Those of us who advocate for the importance of physical education, school sport and physical activity (PESSPA), often quote Nelson Mandela’s declaration that ‘Sport has the power to change the world’, possibly without thinking about what a monumental claim that is. Having worked with thousands of children in the UK, USA, Eastern Europe and various countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, I have seen the life-changing difference that PESSPA can make to children’s lives, and whole organisations and wider communities.

To achieve this transformation at Clavering Primary School, we established three central aims for our PESSPA programme. We want every Clavering child to be physically competent and confident; competitive successfully; and committed to maintaining a healthy, active lifestyle. Our school has grown in terms of both size and success as we strive for excellence on both the playing field and in the classroom. Our PESSPA programme now sits right at the heart of the whole school and goes beyond physical developments to include mental, social and emotional benefits.

As a YST Headteacher Ambassador, I was fortunate to be part of a session with UK Sport that explored how culture is what you see, hear and do. During a recent visit to Clavering from Stuart Kay, YST Schools Director, we reflected on this concept whilst walking around the school during our children’s daily ‘Get Up, Get Active’ session. What struck me was how physical activity is now such a strongly embedded part of our school culture – not just with our children, but with our staff too. Now every Clavering child is physically active for at least 30 minutes every day (not including active transport, active breaks, active lunchtimes, PE lessons or clubs) and, just as excitingly, no child is sedentary for longer than 30 minutes. This is only possible because of the culture we have established and the outstanding support we receive from parents, carers, governors, staff members and our amazing pupils.

Visitors always comment on the buzz that they feel and the obvious impact of our focus on physical activity and active learning. Although flattering, we know there is so much more to be done and we recognise that there is a desperate need to get every school to commit to the transformative power of PESSPA on the mind as well as the body. As we begin a new academic year with renewed passion and vigour, I would urge all Youth Sport Trust member schools to work collaboratively and to challenge others, including the government, to tackle the global crises of childhood mental health and childhood obesity. Then return to Nelson Mandela’s assertion and we really might change the world!