

Youth Sport Trust  
Active Recovery Curriculum



Infographic Summary  
August 2021

# Context

## About Active Recovery Curriculum

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges within education for schools, teachers, pupils and parents. Despite well-established benefits of physical activity on mental and physical health for young people, throughout the UK, children and young people reported being less active during periods of lockdown.

The Youth Sport Trust's (YST) 'Active Recovery Curriculum' (ARC: defined as the prioritisation of physical activity and time outdoors) aims to super-charge recovery speed and outcomes for young people following the pandemic. Sport England and the YST are promoting ARCs in association with National Governing Bodies, charities and associated organisations. Schools, local authorities and families are also supported through a National Lottery funded 'Active Recovery Hub' which sits on the School Games website and comprises free, accessible resources.

Schools and teachers fostering an ARC have worked reactively to meet the unique developmental needs of their pupils and address specific shortfalls in pupil experiences during the pandemic. As such, ARCs and their specific impacts are wide ranging, yet the overarching focus has been prioritising time spent being active or outdoors during the school day with an aim to help reinstate routines, structure, social relationships and academic engagement. ARCs have been implemented in some schools throughout the pandemic, however this research focuses on the application and impact of ARCs since the return to structured schooling on the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

## About *spear*'s evaluation

*spear* was commissioned from May to August 2021 to conduct an independent evaluation of ARC. The evaluation is designed to capture multiple perspectives of impact and highlight key lessons learned which may be applied to future programmes. The report focuses on how ARCs have been adopted in schools, and the impact they have had on various aspects of young peoples' wellbeing and development following disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data informing the report are drawn from quantitative and qualitative sources. Survey responses were collected following one term of ARC delivery from both pupils and teachers. Ten site visits to schools (seven in person, three online) were conducted to gain an enriched understanding of programme delivery and capture young person voice.

This Infographic Summary illustrates key findings from the Final Report including Engagement & Delivery; Insight; Impact; Achievements and Challenges and Embedding and Sustaining Active Recovery Curriculums in schools.

### ARC Aims & Objectives

Pupils:

- Improved mental health
- Improved physical health and literacy
- Improved reported school outcomes

### *spear* Research Questions

- Have Active Recovery Curriculums enhanced young people's physical, mental, social and emotional recovery?
- What do Active Recovery Curriculums look like?
- What have we learnt from Active Recovery Curriculums about the role and value of activity in schools?

### Data Collection

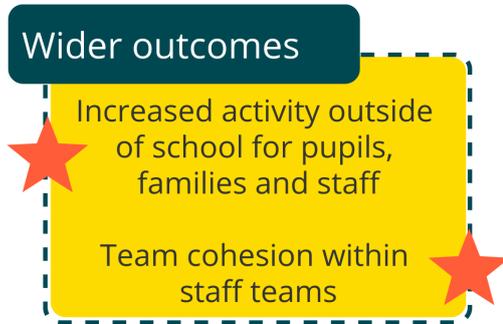
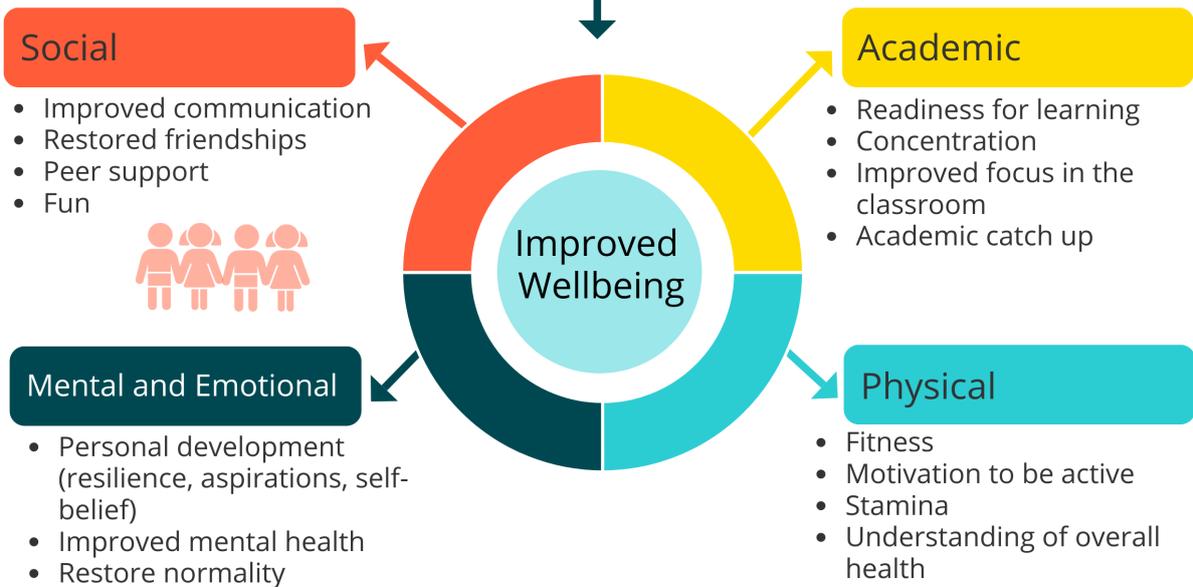
- 6 Primary Schools, 4 Secondary Schools
- Teacher survey: 28 responses from headteachers, class teachers, PE specialist teachers, sports coaches and teaching assistants
- Young people survey: 470 responses from 8-16 year olds from 9 schools
- Site visits to 7 schools
- E-visits to 3 schools

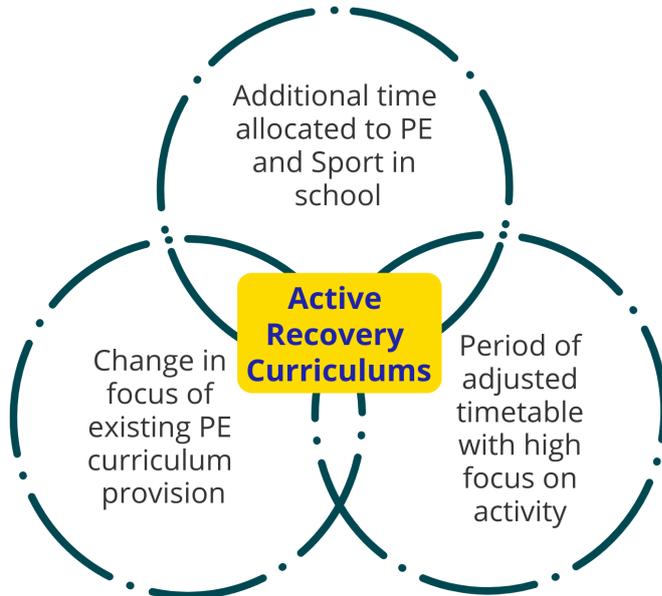
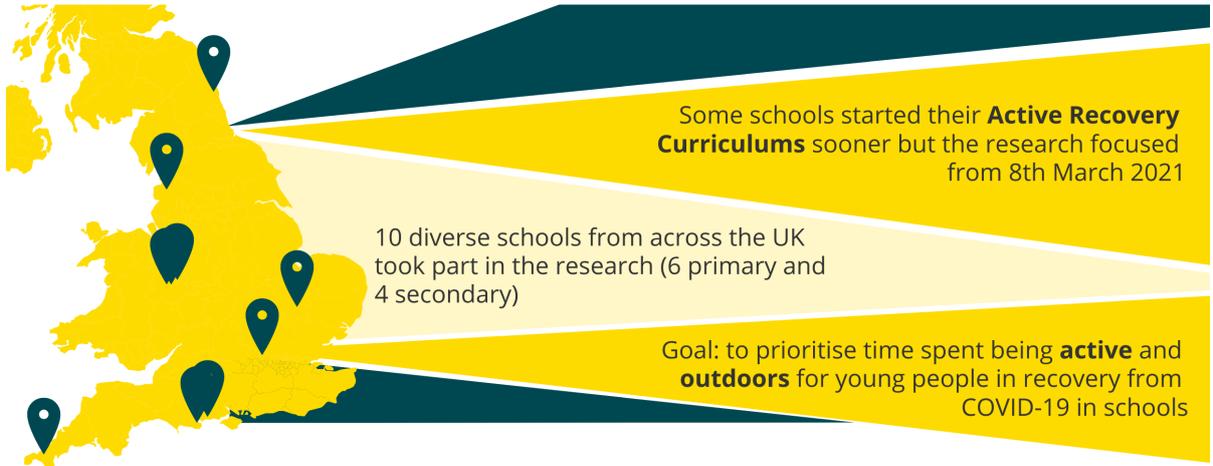
Schools implemented Active Recovery Curriculums by:



Increases in time spent being active and outdoors at school  
 Increases in physical activity since returning to school

Resulted in...



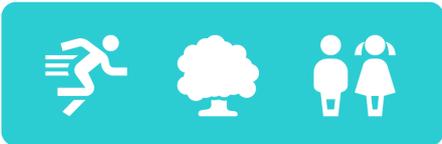


Key elements of physical activity in schools:

Primary Schools	Secondary Schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activity everyday</li> <li>• Regular activity breaks</li> <li>• Physical literacy</li> <li>• Outdoor learning</li> <li>• Activity within other curriculum lessons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation focus</li> <li>• Choice of activities</li> <li>• Physical literacy</li> <li>• Outdoor learning</li> </ul>

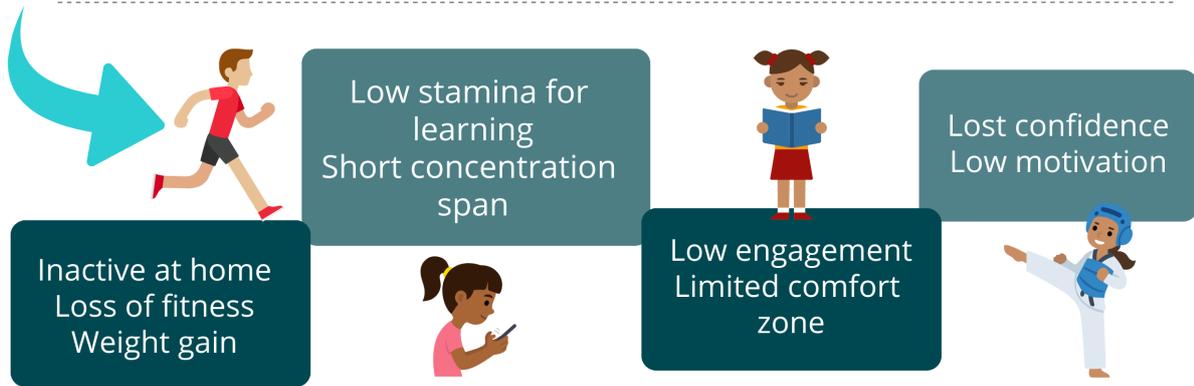
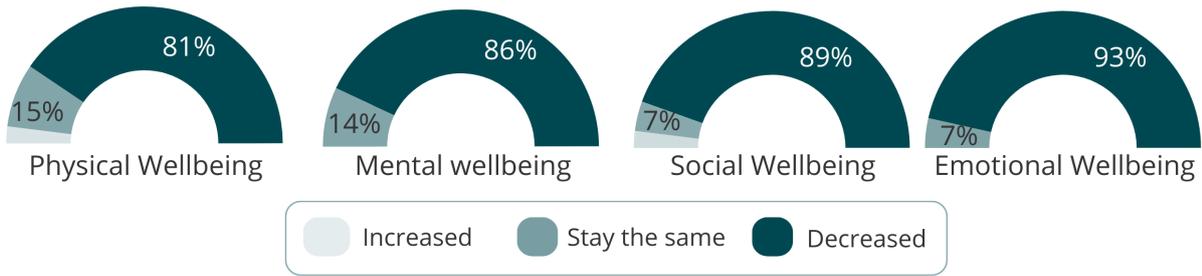
**ARCS included:**

- Increased focus on health and lifestyle
- Special events and activity days
- Novel sports and activities
- Fitness training
- More extra-curricular activities
- Opportunities to spend time with peers
- Physical activity incorporated into other subjects



All teachers said **physical activity** or **mental health** should be the top priority for schools in the recovery from COVID-19

After lockdown, teachers felt pupils' wellbeing had...



When pupils returned to school on 8th March 2021:

**More behaviour issues reported:**  
 Conflict between peers  
 Low level disruption in class  
 Impatience  
 Acting out  
 Low tolerance with one another  
 Inappropriate language  
 Friends falling out



**Physical**



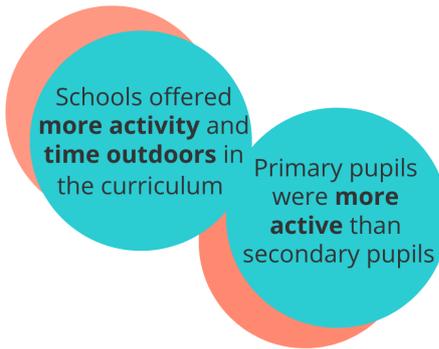
**Lifestyle, health and fitness** were key themes for PE in schools

96% of pupils understand why physical activity and sports are important



**Pupils were more active outside of school**

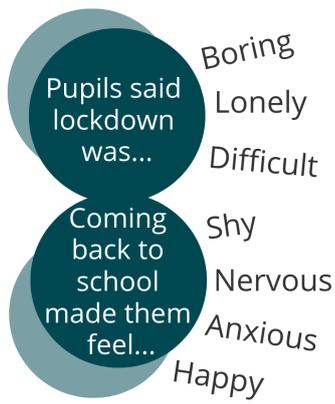
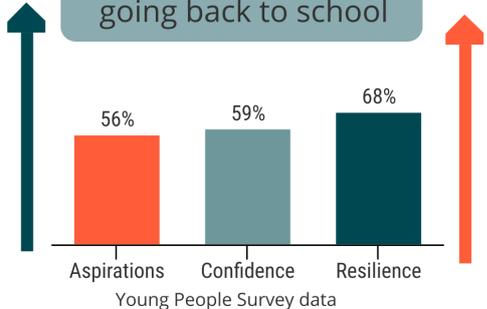
- Extracurricular sports
- Daily family walks
- Cycling to school
- Activities as a family



*“I can now run all the way through The Daily Mile  
It has made me more confident about my body  
It has made me want to try harder”*  
(Primary and secondary pupils)

**Mental and Emotional**

Since taking part in an Active Recovery Curriculum, many young people reported **increases in markers of development**, compared to first going back to school



Since returning to school:

**71%** of pupils have increased their physical activity

**72%** of pupils want to do more physical activity and sport at school

**78%** of pupils like being active and doing sport at school



**86%** of teachers thought mental wellbeing had improved

**89%** of teachers thought pupils' emotional wellbeing had increased

**Social**

When pupils first returned to school 89% of teachers said pupil social wellbeing had decreased



After an ARC 89% of teachers said pupil social wellbeing had improved

Active recovery curriculums helped young people with....

“ Being with your friends and being able to communicate with people during PE kind of makes the experience much more fun. ”  
(Secondary school pupil)



making friends  
communication  
rebuilding friendships  
teamwork  
making memories  
trust  
socialising

Since returning to school:

Happiness and relationships with friends and family has improved for

**63%**  
of pupils

&

**69%**  
of pupils feel their empathy has improved

**Academic**

**Benefits of being active:**

- Improved stamina
- More focused
- Less fidgety
- More engaged
- Distraction from stress
- A break from the classroom
- Improved concentration
- Clears the mind
- Burn energy

(Primary and Secondary pupils)

Some gaps in academic progression but catch up has been good (Teacher)

**91%** of primary and **63%** of secondary pupils said **being active helps them learn**

**88%** of pupils would like to have **more lessons outside**



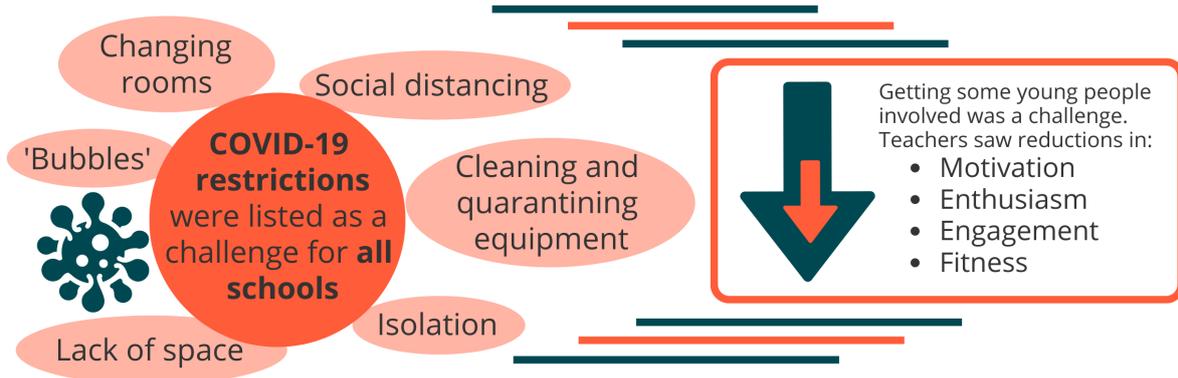
**75%**  
of teachers reported improvements in academic progress

**66%**  
of pupils thought their academic progress had improved





**Lack of time** was the **main challenge** listed by all schools in implementing an Active Recovery Curriculum



Secondary teachers reported ongoing communication issues between peers as face-to-face communication was replaced with virtual contact and social media during lockdown



**Teamwork**  
A whole school approach and cohesion between teachers has been key to successful ARC's

**Extra-curricular**  
Primary schools had great success increasing afterschool clubs offered and had high attendance at clubs



**Healthy lifestyle**  
Promoting the importance of being active and keeping fit has appealed to many pupils. Reduced focus on competitive sport

**Active Communities**  
Staff have become more engaged in PE and sport and some families are finding ways to be more active at home



## Secure support from the wider school community

A whole school approach encourages teachers across the curriculum to incorporate activity and time outdoors and become active role models for pupils.

## Encourage activity everyday

Habitually being active everyday with a 'wake and shake', 'Daily Mile' or extracurricular activities helps pupils establish lifelong routines and recognise the impact of activity on their learning.



## Focus on health and lifestyle

Prioritising activity participation and enjoyment is most effective in motivating many pupils and inspiring them to pursue healthy habits, new hobbies, and physical activities at home.

## Explain why PE is useful

Demonstrating how skills transfer across and beyond sports enables pupils to see the relevance of their engagement and the applicability of skills and attributes gained to wider scenarios.



## Incorporate mental health

Encouraging pupils to reflect on their emotions improves self awareness, their ability to recognise when they are finding things difficult, their coping strategies and their empathy for others.

## Run special events

Opportunities to try different activities, be coached by different people and visit new places helps pupils expand their comfort zones and gain confidence communicating with new people.



## Share best practice, activity ideas and resources

Sharing ideas and showcasing good practice within and between schools helps develop more cohesive and collaborative ways of implementing, embedding and sustaining an active curriculum.

## About *spear*

The Centre for Sport, Physical Education & Activity Research (*spear*) is located within the Faculty of Science, Engineering & Social Sciences at Canterbury Christ Church University. *spear* undertakes a range of evidence-led analyses, from critical commentaries and reflections on current policy and practice, to commissioned research, evaluation and consultancy.

The Centre's research is funded by a range of national and international funders such as the International Olympic Committee, World Health Organisation, Terre des Hommes, Department of Health, Department for Education, Mencap, Chane to Shine, Parkrun, Youth Sport Trust, UK Sport, UK Coaching and Sport England. Recent work has focused on sport, physical activity, health and wellbeing in schools and communities.

Research conducted by *spear* helps guide and inform public policy by contributing to the wider evidence base used by policymakers, providing a rationale for government and commercial investment, and steering programme improvements that enhance the experience of practitioners and participants.

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Healthy Lifestyle Champions evaluation undertaken by *spear* and commissioned by the Youth Sport Trust. Report produced by *spear*.

August 2021