

Maximising the role of PE, school sport and physical activity

Summary of Findings (October 2024)

Introduction

The Youth Sport Trust (YST) has identified locations across England where access to play and sport will likely need support and encouragement. Accordingly, there is a need for a heightened understanding of these locations and their communities that feed into schools. The YST worked with the Manchester Institute for Education at the University of Manchester to undertake research to generate a deeper understanding of a sample of schools in these areas.

This summary is based on the research findings from five schools located in areas of high deprivation. The research involved a sample of school staff, wider stakeholders, pupils and parents. It presents the challenges facing young people, the barriers preventing young people from accessing PE, school sport and physical activity (PESSPA), and recommendations for how good PESSPA practice and provision can be achieved.

Challenges young people face



Not enough physical activity

In line with Government guidelines, in England, 47% of children and young people take part in at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day of the week, compared to only 15.8% of pupils surveyed. Approximately one quarter of pupils reported access to less than the two hours of recommended PE lessons per week and one fifth of pupils reported less than half an hour of physical activity outside of school lessons per week.



Gender inequalities

Girls reported spending fewer days a week involved in physical activity. Girls also reported significantly lower levels of wellbeing, physical wellbeing, happiness, physical activity enjoyment, and school connectedness.



Poor wellbeing

Happiness was lower among pupils surveyed when compared to the national average, at 6.4 compared to 7.7. In addition, 7.2% of pupils reported feeling lonely often or all of the time – somewhat higher than national trends of 5.5% reported by the NHS.



High screen time

43% of pupils surveyed reported spending over four hours a day on screen time and 35% of parents surveyed strongly agreed that digital distractions such as screen time was affecting the time children were active.

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Barriers to accessing PESSPA



Issues in the wider community



Gender stereotypes



Peer pressure and body image



Covid and increased use of technology



Family circumstances



Space and facilities



Value of PESSPA in schools

What does the evidence tell us about the role of PESSPA?

School staff and young people noted that PESSPA is important for young people for the following reasons:



- The majority of young people agreed that sport and exercise is good for them (87%) but less than two thirds (63%) felt confident taking part in exercise and sport.



- Secondary school pupils and girls reported spending fewer days a week involved in physical activity.



- Pupils who spent more days a week engaged in physical activity had better physical wellbeing and enjoyed physical activity more.



- Pupils who enjoyed physical activity had better physical wellbeing, spent more days a week involved in physical activity, felt better connected to school, reported lower feelings of loneliness, and increased resilience and wellbeing.



- Staff play a vital role in supporting pupil engagement in PESSPA. In particular, important aspects include: staff enthusiasm, staff knowledge, being role models to pupils, and sufficient availability of staff to support PESSPA delivery.

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How can good PESSPA practice and provision be achieved?



Build the **confidence of staff** to support engagement in PESSPA

- Sufficient support and training, particularly for those that are not specialist PE teachers
- Build on opportunities that school staff value and understand that PESSPA can play a vital role in the physical and mental wellbeing of all pupils



Use **pupil voice** to guide a range of accessible activities

- Expand the variety of provision
- Modernise opportunities
- Build on pupil voice insights



Allocate **sufficient time** and resources to PESSPA provision

- Offer a minimum of two hours of PE
- Ensure access to sufficient green space and equipment
- Link with external providers to share their expertise and experiences tied to physical activity



Promote **inclusivity**

- Access to sufficient funding to support physical activity provision to be made accessible for all children
- Work with the community to help foster the needs of particular groups and tailor provision to their community
- Support inclusivity for school events, opportunities, and extra-curricular activities
- Implement parent and family engagement networks that facilitate two way communication and awareness raising



Prioritise **pupil enjoyment** and develop confidence to take part in PESSPA

- Make PE fun and exciting
- Provide an inclusive, comfortable and supportive environment (including uniform and changing facilities)
- Tailor activities to specific abilities and ensure a suitable level of challenge
- Vary provision, allow for optionality and adopt means to include pupil voice to support selection of activities
- Make activities easy to understand and offer guidance to pupils at risk of disengaging
- Guide provision with pupil voice
- Allow competition at a suitable level depending on pupil preferences/abilities
- Encourage teamwork and focus on social connection opportunities

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Tackling inequalities – Ideas Bank

The schools that took part in the research highlighted a range of practice and provision that could be transferable to other schools.



How to engage the local community?

- Run a sports fair every year, where local providers come and educate the young people on what's on offer locally.
- Work with local sports organisations to bring a financially accessible multi-sports club based at the school at the weekend.
- PE staff work with local organisations to help them provide inclusive and accessible activities and groups for their pupils.



How to offer inclusive and bespoke provision?

- Offer a bespoke PE curriculum for students who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties.
- Introduce physical activity and gross motor skill development while pupils are young.
- Encourage sport and physical activity at other times in the school day (break times, lunchtime and after school).
- Organise Motor Activity Training Programme (MATP) Challenge days where other special schools attend to showcase and celebrate each other's progress towards their physical development goals.



How to engage young people from economically disadvantaged families?

- Offer activities that pupils from economically disadvantaged families would not normally get the opportunity to try out.
- Provide disadvantaged students with equipment and opportunities that allow them to participate in sport.
- Use funding to support pupils who have an interest and talent in sport, but their families do not have the financial capacity to support the pathway.
- Prioritise places in extra-curricular clubs for pupil premium pupils.



How to develop wider skills through PESSPA?

- Use evidence-based research that promotes the development of life skills alongside the PE curriculum i.e., My PB (Youth Sport Trust initiative).
- Develop wider skillsets closely related to sport e.g., leadership, coaching and first aid training.
- Enable pupils of lower abilities to achieve PE qualifications.



How to overcome pupil body confidence as a barrier to PESSPA?

- Offer alternative changing areas, where pupils can get changed privately.
- Allow students to finish lessons a little early, so they can change alone.
- Adapt the PE kit so it is suitable to be worn throughout the school day.
- Listen to pupil voice.
- Identify pupils who need further support and guidance with body confidence and anxiety and refer them to the wellbeing hub for support and if needed, counselling.