching qualifications are timetabled concurrently with a qualified physical education teacher. This arrangement allows for the qualified physical education teacher to oversee the delivery of the programme and to highlight and off-set any potential health and safety concerns. It also ensures that students benefit from a broader, education-based approach to a range of activities than could be provided by the non-qualified physical education teachers alone. It is acknowledged that the teachers without physical education teaching qualifications have expertise in some areas relevant to Physical Education and can provide quality tuition in these areas. It is also acknowledged that these teachers make a very valuable contribution towards developing a positive physical activity culture in the school and bring a level of vibrancy and enthusiasm to the extra-curricular sports programme. Whilst all teachers observed during the inspection were fully committed to providing high-quality and positive experiences for their students, it is best practice that only teachers who hold appropriate qualifications, as recognised by the Department of Education and Science, be deployed to teach Physical Education. This will ensure that the educational principles underpinning engagement in physical activities and sports can be delivered in a coherent and consistent manner for all students.

There are good structures to support teachers' continuing professional development. These

include releasing teachers for attendance at DES-provided in-service for the revised junior cycle Physical Education syllabus, and payment of affiliation subscriptions to the Physical Education Association of Ireland (PEAI). Whole-school professional development activities have also been provided and include courses in the use of automated external defibrillation (AED), and seminars relating to the greater inclusion of students with special educational needs, all of which are highly relevant to the work of the physical education department. FCJ also accommodates undergraduate physical education students undertaking their teaching placement. It is commendable that these students are fully inducted on arrival in the school and are facilitated and supervised by the respective physical education teachers during their experience.

There are good facilities to support the delivery of a comprehensive physical education programme in the school. The school has a small indoor hall, which is quite restrictive if there are large numbers in the class. A balcony area is used to play table-tennis and is a valuable space that could be further developed as a practical classroom or to accommodate a small fitness suite. In addition, the school concert hall is used for some of the activity strands of the syllabus that can be accommodated in this space. There are extensive external sports facilities that include an all-weather pitch, three grass pitches and a large hard-court area that has been lined to provide for both basketball and tennis. These facilities are very well maintained and presented and are testament to the value placed on physical activity and sport by the school.

There is ample equipment and resources available to support the planned physical education programme. The physical education department also has access to the school's computer room and additional information and communications technology (ICT) equipment, including digital video cameras, if required. The school is broadband enabled and access to the wireless network can be obtained from the sports hall and balcony area. The storage of equipment and resources is highly organised and all are easily accessible. Management is reported to be very supportive of all requests for the purchase of necessary items of equipment and resources. A games fund draw is organised annually and substantial funds are raised to support both the physical education and the extra-curricular sports programmes. The organisation and administration of this initiative by members of the physical education department and senior management are highly commended.

Provision for health and safety issues specific to Physical Education is outlined in the subject plan, which is good practice. In the lessons observed there was very good adherence to the principles of health and safety in all aspects of participation and tuition. The playing environments were also found to be in good condition. However, it is recommended that the school's goalposts be included in all health and safety audits and these be checked for structural integrity and alignment to ensure that they meet the safety standards as per I.S. 356 and I.S. 357. Information on the inspection of goalposts can be obtained from the National Standards Association of Ireland or by visiting their website at [www.n sai.ie](http://www.n sai.ie).

An extensive range of extra-curricular sports and physical activities is supported by the school. FCJ has a long tradition of competing in Gaelic games and has experienced significant success at all grades, winning many local, regional, provincial and All-Ireland titles. The success of the school is due to the commitment of students and teachers in

maintaining very high standards in training and preparation and in competition. The running of the extra-curricular sports programme is well organised and a detailed timetable has been drawn up for the use of the various facilities and training of the school teams. Large numbers of students are reported to participate in the range of activities that include athletics, basketball, camogie, Gaelic football, hockey and soccer. Students are also accommodated to represent the school in activities that cannot be provided directly by the school such as golf and equestrian events. Extensive links have been established by the school with the local sports providers such as the golf, soccer and GAA clubs and the local health and leisure centre. These links extend the availability of top-class facilities and opportunities to the school and this synergy supports students in identifying and developing their interests and talents both through the school and the clubs. The exposure of students to the sporting, leisure and recreational facilities and opportunities in their locality is very good practice as it promotes and develops positive physical activity behaviours. Sport plays a large role in the life of the school and acknowledgement of students' achievements at the annual awards night and the display of photographs and trophies throughout the school is testament to its impact on school life. The achievement and success of past and present students of the school in some of these activities is to the highest national and international standard. The involvement and commitment of a large number of staff in the organisation and coaching of the various activities must be acknowledged and highly commended.

#### Planning and preparation

The facilitation by management, at least once per term, of formal subject department planning meetings and the recording of the proceedings of these meetings is commended. Furthermore, the identification of actions arising from these planning meetings and the assignment of specific tasks to teachers is good practice. The subject is effectively coordinated and the minutes of meetings indicate that a good range of topics is discussed, some of which relate to the most appropriate approaches to teaching and learning and assessment in various topics. This is welcomed as it indicates a good level of reflective practice on the delivery of the planned programme.

The members of the physical education department have fully engaged in a collaborative approach to the subject planning process and a detailed common plan has been developed. The subject plan is very well structured and is a coherent and accessible document. All aspects related to the organisation, content and delivery of a comprehensive physical education programme are clearly presented in booklet form. Good practice was found whereby strategies for the inclusion of students with special educational needs (SEN) and links with the SEN department are identified in the subject plan. The physical education department should also document some of the effective strategies observed for the inclusion of students who may be temporarily unable to participate in the physical activities of lessons. It is commendable that opportunities to promote cross-curricular links have also been identified in the subject plan by specifying the activity modules or topics and their links to subjects such as Home Economics, Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Science and Art.

The concurrent timetabling arrangements for most class groups facilitate the organisation of activity options which students may select from to suit their interests and abilities. This

arrangement is especially beneficial for TY and Leaving Certificate students. However, it is important that this arrangement is regularly monitored to ensure that the available facilities can safely accommodate the numbers of senior cycle students timetabled concurrently. This is especially applicable during the winter months where additional pressure may be placed on the indoor facilities.

There are three stand-alone mixed-gender classes on the timetable; one from first, second and third year. All TY classes are timetabled concurrently and operate a mixed-gender physical education programme. All other class groups are timetabled concurrently and are separated by gender. Whilst this system works well in this school, it is important that this process be grounded in a clear rationale by the physical education department. Opportunities should be availed of to promote gender integration, with the relevant groups, during appropriate modules and activity strands where possible, as this will help to further promote the concepts of socialisation through physical activity and sport. Such opportunities should be included in the subject plan.

The revised junior cycle Physical Education syllabus is fully embedded in the school and many of the resources provided by the support service have been availed of to support its implementation. The number and variety of activity blocks offered at junior cycle are in line with the syllabus guidelines and provide students with a broad, balanced and relevant programme of work. Each activity block is supported by a scheme of work that clearly documents the aims, the content and progression and the resources required to support the teaching and learning process. This is good planning practice.

Resulting from the timetable arrangements for TY, a modular based approach is taken when designing the physical education programme. TY students can select the activities they wish to experience from a predefined list. The planned programme provides students with many opportunities to engage in a diversity of physical activities that promote lifelong participation. These include self-defence, swimming, yoga, kayaking, adventure activities, horse riding, golf, health-related fitness, dance and GAA coaching and refereeing modules. Students receive certificates for many of the activities they study and this external validation and certification of learning provides students with tangible outcomes arising from their physical education programme.

The planned senior cycle programme also provides a diversity of activities. The physical education department engages in a consultative process with senior cycle students to identify the module options for each year group. This is good practice as it allows students to assume some ownership of their physical education programme and improves their level of engagement. To build on this practice it is recommended that the physical education department include an element of student evaluation of the programme at the end of the year. This will further inform and enhance the content and quality of delivery of the senior cycle physical education programme.

There is good planning for resources by the physical education department and a number of DVDs, worksheets and books have been developed to support some of the activity modules offered. To build on this good planning practice it is recommended that the physical education department further develop their resources for the adventure activities module

to include detailed maps of the school grounds. These extensive grounds are ideally suited to introducing students to orienteering. The completion of this process could be achieved in collaboration with the school's geography department. Advice and assistance on the mapping process could be obtained by contacting the local branch of the Irish Orienteering Association. Further information and contact details are available on [www.orienteering.ie](http://www.orienteering.ie).

It is commended that an extensive list of relevant websites are documented in the subject plan, which provide a useful source of activity-specific information and online resources. However, it is recommended that the physical education department plan for the greater use of ICT as an additional strategy in the teaching and learning process where practical and applicable. There is very good potential in this school for the effective use of a range of digital media and computer-based applications to promote higher-order engagement in the subject. For example video clips may be used to assist students in their application of set criteria for self and peer-review of performances. Electronic resources may also provide useful stimulus and criterion-referenced material to assist students in their analysis of biomechanical, tactical and aesthetic components of human movement and performance. Further information on the use of ICT in teaching and learning is available on [www.ncte.ie](http://www.ncte.ie).

### Teaching and learning

There was a good standard of teaching and learning observed in all lessons. Lessons were well structured and paced. Good procedures were established at the commencement of each lesson including the preparation of the learning environment, the recording of attendance and the organisation and implementation of warm-up activities, all of which were executed efficiently.

In the lessons visited the topics were health-related fitness, volleyball, soccer and Gaelic football. Good practice was observed when the teacher outlined the lesson content and purpose and shared the intended learning outcomes with the students. In most other cases, some identification of the content and progression was shared with students during the lessons. It is recommended that teachers build on this practice and include clear learning outcomes for students at the beginning of all lessons. This practice can help students remain focused on the specific requirements of each task and provide tangible targets for their learning.

All lessons commenced with warm-up activities and in most cases, these were related to the focused topic, which helped to optimise the skill familiarisation phase of the lessons. The warm-up phases of lessons were appropriately structured and included light aerobic-based activities followed by stretching exercises and skill rehearsal drills, all of which ensured that students were in a state of physiological readiness for higher intensity activities. Teachers used the available space in the sports hall very well, particularly when there were large numbers of students present. In one case, a systematic approach was taken to create movement lanes, which ensured that all students were fully active and worked through a series of mobility drills in a safe and structured manner. Good practice was also observed in a lesson when senior students took responsibility for their own warm-up. However, in such cases, it is important that the duration and technical execution of the activities and exercises are closely monitored by teachers to ensure that students adhere to the correct

physiological and biomechanical principles at all times. The practice of regularly questioning and reinforcing students' knowledge and understanding of basic anatomy and physiology during the phases of the warm-up is commendable.

There was a good range of teaching methods used to promote learning in the lessons observed. These included teacher and student-led demonstrations, pair and small group work, completion of worksheets, peer-review and questioning. Demonstrations were well executed and effective in indicating the technical points for successful performance. There was also some good use of the whiteboard to outline lesson organisation, to explain tactical positioning or to identify the technical components in the execution of a focused skill. Teachers used questioning as a valuable strategy to determine students' understanding and to engage them in some analysis of their performances. This practice is commended as it promotes students' cognitive engagement with the activities which further informs their practical performance. A team-teaching approach was observed in some lessons and this worked successfully to support students' engagement with the set tasks and activities.

There was good sequencing of learning in most lessons to ensure the acquisition, development and application of key skills. In the games lessons observed, skills were practised in unopposed settings, in conditioned small-sided games and in full application. This sequencing of learning is good practice as it assists students to develop their technical ability and their tactical understanding in an integrated manner. A review of the games for understanding approach would assist teachers to further develop this practice. Students' engagement in self-directed and paired activity in the gym demonstrated a high level of application and maturity. Students worked well in pairs to alternate the role of "spotter". This was particularly useful to promote the development of technical competence in the execution of the resistance exercises. To further develop students' technical competence and understanding of resistance training, teachers should extend the performance criteria for each exercise to focus on the correct posture to ensure optimal alignment of the articular and muscular structures, the lifting phases and the breathing technique when exerting a force. The approach of using a rich-task at the end of a senior soccer module was good practice. However, it is important that the rich-task is framed appropriately to ensure that students have an opportunity to apply all aspects of their learning related to the activity module. This may include the completion of a personal skill and physical fitness profile and an analysis and selection of appropriate team tactics, in addition to the organisation and participation in the end-of-module tournament.

In all lessons there was a good commitment to ensuring high levels of physical activity and students were fully engaged in the lesson tasks. Tasks were structured to include students of all ability and were equally challenging for the high performer as well as those with low levels of motor skill or physical fitness. Strategies have been developed for the inclusion of students who are unable to participate in the physical activities of the lesson, which is good practice. The documentation of these strategies in the subject plan has been previously recommended.

A number of posters and charts related to warm-up, stretching and anatomy are displayed in the sports hall and these provide a useful stimulus to promote students' knowledge and understanding. The continuation of this good practice is recommended and where possible

the materials should be changed periodically to coincide with the various topics being studied.

In all cases there was very good classroom management and teachers had established a good rapport with their students. Lessons were characterised by mutual respect and adherence to a high standard of behaviour. Teachers were actively engaged with their students and offered assistance and affirmation to individuals and small groups when required.

Good practice was observed where teachers reviewed students' learning at the end of lessons through questioning. In some cases, teachers also gave an outline of the content of the next lesson. This is good practice as it helps students to view their physical education lessons as part of a learning continuum rather than a series of isolated experiences.

Students demonstrated a good work ethic and were diligent in their application to the set tasks. Students had a good knowledge of the focused topics when questioned by the inspector and demonstrated a good understanding of their work.

#### Assessment

Assessment in Physical Education takes place informally through observation of students' engagement in class activities and through questioning to determine students' understanding of the focused topics. Involvement in the implementation of the revised junior cycle Physical Education syllabus has seen the introduction of self and peer assessment, and the completion of rich-tasks for some classes, which is commendable. The completion of a written assignment by TY students is another example of an effective form of assessment. To further develop the assessment process, it is recommended that the physical education department expand the present system to develop student portfolios of learning, whereby all students can retain a record of their work. This process will also help provide a more informed basis from which to report on students' progress and attainment in the subject.

Records of attendance and participation are maintained by all teachers in a systematic manner for each physical education class. The physical education department attends all parent-teacher meetings and a comment on students' attainment in Physical Education is included in formal reports to parents at Christmas and summer, which is commendable.

#### Summary of main findings and recommendations

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Physical Education is well resourced and organised in FCJ.
- The school is implementing the revised junior cycle Physical Education syllabus.
- Management is fully supportive of continuing professional development and all qualified physical education teachers have attended in-service training for the implementation of the revised junior cycle Physical Education syllabus.



- A good range of well-maintained facilities is available for the teaching of Physical Education in the school and the local sports, leisure and recreation facilities and amenities are regularly used by the school to support the planned programme.
- Subject department planning is well advanced and a comprehensive physical education plan has been developed.
- The programme of work for each year group is clearly presented and supported by schemes of work that address all aspects related to the content and effective organisation and delivery of the subject.
- There is a good range of activities planned for TY in keeping with the spirit and ethos of the programme.
- The practice of organising activity modules to accommodate the preferences of TY and Leaving Certificate students is highly commendable.
- There is a good standard of teaching and learning in Physical Education. Lessons were well organised, structured and conducted in a respectful learning environment.
- Students' participation and progress in Physical Education is reported to parents twice per year.
- Sport is highly valued by the school and there is an extensive extra-curricular sports programme. The school has had notable success at regional and national level in many of these activities.

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

- It is recommended that the title 'Games' be changed to Physical Education on the school's timetables.
- The school should reconsider its provision of Physical Education at senior cycle and ensure that all students have access to the subject in accordance with the Department of Education and Science guidelines.
- Only teachers who hold recognised qualifications should be timetabled to teach Physical Education.
- The school's goalposts should be included in all health and safety audits and checked for structural integrity and alignment to ensure that they meet the safety standards I.S. 356 and I.S. 357.
- Where classes are timetabled concurrently and separated by gender, the physical education department should plan to include opportunities that promote gender integration during appropriate modules and activity strands.
- Teachers should expand the practice of sharing the content at the beginning of lessons with students to include specific learning outcomes.
- The present system of assessment should be expanded to include student portfolios of learning, where all students can retain a record of the work completed in their physical education lessons.

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

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