



YOUTH
SPORT
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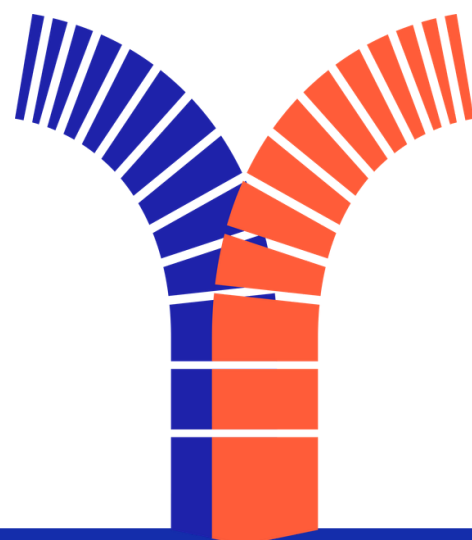
WELL
SCHOOL
COMMUNITY



Further Reading Guide: Adapting Your Curriculum To Create A More Active School.



Live Well.



This resource has been designed based on the Well Schools Live Well pillar.

Why Physical Activity Matters for Learning

1. Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain

John J. Ratey & Eric Hagerman

Why read it?

Perhaps the most influential book linking movement, brain development and learning. Ratey synthesises neuroscience research to demonstrate how physical activity improves attention, memory, emotional regulation and mental health.

Key takeaway for school leaders

Exercise should not be viewed as competing with academic learning. Rather, it creates the neurological conditions that enable learning to occur. Ratey argues that movement can improve concentration, reduce anxiety and support cognitive performance.

Practical implication

Consider how movement is integrated throughout the school day rather than confined to PE lessons.

Understanding What Works in Schools

2. Visible Learning

John Hattie

Why read it?

Hattie's synthesis of thousands of studies provides one of the largest evidence bases available on factors influencing pupil achievement. His work encourages leaders to focus on approaches with the greatest impact on learning.

Key takeaway for school leaders

While physical activity itself is not one of Hattie's highest-ranked influences, active schools often create conditions that support many high-impact factors including:

- Student engagement
- Teacher-student relationships
- Self-regulation
- Wellbeing
- Feedback and metacognition

Practical implication

Use physical activity as a vehicle to strengthen wider evidence-informed teaching and learning strategies rather than viewing it as a standalone initiative.

The Youth Sport Trust Perspective

3. PE and School Sport Annual Report

Youth Sport Trust

Why read it?

Provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of children's physical activity, wellbeing and school sport across England.

Key takeaway for school leaders

Participation in physical activity and school sport is associated with improvements in:

- Self-belief
- Mental wellbeing
- Resilience
- Social development
- Engagement with school

Benefits are particularly significant for disadvantaged young people.

Practical implication

School leaders should view physical activity as an inclusion and equity strategy, not simply a health intervention.

4. The Link Between Physical Activity and Attainment in Children and Young People

Youth Sport Trust Evidence Paper

Why read it?

A concise and accessible summary of the evidence linking physical activity with educational outcomes..

Key takeaway for school leaders

The evidence suggests positive associations between physical activity, concentration, behaviour, cognitive function and academic attainment. Schools are uniquely positioned to influence lifelong habits.

Practical implication

Physical activity should be considered within school improvement planning alongside literacy, attendance and wellbeing priorities.

Creating Active Schools

5. Creating Active Schools Framework

Bradford / Active Schools Research

Why read it?

One of the most practical whole-school frameworks available for embedding movement throughout the school day.

Key takeaway for school leaders

The most successful schools do not simply increase opportunities for sport; they redesign systems, culture, policies and environments to make movement a normal part of school life. This approach has been highlighted nationally as a model for wider adoption.

Practical implication

Review:

- Curriculum design
- Timetabling
- Playtimes
- Active travel
- Classroom practice
- School environment

rather than focusing solely on PE provision.

Physical Literacy and Whole-Child Development

6. Developing Physical Literacy

Margaret Whitehead

Why read it?

Whitehead's work underpins much of the modern thinking around physical literacy.

Key takeaway for school leaders

Physical literacy is not simply physical competence. It encompasses motivation, confidence, knowledge and understanding that enable lifelong participation in physical activity.

Practical implication

Success should not be measured solely by sporting performance. Schools should focus on developing confidence and positive relationships with movement for all pupils.

7. Flourish

Martin Seligman

Why read it?

Introduces the PERMA model of wellbeing (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment).

Key takeaway for school leaders

Schools should intentionally develop wellbeing alongside academic outcomes.

Practical implication

Physical activity contributes to all five elements of PERMA and can therefore become a practical mechanism for delivering a wellbeing strategy.

Suggested Reading Sequence for Busy School Leaders

If time is limited:

Start Here

1. Youth Sport Trust – The Link Between Physical Activity and Attainment
2. Youth Sport Trust – PE and School Sport Annual Report

Then Read

3. John Ratey – Spark
4. John Hattie – Visible Learning

Finally Explore

5. Creating Active Schools Framework
 6. Margaret Whitehead – Physical Literacy
 7. Martin Seligman – Flourish
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Three Leadership Questions to Reflect On

1. How much of our school day enables movement rather than restricts it?
2. Are we treating physical activity as a curriculum subject, or as a whole-school strategy for learning, wellbeing and inclusion?
3. If wellbeing, attendance and attainment improved over the next three years, what role would physical activity have played in that success?

The strongest evidence increasingly suggests that schools should stop viewing physical activity as something that sits alongside learning and instead recognise it as one of the conditions that helps learning, wellbeing and development flourish.



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