

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

**Subject Inspection of Physical Education
REPORT**

**Blackrock College,
Blackrock, County Dublin
Roll number: 60030V**

Date of inspection: 24 March 2009

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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 Blackrock College, 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 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 and a representative of the subject teachers.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Sport and physical activity is central to life in Blackrock College, whose students have a long established and successful tradition of competing at the highest level in many sporting endeavours. A significant level of resources is committed by the college to the provision and maintenance of the extensive sporting facilities, which provide the infrastructure to support the various Physical Education, sport and physical activity programmes. A culture of participation and engagement is fostered and promoted through various effective supports that include a dedicated games master and the extensive involvement of a large number of staff members and past students, many of whom are qualified coaches in the various disciplines.

Physical Education is a core subject on the curriculum for junior cycle, Transition Year (TY) and fifth-year students. The timetable provision for the subject in second year and TY has increased recently, which is commendable. The current timetable allocation for the subject provides second-year students with one double period of Physical Education, whilst third-year students receive a single period for the subject per week. TY students receive one double period per week. Fifth-year students receive one single period per week, whilst the subject is not timetabled for sixth-year students. The college views the extensive sport and physical activities programmes, which are scheduled for various athletes and players before school, during lunchtimes and after school, as being an integral component of the overall provision for Physical Education. This report acknowledges the college's view and highly commends its provision and support for the extra-curricular sport and physical activities programmes. However, the timetable provision for curricular Physical Education is significantly below the recommendations of the Department of Education and Science (DES) as outlined in the *Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools*. The time available in single period lessons is insufficient to provide for meaningful and in-depth engagement with the topics. Students require adequate time to change before and after lessons, which reduces the amount of time for quality tuition and physical activity. Curricular Physical Education strives to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the principles underpinning human movement and the multi-faceted benefits that accrue as a result of regular engagement in physical activity, exercise and sport. The experiences provided through a broad, balanced, relevant and coherent physical education programme ensure that all students learn through a combination of focused cooperative and competitive tasks commensurate with their physical and cognitive abilities. Learning through and about Physical Education collectively provides all students with a deeper understanding of the world of physical activity, exercise and sport than is possible through the extra-curricular programmes. The excellent extra-curricular sports and physical activity programmes provide a medium through which students can apply, further enhance and give expression to the knowledge and understanding gained in Physical Education. Whilst a large majority of students participate at some level in the extra-curricular sports programme, not all students will maintain their participation levels over their school careers. It is recommended that the provision of single period lessons be reviewed and increased to provide a minimum of a double period per year group per week, and that the college work towards providing Physical Education for all students in line with the recommendations of the DES.

The Physical Education department consists of three teachers, who are qualified in the subject, with one of these teachers currently pursuing recognition for his qualifications through the Teaching Council. Due to unforeseen circumstances, in the short term, some lessons are being taken by personnel who do not possess Physical Education qualifications. As classes are timetabled concurrently, suitable arrangements are in place to ensure that these lessons are overseen by the qualified Physical Education teachers. Nevertheless, it is recommended that only teachers who hold recognised qualifications be deployed to teach the subject. Members of the physical education department continue to pursue further professional development opportunities. Participation in relevant courses and conferences organised and certified by National Governing Bodies (NGB) of various sports ensures that the Physical Education teachers are fully aware of current best practice in these areas. The supports provided by the college and the level of engagement by the Physical Education teachers in the variety of relevant courses are highly commended.

The college has not participated in the programme of in-service provided by the DES for the implementation of the revised junior cycle Physical Education syllabus, or the *Action for Life* health-related activity programme. However, it is welcomed that the physical education department is actively sourcing relevant courses on the implementation of the revised syllabus and appropriate use of course materials. The use of the Junior Cycle Physical Education Support Service (JCPESS) website (www.jcpe.ie) and active engagement in online discussion forums for professional consultation would be beneficial for informing best practice. Furthermore, membership of the Physical Education Association of Ireland (PEAI; www.peai.ie) is funded by the college, which is another useful forum for

sharing good practice and ensuring ongoing professional development. The experience of some members of the physical education department in Blackrock College would be a very useful asset and would bring significant professional expertise to the subject association. Consideration should be given to some engagement and participation in the local Teacher Professional Network (TPN), which is facilitated by the PEAI.

Although the college does not possess a large indoor sports hall, it has a number of meticulously maintained facilities to support the teaching and learning of Physical Education and the extensive extra-curricular sports programmes. The indoor facilities include the jubilee hall, which is a small multi-purpose hall, a dedicated table-tennis room, two squash courts, a weights room and a four lane twenty-five metre indoor heated swimming pool. The weights room has a combination of free-weights and resistance machines and a number of cardio-vascular equipment including treadmills, rowing machines and bicycles. This facility provides a functional environment to teach the concepts related to the development of metabolic fitness, in addition to performance-related training. The external facilities in the college include ten rugby pitches, two soccer pitches, tennis courts and a 110 metre six-lane tartan running track. The lack of a suitable indoor area imposes some restrictions on the type of activities that can be adequately provided through the physical education and extra-curricular sports programmes. There are plans to develop a full-sized sports hall as part of the next development phase for the college. The provision of this facility will ensure that the college will possess a comprehensive high quality infrastructure to further support students' development.

There is sufficient equipment available to support all of the planned activity strands of the syllabus. A budget system is in operation to purchase replacement and additional equipment and resources. Other larger items are purchased on a needs basis and it was reported that management is fully supportive in this regard. There is excellent access to information and communication technology (ICT) to support planning, teaching and learning in Physical Education. A health and safety statement is prepared to ensure the welfare of all students participating in the physical education programme in keeping with good practice.

As referred to earlier in this report, Blackrock College offers an extensive extra-curricular sports and physical activities programme. The college is synonymous with rugby, which is its principal sport, and it is the most successful school in provincial history. It is also one of the greatest contributors to the various development academies and national squads, with many former students contributing to and leading Ireland to historic successes. For this alone the college deserves the highest accolades for its contribution to Irish sport. However, the college has structures that penetrate far beyond a single sport and has developed successful coaching and training programmes in a number of other sports including athletics and cross-country running, basketball, cricket, cycling, Gaelic football, rowing, soccer, squash, swimming and water polo, table-tennis and tennis. Participation in schools' competitions in a number of other sports such as golf, sailing and equestrian events are facilitated to give students an opportunity to represent Blackrock College in their sports of choice. Students have developed a strong sense of identity, community and sportsmanship through their involvement in the sports programme and spoke highly of its provision, support and organisation during the inspection.

The coordination of the extra-curricular programme is exemplary and there is detailed planning for the provision of the various sports and activities. Beneficial links have been established with a number of clubs and institutions, including University College Dublin (UCD), to provide high quality coaching to students and also to support their progression from school to club level. It is also notable that some of the activities are provided on a recreational basis, which supports students who may not be interested in competitive sport but who value and enjoy participating in exercise and physical activity. The college has recently conducted an analysis of the participation levels in the extra-curricular sports programme and this level of self reflection is highly commended. A significant number of staff members are involved in organising and coaching the extra-curricular activities and deserve great credit for their contribution. A number of past students of the college also contribute to coaching some of the college's athletes and teams, which is particularly praiseworthy and exemplifies the position of sport in the life of the college.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Subject planning for Physical Education is advancing well in Blackrock College. Management supports formal subject department planning meetings approximately once per month. A subject co-ordinator for

Physical Education is in place, a position which is assigned for an agreed term and for which each member of the subject department may apply. Each permanent member of the physical education department has had an opportunity to fulfil this role. The duties of the subject co-ordinator are well defined and include organising meetings, the organisation and use of facilities, liaising with management regarding curricular provision and budgetary planning. Minutes are maintained of formal meetings and indicate that pertinent issues regarding the organisation and delivery of the physical education programme are discussed. A dedicated office is available to the physical education department, which facilitates many informal meetings and a collaborative approach to the subject planning process. In addition, there is a networked computer available in the office, which also supports research, programme planning and record keeping. The support structures and facilities available ensure that the subject is very well co-ordinated and organised in the college.

A comprehensive subject plan has been developed for Physical Education. The junior cycle plan includes most of the activity strands of the syllabus and the programme of work is linked to the learning outcomes of the syllabus. The planned programme provides good breadth and balance in terms of knowledge and skills that students will acquire to inform their understanding of human movement and participation in physical activity, exercise and sport. It is recommended that some consideration be given to the inclusion of additional activity strands, such as adventure activities and team challenges, in the junior cycle programme. This would support students' learning prior to participation in their residential outdoor education trip. Participation in a number of events such as orienteering, hill-walking and camping may serve as a rich-task where students apply their learning at the completion of an activity block.

The TY programme includes an innovative fitness module, which aims to introduce students to the benefits of physical fitness, along with the principles and types of training applicable to the development of the components of health-related and sports-related fitness. A module in fifth year introduces students to the process of developing a training programme. This involves students in identifying the specific needs of the individual, designing an appropriate intervention and applying the principles of training. This is a well designed and worthwhile module that involves students in analysing and applying their knowledge and skills.

Detailed schemes of work are planned to support the effective delivery of many of the blocks of learning. Some of these schemes are excellently developed and presented to identify the key learning outcomes for each unit of work, and also include all relevant aspects to support the effective teaching and learning of the planned content. It is recommended that all schemes of work developed by the physical education department be assimilated into a common agreed format. This will help to develop consistency in delivering the core content and promoting effective teaching and learning for the specific blocks. Furthermore, schemes of work for similar activity strands should clearly illustrate the progression in terms of learning between each block. This progression is clearly illustrated in the planned health-related fitness modules from second year to fifth year and should serve as an example for all activity strands. This work should take place over an agreed period of time and be evenly distributed amongst all members of the department.

Planning for the inclusion of students with additional or special educational needs (SEN) is very well organised. Good links have been established with the learning support department and guidelines are available to support the Physical Education learning experiences of students with SEN. The use of an electronic database to access specific details and appropriate teaching and learning strategies is very good practice. There is scope for the further development of strategies and resources to include students who may be temporarily unable to participate in the physical activities due to medical or other reasons. The planned integration of ICT as an aid to teaching and learning, including the sourcing of resource materials from a variety of websites is most welcome. The continued development and expansion of this good practice is encouraged. The use of a dedicated physical education folder on the intranet to share planned schemes of work and electronic resources is exemplary practice.

There was good evidence that members of the physical education department engage in constructive self-evaluation. The annual review of participation levels, programme content and issues arising within each year group is very good practice to support the future development of the subject. To build on this good work, some element of student review of the physical education programme should be considered to enhance this review process.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

There is a good standard of teaching and learning in Physical Education in Blackrock College. In the lessons visited, the topics taught were health-related fitness and invasion games. Systematic procedures have been developed to record student attendance and participation. Students changed quickly and assisted in carrying equipment and setting up the playing environment, which ensured that the time available for learning was optimised. Some strategies, such as assisting in the organisation of the lesson and umpiring, were used to engage students who were unable to participate in the physical activities, which are commended. The further development and expansion of these strategies would be beneficial to actively maintain the engagement of these students throughout their lessons. These may include peer review of key performance indicators, taking video clips, acting as a teaching assistant and the completion of task specific worksheets.

Good practice was observed at the commencement of some lessons whereby teachers specified the content of the lessons and also indicated the learning intentions for their students. This practice should be extended, where practical, to all lessons so that students have a clear focus on what they are expected to know and be able to do at the end of the lesson. Practical lessons commenced with warm-up drills, which were appropriately structured with the intensity of activities progressing incrementally. Many of the warm-up practices consisted of initial skill-based activities, which ensured that students were fully active and engaged through rehearsal of previously learned motor-skills. In addition, good control of the intensity of the activities ensured that students adapted physiologically through appropriate progressions. Stretching activities were also included as appropriate and many of the exercises were taken by students on their teacher's instructions. This is very good practice as it provides students with opportunities to apply their learning, demonstrate their skill-based competency and develop their confidence to lead their peers. Good differentiation was made in some instances between static and dynamic range of motion and the relevance of each mode of stretching to performance.

Teaching strategies used were appropriate to the activities and involved students in some self-directed learning, individual, pair, small group and team based-activities. There was a good mix of unopposed skill-based practices and game-related activities, which provided opportunities for students to apply their learning in conditioned activities or games. In some instances, the use of smaller groups would have increased the opportunities for students to gain more experience in applying their skills in game-related play. Consideration should be given to optimising group size to ensure that all students have ample opportunities to practise their skills in applied settings. In some instances, the use of bibs would have been beneficial to players to identify their teammates. When teaching the principles of offensive and defensive play, it is suggested that players be given positional roles, which may be alternated at regular intervals, to further their understanding of these concepts. Exemplary practice was noted in one lesson where tasks were set for students that involved problem solving and decision making to develop offensive strategies in invasion games. Clear progression in students' learning and competency in playing the conditioned games were observed through improved spatial awareness and positional sense, good support and directional play. The involvement of students cognitively as well as physically in their lessons is highly commended.

Questioning was used to good effect in all lessons observed to engage and challenge students. ICT was effectively used in one of the theory lessons observed through a well prepared and engaging PowerPoint presentation. The use of assessment strategies in some lessons is also to be commended, as it promotes application to study and promotes deeper understanding of the course materials.

Most of the lessons observed included good use of subject specific terminology and challenged students to develop their understanding of the principles underpinning their involvement in the set tasks. In one case, students would have benefitted from clearer explanations and examples of key physiological and training principles. It is recommended, where precise technical information is required, that accurate explanations would be supported by carefully chosen resources and exemplar materials.

Classes were well managed and tasks were well organised and expediently executed. Students' engagement, application and work-rate in the lessons observed were of a high quality. All practical lessons had a strong focus on high levels of physical activity, which is commendable especially in single period lessons. Teachers have established a supportive and affirming rapport with their students, who

were friendly and respectful of each other and their teachers. The creation of a fully inclusive and positive supportive environment in all lessons is highly commended.

Lessons concluded by reviewing the main teaching and learning points and outlining the topics to be covered in the next lesson. This good practice ensures that students view each lesson as part of a sequence that incrementally develops their learning.

ASSESSMENT

Detailed records are maintained of students' attendance and participation in all Physical Education lessons. The storage of these records electronically is exemplary as it allows for the easy monitoring and comparison of participation data within and between class and year groups.

Significant progress has been made in the development of the assessment process for Physical Education in the college. The physical education department has begun to use some assessment for learning strategies to help promote students' learning. These include the use of self-assessment profiles and the introduction of peer-assessment methods. A number of assessment tasks are also set for students that contribute to the assessment process, such as the completion of written assessments at the end of a health-related fitness module in TY and the design of an individualised fitness training programme in fifth year. The inclusion of formative feedback on students' written assessments or tasks is very good practice as it directs students to areas where improvements can be made, whilst acknowledging areas of high quality. The development of student profiles from teachers' records and observations and the completion of a number of tasks ensure that a good overview of student engagement and attainment is formulated, which informs reporting to parents. The continued development and expansion of the assessment system is recommended. The inclusion of additional tasks such as the completion of an investigative task, a written, picture or video diary of skill development in a selected activity and a practical performance assessment at least once per year are some examples that will help to enhance the student profiles. The information and materials collected will also facilitate the development of student portfolios of learning.

The frequency of reporting to parents is exemplary. Weekly application reports, in addition to regular attainment reports, ensure that parents are fully informed of their son's engagement and progress across all subjects including Physical Education. In addition, parent-teacher meetings for each year group provide a useful forum to engage with parents.

There was a very good work ethic observed amongst the students participating in their Physical Education lessons in Blackrock College. Students were confident and competent respondents to questions posed during the inspection.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The range of facilities and resources available for Physical Education, school sport and physical activity are of a high quality and are very well maintained.
- The structures and facilities to support the subject planning process ensure that Physical Education is very well co-ordinated and organised in the college.
- A comprehensive subject plan has been developed collaboratively by the physical education department to support the organisation and delivery of the subject.
- Continuing professional development and engagement in relevant courses is promoted and fully supported by management. Members of the physical education department have been proactive in their own professional learning.
- ICT is effectively integrated to support teaching and learning in Physical Education.
- There was a good standard of teaching and learning in the Physical Education lessons observed.
- Lessons were well structured and paced and ensured high levels of engagement and physical activity.
- Tasks set in lessons were challenging and promoted students' physical and cognitive development.
- Students observed were confident, competent and enthusiastic in their engagement.

- Teachers have established a good rapport with their students and there was a very respectful, positive and affirming atmosphere evident in all lessons.
- Significant progress has been made in the development of the assessment process for Physical Education.
- The electronic storage of student records and the frequency of reporting to parents are exemplary practices.
- There is exemplary provision, promotion, involvement and achievement in extra-curricular sport and physical 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 provision for Physical Education be extended to all students in the college in line with the recommendations of the Department of Education and Science, *Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools*.
- The provision of single period lessons for Physical Education should be revised to provide a minimum of one double period per week.
- It is recommended that only teachers who possess recognised qualifications to teach Physical Education be deployed to teach the subject.
- All schemes of work developed by the physical education department should be assimilated into a common agreed format.
- Additional strands of the syllabus should be included in the planned physical education programme.
- Where applicable, consideration should be given to optimising group size to ensure that all students have ample opportunities to practise their skills in applied settings.
- When precise technical information is required, explanations should be accurate and supported by carefully chosen resources and exemplar materials.
- The continued development and expansion of the assessment system to include an increased range of assessment methodologies is recommended.

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

Published February 2010