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Mr T McCourt  
Headteacher  
St. Aidan's Catholic School  
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Dear Mr McCourt

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: physical education (PE)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 10 and 11 March 2010 to look at work in PE.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on the identification of an area of best practice in PE and its impact for students.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with you and your Director of Learning; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work and observation of 10 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of PE is satisfactory.

Achievement in PE

Achievement in PE is satisfactory overall.

- Teachers' assessments indicate that standards in Key Stage 3 are significantly above national expectations, although progress is inconsistent. Students make better progress in developing and applying skills than they do in evaluating and improving performance and developing physical and mental capacity. Students' understanding of concepts is not as high as their performance. Some higher-attaining students make very good progress, while average and lower-attaining students' progress is generally satisfactory. There is no continued assessment of students' progress in Key Stage 4 core PE, although

standards observed in lessons were broadly average and progress was satisfactory.

- Small groups of more able and talented students excel in traditional sports. Some of them perform at national level. The school has a reputation for the excellence of its football, badminton and athletics teams.
- Behaviour is consistently good and makes a strong contribution to learning. Most students enjoy PE, are highly motivated and have the determination to fulfil their potential. They collaborate well in a range of contexts.

#### Features of best practice

- Attainment is high for the small numbers of students studying examination courses in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. These students, on a range of GCSE, BTEC and A-level courses, make very good progress owing to the consistently good teaching, curriculum provision and good care, guidance and support they receive. Take-up of examination courses has increased by almost a third over the last two years.

#### Quality of teaching in PE

The quality of teaching in PE is good.

- The teaching observed ranged from satisfactory to outstanding. All of the specialist staff demonstrate secure subject knowledge, develop good relationships with students and organise lessons safely. Teachers have high expectations of students' behaviour and attitudes and are effective in helping them to develop and apply skills. Students' roles, such as officiating, leading and coaching, are less well developed.
- A lack of good-quality long-term planning results in inconsistencies in teachers' short-term planning. In the best lessons, teachers plan suitably challenging tasks for students of different abilities. They set clear lesson objectives and success criteria. Students respond by demonstrating the confidence and level of understanding required to improve their own performance, aided by timely and concise teacher feedback and good peer-assessment. Teachers' effective use of questioning helps students to make progress. In some lessons, learning was less effective because students were not challenged fully or encouraged to learn independently, think for themselves or work creatively. Students were given few opportunities to solve problems and teachers tended to measure their progress through the completion of skills-based tasks.
- Students in Key Stage 3 can explain what National Curriculum level they are working at but do not show a thorough understanding of how they are assessed or what they are expected to know or understand. New procedures for self- and peer-assessment are being introduced to tackle this. Records of students' progress are maintained following regular activity-based assessments which do not take account of factors other than performance.

- Students have few opportunities to use information and communication technology to enhance their learning.

## Quality of the curriculum in PE

The quality of the PE curriculum is satisfactory.

- The time spent travelling to playing fields and the limited indoor facilities have a detrimental effect on the quality of the curriculum and students' achievement. The vast majority of students in Years 7 and 8 are timetabled for well over two hours of PE each week but, in reality, receive significantly less than this. Similarly, in Years 10 and 11, participation in lessons is eroded by the time spent travelling to facilities. You are aware of these issues and have placed them high on the school's list of priorities as it enters the 'Building Schools for the Future' programme. There is no PE provision for students in the sixth form, other than for examination groups.
- The curriculum lacks breadth and balance and is heavily games-biased, founded on the traditional strengths of the school. New schemes of work are being written to reflect the new National Curriculum, which is underdeveloped. Students are aware of the narrow range of activities on offer in the curriculum and those studying PE for GCSE welcome the opportunity to experience more variety through activities such as personal survival and rock-climbing. Students have the opportunity to broaden their experiences by taking part in sports offered through extended services, including archery, skiing and ten-pin bowling. However, some of them feel that costs are prohibitive. A broad range of competitive opportunities is offered in and out of school time.
- An excellent range of accreditation is offered in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, including the BTEC First and National awards, GCSE and A-level PE. The Key Stage 4 programme is organised particularly well to ensure that students access the most appropriate course. However, core PE lessons are less well organised to match the needs and interests of all students. Students still enjoy these lessons but see them as recreational and are unsure of learning expectations. Lesson observations confirmed that programmes lack structure and progression and do not always provide enough challenge.

## Effectiveness of leadership and management in PE

The effectiveness of leadership and management in PE is satisfactory.

- The acting subject leader is having an immediate impact, aided by strong support from the senior leadership team. There is an ambitious vision for improvement with a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development, demonstrated in a comprehensive development plan. Subject leadership has the commitment and drive to implement change. Thorough monitoring and self-review are being implemented and departmental documentation, including new schemes of work, is being developed. Highly effective target-setting, assessment and monitoring in

Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 examination groups have resulted in a rapid rise in achievement. Similar systematic procedures are planned for Key Stage 3.

- The new staffing structure reflects senior leaders' awareness of the need for change, to modernise the department, building on the sound traditional foundation and reputation for sporting excellence. This structure presents clear roles and responsibilities, making good use of the expertise of each member of the team. There is good capacity to sustain improvement.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- modernising the Key Stage 3 curriculum by developing new schemes of work which reflect the requirements of the new National Curriculum and link to assessment procedures which take account of all of the processes
- broadening the range of teaching styles to incorporate opportunities for students to develop personal learning and thinking skills
- providing the recommended two hours of high-quality PE and sport for all students.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop PE in the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Geoff Sheldon  
Additional Inspector