PRIMARY PHYSICAL EDUCATION:
A GOOD PRACTICE SURVEY

Providing Inspection Services for
Department of Education
Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 In March 1996, the Health Promotion Agency published the Northern Ireland Physical Activity Strategy 1996-2002. In response to the strategy and, following extensive consultation, the Northern Ireland Physical Activity Strategy Implementation Group agreed an action plan with approximately 70 organisations including the Department of Education in Northern Ireland (DE). As one of the key activity areas, the action plan states that a survey of physical education should be undertaken, with a view to identifying and disseminating good practice and promoting health related physical education (HRPE) as part of the statutory physical education (PE) programme of study of the Northern Ireland Curriculum (NIC). A report was published in March 2000 on the provision for PE in the secondary phase.

1.2 This report draws on evidence from structured visits to 39 primary schools during the period February to June 2000. The schools involved were representative of small and large schools throughout Northern Ireland. The inspectors visited 188 physical education lessons and had discussions with principals, physical education co-ordinators and classroom teachers.

1.3 As a statutory subject within the NIC, PE aims to give all children opportunities to develop their skills and understanding, and develop a positive attitude to physical activity and to an active and healthy lifestyle. The children should experience a sense of
fun and enjoyment and develop confidence in physical activity both as individuals and as part of a group. The process of planning, performing and evaluating movement is central to the development of skill and understanding, and throughout both key stages, the children should have opportunities to make choices about their physical movements, observe and comment on their own work and the performances of others, and suggest ways of improving performance. Through PE programmes in schools, children should also develop an understanding of safe practices, the relationship between physical activity and good health in every day life, and of the importance of participation in physical activity after they leave school.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Corresponding Term</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than 90%</td>
<td>almost/nearly all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75%-90%</td>
<td>most</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50%-74%</td>
<td>a majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30%-49%</td>
<td>a significant minority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%-29%</td>
<td>a minority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 10%</td>
<td>very few/a small number</td>
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2. ETHOS

2.1 In almost all of the schools inspected, the ethos relating to physical education was good and a majority of the principals and the teachers were committed to the value of PE; a majority of the PE policies contained a dress code for the teachers and the children, and a growing number of the teachers and classroom assistants provided a good example to the children by changing clothing for PE lessons. As a result, in a majority of schools, all children change fully for PE lessons by term three.

3. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

3.1 A majority of the lessons observed, were characterised by good relationships and the children participated with enjoyment, enthusiasm and confidence. In the best practice observed, the children listened attentively, carried out tasks carefully, responded willingly to questions, performed for others, talked about what they had done and seen, and assisted safely with handling large and small apparatus. When given sufficient opportunities, the children were able to plan what they were going to do, practise and refine their skills for sustained periods of time, answer questions about their performance and use this information to improve their skills.

3.2 The quality of the teaching observed, ranged from excellent to satisfactory; in a majority of lessons observed the quality of
teaching was good. Good quality teaching was associated with the children’s high levels of achievement and motivation. Without exception, their skills showed significant improvement in lessons which had clear learning outcomes, were well organised so that the children could take responsibility and work independently, had high levels of activity, and where the teacher used appropriate teaching approaches to address the range of abilities in the class.

3.3 In best practice observed, the children were aware of the reasons for warm-up and cool-down activities, the teachers gave clear explanations of the intended learning outcomes, reviewed quickly the work from the previous lesson, reinforced safety aspects, used children to demonstrate, questioned the children about their actions and illustrated how their skills could be improved by highlighting significant teaching points. Importantly, throughout these lessons, the teachers had high expectations of the children’s performances and gave opportunities for them to sequence work, develop quality movements and to talk about their own performance and that of others. In a small number of schools, the teachers used PE as a stimulus for subsequent creative writing and art work.
ILLUSTRATION OF GOOD PRACTICE

In a composite class of year 3 to year 5 children, the lesson warm-up activity was fun and included ball handling skills which would be useful later in the lesson. Good discussion took place about health-related aspects of warming-up. In pairs, the children chose the throwing skills to show and discuss with their partner, while the teacher encouraged the older children to make their tasks more difficult using a selection of different types of balls. The same skills were reinforced and practised throughout the lesson in various contexts. The teacher gave encouragement and support, and used pupil demonstrations to develop the children’s observation skills and promote discussion. The children’s skills showed improvement and they used them confidently in a game before the cool down.

3.4 In a majority of lessons, the teachers used whole-class questioning effectively to assess understanding and to promote listening and talking. A minority of the teachers observed, have developed open-ended questioning techniques which encourage the children to reflect on what they are doing, make predictions, use technical terms or give reasons for their opinions. A few teachers have developed teaching approaches which include the identification of the criteria for the children to use when observing and evaluating their own performance and that of others.
ILLUSTRATION OF GOOD PRACTICE

In a year 3 lesson on the theme of ‘balance’, the teacher carefully developed the children’s understanding of and competence in balancing in a variety of ways. Through good questioning the children were encouraged to talk about the different ways of balancing and to perform at different levels. The children worked with a partner to develop sequences showing different ways of balancing in relation to a hoop placed on the floor, and together developed a sequence of balances which prompted further discussion. The children were very responsive, worked creatively in pairs and used language effectively to discuss their performances.

3.5 In a minority of lessons observed, weaknesses in the teaching affected adversely the quality and standard of the children’s work and, on occasions, resulted in poor discipline. For example, in gymnastics and dance, the teachers’ expectations were too low, the tasks set lacked structure and the teachers did not require the children to practise and refine their movements through controlled sequence work. In a minority of games lessons observed, the teachers did not give the children sufficient time to practise and become confident in the skills from the previous lesson before moving on to the next lesson, and did not challenge the more able children sufficiently to promote their progress more quickly. In a significant minority of
lessons, the teaching approaches did not allow the children to make choices, to be creative or to develop evaluative skills. In a majority of lessons, the children participated in warm-up and cool-down activities, but their understanding of what they were doing, why they were participating in PE and its contribution to good health was assessed in only a minority of lessons.

3.6 Supportive and high quality planning has been undertaken by the vast majority of PE co-ordinators in schools. They have been well supported by the Curriculum, Advisory and Support Service (CASS) within each of the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs) through schemes of work and teaching materials which chart progression and promote whole school planning. The schemes also provide a framework and materials for teachers who lack confidence in teaching physical education. Some schools, however, rely too heavily on these materials, and teachers do not adapt them sufficiently to the needs of the children or the circumstances of their particular school. Very few schools, as yet, have incorporated effectively the available ‘Top Play’ Youth Sport Trust materials into their planning.

3.7 At key stage1(KS1) in particular, some effective use is being made of taped dance programmes to complement the school’s planned dance programme; year group teachers use the programmes successfully to develop integrated work in other areas of the curriculum. However, a minority of teachers rely too heavily on the taped materials, and do not develop sufficiently the ideas presented on the tapes. For example, the children are not
expected to plan, perform or talk about their movements, and standard of work and progress is not assessed adequately. Consequently, the children’s ideas and movements do not develop or improve as much as they should.

ILLUSTRATION OF GOOD PRACTICE

The PE co-ordinator in a rural school of over 200 children, devises all the planners for the year, the units of work, lesson plans and the progression charts. Each teacher has a file containing the PE policy, lessons, and progression charts; some intended learning outcomes for the activities are written on the lesson plans. From these plans and other materials, the teachers develop the lessons further, focus on the intended learning outcomes for their children, and add tasks and evaluations which link to other curricular areas or class topics.

3.8 In almost all of the schools visited, carefully structured planning at KS1 ensures that the children have a broad and balanced programme of activities. In contrast, at KS2, a majority of the programmes are less challenging, lack breadth and the provision for games activities predominates. As a result, there is insufficient emphasis on the teaching of body management skills and creative activities. In a majority of schools, the standards of performance in all aspects of the PoS are good at KS1. In contrast, at KS2, the children's standards of performance in gymnastics and dance are
satisfactory or better in only a minority of schools. In most schools, the standards achieved in games, range from satisfactory to good; they are generally good. The children’s understanding of the benefits of physical activity is developed effectively in only a minority of schools.

3.9 The facilities and resources in primary schools have a major influence on the teaching and learning. The accommodation in 23% of the schools visited was poor; the lack of an adequate indoor space greatly restricts the ability of these schools to offer the range of experiences within the PoS and to enable the children to reach the standards of which they are capable. This is particularly apparent at KS2 when the lack of fixed apparatus and appropriate medium-sized apparatus restricts progression in gymnastics. Inadequate or no storage accommodation for PE apparatus is also a major problem in almost 50% of the schools inspected; the schools report that they do not buy apparatus because there is no suitable place to store it, or it has to be located around the hall thus becoming a health and safety hazard for the teachers and the children. Over 50% of the schools do not have storage accommodation for cellular foam filled mats which takes account of the guidance offered in the DENI circular 1989/21*. A few small schools, without facilities, appropriately use local centres for some activities; they report that they would use the local leisure centre more often but the cost of the transport and facility hire is too expensive. An imaginative approach to the resourcing and use of such facilities for small schools would be a useful development.
Over recent years, literacy and numeracy have been the focus of much of whole-school professional development. As a result, although there is evidence in lessons of previous in-service training (INSET), there has been little professional development of staff in PE in a significant minority of schools. Professional development has often been limited to PE co-ordinators attending courses provided by the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS). However, dissemination of the ideas and materials from these courses has been limited largely to discussion at staff meetings. Only a minority of PE co-ordinators have sufficient confidence and management support to provide practical demonstrations to the whole school staff, year group teachers or to team teach with individual teachers. In general, unless PE is their specialist subject, co-ordinators lack confidence in their own ability to demonstrate good practice to other teachers. One of the schools surveyed, paid for a specialist teacher of dance to support the development of a good and varied cross-curricular dance programme.

A minority of schools have used external sports coaches well to provide further professional development for class teachers. In these schools, and supported by the class teacher, coaches have taught a class during their PE time for a six week block of lessons; written materials provided by the coaches have assisted the teachers to plan future lessons. Visits by coaches during PE time have appropriately been restricted to one year only. The teachers have also appreciated the help from other external
coaches who have visited schools to support the extra-curricular programme. The quality of the support provided by these external coaches is generally monitored carefully by the principal in the schools.

3.12 In a majority of schools, the teachers have knowledge of the skills and creative abilities of the children in their class; a small number keep records of their skills, understanding and attitudes to PE. In one of the schools surveyed, the individual teachers kept good records, using level descriptions, which readily informed future planning and progression into the next year group. In another school a teacher developed a very useful record sheet for individual children which reflected development in areas such as problem solving, working with others, creativity, skills development and application, use of imagination and self-evaluation.

**ILLUSTRATION OF GOOD PRACTICE**

The teachers in a school of 100 pupils reviewed whole school planning and assessment. The intended learning outcomes for lessons are recorded on the teacher's planning sheets, and include attitudes, skills, aspects of health-related PE and relate to appropriate level descriptions from the PoS. The assessment criteria correspond with the intended learning outcomes. The outcomes of the assessment inform future planning, and observations about progress are made on the school's report to parents.
4. MANAGEMENT

4.1 Evidence from the survey indicates that co-ordination is most effective where the principal and the co-ordinator are enthusiastic about physical education and there is a systematic approach to the review and evaluation of the programme. In a small number of the schools surveyed, physical education was included on the school development plan (SDP). In the most effective practice observed, the principals supported the co-ordinators and, by careful and imaginative time-tabling, enabled them to observe classes with all age groups and offer suggestions and advice to the teachers, assist with and monitor planning, or to facilitate practical dissemination of teaching ideas and approaches. In almost all of the schools surveyed, however, the monitoring of teaching and learning and standards achieved in physical education lessons was poor.

ILLUSTRATION OF GOOD PRACTICE

The principal, the PE co-ordinator and the teachers identified areas of the PE programme where they considered the provision to be weak; the principal included these areas in the SDP. At a staff meeting, success criteria were set for the SDP. While PE was included on the SDP the principal organised the time-table so that the co-ordinator was available to take lessons or to team teach, and to monitor and evaluate progress at year group meetings.
4.2 The majority of the teachers do not have the confidence or understanding to challenge and extend the children in all areas of the PE programme. There are weaknesses particularly in gymnastics and dance which are often taught with little imagination and low expectations. Where large gymnastic apparatus is available it is often not used effectively or consistently to develop the children’s ability to use apparatus creatively, or to develop body control in a range of situations. In schools where there are PE specialist trained teachers, principals often use these teachers well to support the other members of staff, particularly in KS2, where class teachers may be less confident in some activities on the PE programme.

4.3 In the schools surveyed, the allocation of curricular time to PE varied considerably within and between KS1 and KS2. On average, the majority of KS1 children have between three and five sessions a week while KS2 children have two sessions. Generally, insufficient time is allocated to PE in KS2 to ensure a broad and balanced programme and promote high standards of work. Some schools, however, have altered their time-tables at KS2 to facilitate longer sessions with specialist teachers and are evaluating the standards achieved. Importantly, all schools offer swimming, although small rural schools find it expensive in terms of time and money. The principals in large schools with only one hall or in small schools with no hall, often organise rotational programmes effectively to facilitate as many lessons as possible.
in the indoor space and, with varying degrees of success, try to minimise imbalances in the children's PE programme.

4.4 Extra-curricular provision is good in almost all schools although it is more restricted in rural schools; the teachers willingly spend a great deal of their time at lunch-time and after school extending the children's experiences. In a significant minority of schools, the youth sport initiatives developed by the Sports Council, CASS and local district councils have provided valuable links with youth sport co-ordinators in local secondary schools, sports coaches and sports clubs in the local communities.

ILLUSTRATION OF GOOD PRACTICE

In a seven teacher school, four teachers have gained football coaching qualifications and three have gained netball coaching qualifications to support their curricular and extra-curricular teaching. The school principal also funds a programme to enable a basketball and football coach to teach the children after school; further opportunities are given to the children to participate through the youth sport provision linked to their local secondary school. Information about local junior netball and basketball clubs are advertised in the school hall to encourage the children's wider participation in youth sport.
5. **CONCLUSION**

5.1 This survey highlights many significant features of the provision for physical education in the primary schools surveyed. These include:

- the good ethos in physical education in almost all of the schools and the commitment of a majority of the principals and teachers to PE;

- a majority of the lessons observed which were characterised by good relationships and the children’s participation with enjoyment, enthusiasm and confidence;

- the good quality of the teaching in a majority of lessons observed;

- the children’s high levels of achievement and motivation in a majority of lessons;

- the supportive and high quality planning undertaken by the vast majority of PE co-ordinators;

- the quality of support provided by CASS, although the amount of support has decreased in recent years;

- the broad and balanced programmes at KS1 in almost all the schools;
• the good standards of performance in all aspects of the PoS at KS1 in a majority of schools;

• the satisfactory to good standards achieved in games at KS2 in a majority of schools;

• the good extra-curricular provision in almost all the schools.

5.2 This survey has also identified a number of issues which need to be addressed by members of school management, the Education and Library Boards, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and CASS if they are to meet, more consistently, the needs of all the children. These are:

• the insufficient opportunities for children to observe and evaluate their own or other’s performances in the majority of lessons;

• the teachers’ low expectations, with the children given insufficient time to practise and refine their skills in a minority of lessons;

• the lack of challenge, breadth and balance in the provision for all of the children at KS2 in a majority of schools;

• the children’s standards of performance in gymnastics and dance are satisfactory or better in a minority of schools at KS2;
an understanding of the relationship between PE and a healthy lifestyle is under-developed in a majority of schools;

the poor facilities and resources in 23% of the primary schools have an adverse influence on the programme and the standards achieved by the children;

the level of funding of small schools, with inadequate facilities for PE, does not support the regular use of facilities in the local community;

a significant minority of schools where there has been little whole-school development of staff in physical education;

the monitoring of teaching and learning and standards achieved in physical education lessons was poor in almost all of the schools surveyed;

a majority of teachers lack of sufficient understanding and confidence to challenge and extend the children in all areas of the programme of study.

5.3 This survey has also identified a number of areas of concern which are beyond the control of the schools but which need to be addressed. These are:

the poor teaching accommodation for physical education in 23% of the schools surveyed;
the lack of sufficient storage to accommodate apparatus in 50% of the schools surveyed;

the lack of adequate changing facilities for the older children in the vast majority of primary schools.

* DENI circular no 1989/21: CELLULAR FOAM FILLED EQUIPMENT AND FURNITURE
APPENDIX

SCHOOLS INVOLVED IN THE SURVEY

Abbey PS, Newtownards
Annaghmore PS, Portadown
Ballymena PS, Ballymena
Bangor Central Integrated PS, Bangor
Beleek Controlled PS, Belleek
Broadbridge PS, Eglinton
Buick PS, Cullybackey
Clough PS, Ballymena
Currie PS, Belfast
Derryhale PS, Portadown
Down High School Preparatory, Downpatrick
Drumsallen PS, Armagh
Dunclug PS, Ballymena
Edenderry PS, Portadown
Enniskillen Model PS, Enniskillen
Gracehill PS, Gracehill
Greyabbey PS, Greyabbey
Harmony Hill PS, Lisburn
Holy Trinity Girls’ PS, Belfast
Moorfields PS, Ballymena
Newbuildings PS, Newbuildings
Newtownbreda PS, Belfast
Omagh County PS, Omagh
Seagoe Church of Ireland PS, Portadown
Seaview PS, Belfast
Springfield PS, Belfast
Straid Haveron PS, Crumlin
Strandtown PS, Belfast
Stranmillis PS, Belfast
St Aloysius PS, Lisburn
St Anne’s PS, Londonderry
St Comgall’s PS, Bangor
St Davog’s PS, Belleek
St Mary’s PS, Aughnacloy
St Mary’s PS, Stewartstown
St Patrick’s PS, Garvagh
St Therese de Lisieux PS, Belfast
William Pinkerton PS, Dervock
Windmill Integrated PS, Dungannon
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