

IMPROVING Physical Education

in Post-Primary Schools

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The Education and Training
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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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A number of quantitative terms are used in the report. In percentages, the terms correspond as follows:-

| | | |
|---------------|---|--------------------------|
| More than 90% | - | almost/nearly all |
| 75%-90% | - | most |
| 50%-74% | - | a majority |
| 30%-49% | - | a significant minority |
| 10%-29% | - | a minority |
| Less than 10% | - | very few/a small number. |

INTRODUCTION

The findings in this paper are based on inspections of and visits to physical education departments in post-primary schools in Northern Ireland during the period 1996-2000.

1. Strengths

- 1.1 Most lessons are characterised by the enthusiastic response of pupils, and by the interest and commitment of a majority of teachers. In almost all lessons there are good relationships between the teachers and pupils, and among the pupils.
- 1.2 Teaching is satisfactory or better in a majority of lessons in key stages 3 (KS3) and 4 (KS4). The best teaching is characterised by clear objectives and high expectations, effective lesson planning, appropriate pace, and good use of a range of teaching approaches to suit the needs of pupils. In all schools, the knowledge and enthusiasm of the teachers contribute significantly to the pupils' responses and the standards they achieve. In almost all lessons the pupils are suitably dressed for vigorous activity.
- 1.3 In KS3, the standards of performance are satisfactory or better in a majority of lessons. During years 9 and 10, in most schools there is a general improvement in the pupils' standards in games and swimming.
- 1.4 In KS4 and sixth form, the standards of performance are at least satisfactory or better; the games skills of the more proficient pupils are usually well-developed.
- 1.5 In KS3, curricular planning is good in two-thirds of schools and, in KS4 and sixth form, in only about half of the schools. In the most effective planning, the schemes have clearly defined learning outcomes, show progression, provide opportunities for the pupils to be creative and to develop their evaluative skills, and outline opportunities for assessment.
- 1.6 In KS3 and KS4, assessment is good in a significant minority of schools. In the best practice, assessment is linked to the level descriptions in the programme of study and the information gained is used by teachers to inform the learning outcomes in their schemes of work. Motivation is enhanced when the pupils are aware of the assessment processes and of how they contribute to their own progress in each activity.
- 1.7 The allocation of time to PE is adequate to cover the programme of study in approximately two-thirds of schools; the allocation of time ranges between 8% and 12% of the total curricular time available.

- 1.8 The accommodation and resources for PE are good or better in around two-thirds of post-primary schools.
- 1.9 The breadth and impact of extra-curricular programmes vary from school to school. There are marked differences between what is offered in grammar and secondary schools, in urban and rural schools, and to girls and boys.
- 1.10 Approximately 25% of pupils participate in extra-curricular activities; the number of pupils who take part regularly in extra-curricular sporting activities ranges from 65% to 8% of the total number of pupils in each school.

2. Areas for Improvement

- 2.1 In KS3, the pupils generally are not challenged sufficiently across all areas of the programme of study.
- 2.2 In KS4 and sixth form, the standards of performance of the less proficient pupils are mostly poor and underdeveloped.
- 2.3 In athletics and games in KS3 and KS4, particularly in games closely associated with an individual school's traditions, insufficient attention is paid to pupils who display average or low ability in the particular activity.
- 2.4 Participation by a minority of pupils is erratic and lacking in commitment; too many pupils, particularly in KS4 and sixth form, do not participate regularly.
- 2.5 In approximately half of the schools, there are weaknesses in the planning for health-related physical education. In these schools, either there is no planned provision or there is discrete provision and no planned integration into other areas of the PE programme.
- 2.6 There is an over-emphasis on team games which results in inadequate time being allocated to the other areas of the programme of study.
- 2.7 In a majority of schools, insufficient attention is given to gymnastics and dance.
- 2.8 In KS4 and sixth form, the curricular planning is poor in a significant minority of schools.
- 2.9 In a third of schools, the allocation of time to PE at KS3 and/or KS4 is insufficient to ensure adequate provision for the programme of study.
- 2.10 The quality of teaching in PE provided by non-specialist teachers is generally poor and sometimes unsatisfactory. In many grammar schools,

there is an over-dependence on non-specialist teachers with little expertise in the activities they are deployed to teach.

- 2.11 The levels of participation by pupils in extra-curricular sporting activities are generally low.

3. Priorities for Action

Given the areas of weakness above, and to promote further improvement in the teaching and learning of physical education there is a need:

- 3.1 to implement a planned and progressive programme for health-related physical education for all pupils;
- 3.2 to improve the planning of the programme for pupils in KS4 and sixth form;
- 3.3 to address the over-emphasis on team games and improve the allocation of time to, and the standards achieved in, the other areas of the programme of study;
- 3.4 to plan more specifically to identify clear learning outcomes for each lesson, and to ensure consistency in all areas of the programme, and for all pupils;
- 3.5 to develop an appropriate range of teaching approaches to support, challenge and encourage the less proficient pupils;
- 3.6 to use information gained from assessment of the pupils' work to plan and evaluate teaching and learning;
- 3.7 to introduce in grammar schools, a more consistent approach to the professional development of non-specialist teachers who assist with PE and extra-curricular programmes
- 3.8 in all schools to improve participation of pupils in extra-curricular sporting activities.

CONCLUSION

Schools and the Inspectorate recognise the importance of self-evaluation as a basis for improvement and development. It is intended that this publication, and the publication 'Evaluating Physical Education', will support physical education teachers and departments in their evaluation and improvement of their teaching and of their pupils' learning and standards of achievement.

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