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Section 1
Introduction

The Girls Active Programme was developed as the result of a two-year research project and pilot by the Youth Sport Trust into the motivations and barriers to girls taking part in PE and sport. It aims to develop a partnership between teachers and girls to understand what makes girls fully engage in PE, sport and physical activity in their school and then, through a network of role models and peer leaders, provide relevant opportunities for all girls, not just the sporty few. Women in Sport have been working in partnership with the Youth Sport Trust on the Girls Active programme since 2015.

Girls Active was introduced to Northern Ireland in 2016-17 with the support of delivery partners Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Council. Ten schools were involved thanks to funding from the Department for Communities and Sport Northern Ireland.

Section 2
Summary

The survey of girls and boys in Girls Active schools in Northern Ireland found significant differences between the two sexes in regard to attitudes and participation in sport and physical activity. Girls recognise the importance of being active, but are less likely than boys to apply this to their behaviour and attitudes in relation to sport and physical activity. Girls do not view physical activity as an important part of their life in comparison with boys and are less likely to report enjoying taking part in physical activity or PE than boys. Unsurprisingly, this leads to girls reporting lower levels of physical activity than boys.

The post-intervention survey, completed four months after the start of the Girls Active intervention in schools, highlights a positive change in the girls’ attitudes towards sport and physical activity. Girls were more positive towards sport and physical activity, with a greater proportion reporting that sport and physical activity is an important part of their life. A greater proportion of girls also reported enjoying taking part in physical activity and PE, and reported a reduction in some barriers. Positively, this has led to an increase in the amount of physical activity they take part in. The Girls Active programme has therefore had a positive impact on girls’ participation in sport and physical activity in the short period of time it has been running.
Schools involved in Girls Active Northern Ireland were asked to encourage their girls to complete a questionnaire before and after the programme intervention. The pre-intervention survey was completed in December 2016 and the post-intervention survey in May and June 2017. Schools were advised that boys could complete the survey if they so wished which would then provide teachers with information about the different needs of boys and girls. However, asking boys to complete this survey was optional and not mandatory.

Schools were provided with an individual school report summarising the findings from both the pre and post surveys as well as some of the key national statistics for comparison. A data report comparing the girls' national pre and post data is also available.

While lead teachers from each school received Girls Active training in December 2016, they did not start delivering the programme with their Girls Active Leaders until after they had attended the Girls Active Inspiration Day in mid-February 2017. Findings therefore relate to impact achieved through delivery over four months.

This report will explore:

- What are the attitudes and behaviours of girls in Northern Ireland with regard to sport, PE and physical activity and how do these compare to boys?
- What sports, settings and groupings are most appealing to girls in Northern Ireland?
- What are the common barriers to participation for girls in Northern Ireland and how do these differ from boys?
- Are there any differences in target groups such as BAME, disability, Key Stage 3 or 4 or between girls with different activity levels?
- Differences in responses between girls in the pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys.
- The process and impact in schools illustrated through case studies.

The data in this report contains responses from pupils at schools in Northern Ireland only.
Differences between girls’ and boys’ attitudes and participation

This section focuses on the responses to the Girls Active pre-intervention survey to enable comparison between girls’ and boys’ responses.

1,330 girls and 353 boys responded to the pre-intervention survey.

Respondents are spread among Years 8 to 14.

In terms of ethnicity, 87% of girls and 82% of boys are white. 4% of girls are from a multiple ethnic background with other ethnicities representing 1% or fewer girls. 6% of boys are from a multiple ethnic background, with other ethnicities representing fewer than 2% of boys.

10% of girls and 14% of boys have a long-term illness, health problem or disability which limits their daily activities. Girls were more likely to report poorer health, with 25% rating their health as fair or poor compared with 17% of boys.

**Attitudes towards physical activity**

A large proportion of both girls and boys say they understand the importance of an active lifestyle, with over eight out of ten respondents saying this was very or mostly true. Worryingly, this drops by 11% between Key Stages 3 and 4.

**Table 1 - Attitude: Importance of an active lifestyle**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very/mostly true</th>
<th>I understand the importance of an active lifestyle</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td></td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KS3 (11-14 years old)</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td></td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KS4 (14-16 years old)</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td></td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
However, although girls recognise the importance of an active lifestyle, there appears to be a disconnect between attitudes and behaviour. While 70% of Key Stage 3 girls said that physical activity is an important part of their life, only 5% of girls in Key Stage 3 are active seven days a week.

There is a significant drop in the proportion of girls who think physical activity is an important part of their life between Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4, from 70% to only 43% of Key Stage 4 girls. For boys, the reverse is true, with an increase in the percentage of boys saying physical activity is important in their life from Key Stage 3 (68%) to Key Stage 4 (75%).

Only two fifths of girls (43%) feel the skills they learn in PE are relevant in their day to day life.

Table 2 - Attitude: Importance of physical activity in life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very/mostly true</th>
<th>Physical activity is an important part of my life</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALL</td>
<td></td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KS3 (11-14 years old)</td>
<td></td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KS4 (14-16 years old)</td>
<td></td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The percentage of girls liking physical activity is similar to boys for Key Stage 3; 86% of girls compared to 88% of boys. However, while the percentage of boys enjoying physical activity remains high in Key Stage 4 (84%), it falls considerably for Key Stage 4 girls to 71%. It is important to understand this change in enjoyment of physical activity as this will have a substantial impact on motivation to take part. This may be due to the increase in girls by Key Stage 4 reporting barriers around a lack of confidence as well as more girls reporting they don’t like the opportunities on offer.

The percentage of both boys and girls who state they like to take part in PE drops from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4. However, the drop is much more substantial for girls than boys. 85% of girls in KS3 report liking PE, falling to only 61% in KS4.
Table 3 - How do you feel about the following (like it/like it a lot)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Like (a lot/little)</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th></th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>KS3</td>
<td>KS4</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking part in physical activity</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking part in PE</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning at school</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Concerningly, only 50% of girls selected very true or mostly true in relation to the statement ‘I look forward to taking part in PE lessons’ compared to 71% of boys, and only 43% said ‘I look forward to taking part in extra-curricular sport’ compared to 58% of boys.

Views of PE and physical activity
(Agree statements are very or mostly true)

- The skills I learn in PE are relevant in my day to day life
- I would like to have a say in the activities we do in PE and after school clubs
- I like it when my PE lessons are competitive
- I look forward to taking part in extra-curricular sport
- I look forward to taking part in PE lessons
Time spent excercising

Pupils were asked how often they took part in physical activity. On average, girls are active on fewer days per week and for less time per day than boys. Only 8% of girls meet the Chief Medical Officer’s guidelines of 60 minutes of activity every day.

Table 5 - Reported activity levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Girls (average)</th>
<th>Boys (average)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active days per week</td>
<td>3.3 days</td>
<td>3.9 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(60 minutes or more that make you feel warmer and make your heart beat faster)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical activity levels on an average day</td>
<td>71 minutes</td>
<td>80 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only half of girls said the statement 'I am happy with the amount of physical activity I do' was mostly or very true compared to 67% of boys.

Preferences in sport

The pupils were asked to select three activities they would most like to do in PE from the list provided. Both boys and girls selected a mixture of team and individual sports but the popularity of different sports varied significantly between them.

There was no one dominant sport selected by the girls, and preferences were much more fragmented with less than one fifth of girls selecting any one activity. Dance was the most popular activity, selected by 19% of girls, and 18% selected gymnastics and football. In comparison, 49% of boys selected football as an activity they want to do in PE. Parkour and boxing were selected by 18% of boys.

Table 6 - The top 10 most appealing sports for girls and boys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19%</td>
<td>Dance</td>
<td>Football</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18%</td>
<td>Gymnastics</td>
<td>Parkour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18%</td>
<td>Football</td>
<td>Boxing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17%</td>
<td>Trampolining</td>
<td>Mountain biking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17%</td>
<td>Netball</td>
<td>Gym</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17%</td>
<td>Gym</td>
<td>BMX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14%</td>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>Dodgeball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13%</td>
<td>Hockey</td>
<td>Basketball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12%</td>
<td>Dogeball</td>
<td>Martial arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12%</td>
<td>Cheerleading</td>
<td>Golf</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The wide variety of sports chosen by girls, and the fact that there is no single dominant sport catering for the majority, underlines the challenge of engaging girls and providing the variety of activities in school to appeal to all.

Preferences about how students would like to be grouped in PE lessons also varied between boys and girls. While being grouped with friends was the most popular response for both sexes, more girls than boys considered this to be true with 36% of girls selecting this option compared to 28% of boys.

### Table 7 - Groupings for PE and school sport

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With your friends</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With your sex only</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed boys and girls together</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With students who like similar sports</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With students of a similar ability</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Motivations

The pupils were asked about what motivates them to take part in sport, physical activity and PE at school. For girls, the top motivator is to be healthy, selected by 60% of girls. For boys, having fun was the main motivator, selected by 66% of boys.

### Table 8 - Top ten motivators to take part in sport, physical activity and PE at school (top 3 motivations are in bold)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To be healthy</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have fun</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To feel good</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To spend time with my friends</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To try new sports or activities</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To develop a new skill</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To set myself a goal to achieve</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To look good</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To win competitions</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To take part in activities delivered by my peers</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Girls were less likely to report feeling encouraged to be active by their parents or their school. 64% of girls said they were encouraged by their parents compared with 74% of boys. 61% of girls feel encouraged by their school compared with 69% of boys. Women in Sport’s research ‘What Sways Women to Play Sport’ (2015) highlights the important role that families and influencers such as teachers can play in driving participation. Both parents and teachers play a vital role in supporting and encouraging girls to be active.

**Barriers**

Girls perceive more barriers to taking part in sport and physical activity at school than boys. 85% of girls selected at least one barrier to taking part in physical activity compared with 60% of boys.

The types of barriers selected also differ between boys and girls. 35% of girls selected having their period as a barrier to taking part in sport and physical activity at school, closely followed by not being confident, selected by 32% of girls. The most common barrier for boys was having an injury, selected by 16% of boys, and not feeling confident, selected by 12%.

**Table 9 - Barriers to taking part in sport, physical activity and PE at school**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top ten barriers for girls</th>
<th>Top ten barriers for boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When I have my period 35%</td>
<td>I have an injury 16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am not confident 32%</td>
<td>I am not confident 12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t like people watching me 29%</td>
<td>I am not good at it 12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am not good at it 28%</td>
<td>I don’t enjoy it 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t like the boys watching me 22%</td>
<td>I don’t like the activities on offer 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t enjoy it 22%</td>
<td>I don’t have time 7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t like getting hot and sweaty 20%</td>
<td>The changing rooms are not private enough 6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The changing rooms are not private enough 19%</td>
<td>I have a medical condition that prevents me taking part 6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t like the activities on offer 16%</td>
<td>My transport doesn’t let me do breakfast after school activities 6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above 15%</td>
<td>None of the above 40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The pupils were also asked about their barriers in relation to sport and physical activity outside of school (see Table 10). The main barrier for girls was having no time due to their school work, selected by a third of girls (32%). This was also the boys’ main barrier, but was selected by a much lower proportion of boys: 14%.
Table 10 - Barriers to taking part in sport and physical activity outside of school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top ten barriers for girls</th>
<th>Top ten barriers for boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I don't have time because of my school work</td>
<td>I don't have time because of my school work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am not confident</td>
<td>I have an injury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I have my period</td>
<td>I am not confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't like other people watching me</td>
<td>I am not good at it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm not good at it</td>
<td>My school work is more important to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have no-one to be active with</td>
<td>I don't enjoy it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't like the boys watching me</td>
<td>I have no-one to be active with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't enjoy it</td>
<td>I can't afford to take part</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My school work is more important to me</td>
<td>I don't like other people watching me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>None of the above</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coaching, leading and administration

Pupils were asked about being coaches, leaders and administrators, both inside and outside of school. Within school, very few boys or girls are coaches, leaders or administrators but these numbers increase outside of school. Overall two fifths of girls would like to be a coach, 45% would like to be a leader and 34% would like to be an administrator, highlighting an opportunity for both schools and community clubs to engage girls in sport and physical activity.

Table 11 - Are you a coach, leader or administrator/organiser?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are you a...?</th>
<th>Girls In school</th>
<th>Girls Out of school</th>
<th>Boys In school</th>
<th>Boys Out of school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coach</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator/organiser</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 12 - Would you like to be a coach, leader or administrator/organiser?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Would you like to be a...?</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th></th>
<th>Boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In school</td>
<td>Out of school</td>
<td>In school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator/organiser</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Boys are more likely to report feeling confident in leading or influencing their peers or other young people compared to girls. 40% of girls said they were confident or very confident compared with 54% of boys.
Wellbeing

This research highlights a worrying low level of confidence for girls, particularly in relation to body image. The respondents were asked to state how true a list of statements were in relation to them. Only 35% of girls said the statement 'I am happy with the way my body looks' was very or mostly true compared with 66% of boys. Only 47% of girls said they always or often felt confident compared with 73% of boys.
Ethnicity

This section highlights areas where responses differ between white and Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority (BAME) girls. 13% of girls report their ethnicity as Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME). 4% are from a multiple ethnic background with other ethnicities representing 1% or fewer girls.

Two thirds of BAME girls report that physical activity is an important part of their life, compared with just over half of white girls. BAME girls are also more likely to report liking competitive PE lessons; 56% compared to 43% of white girls. However, white girls are more likely to indicate that they want a say in the activities they do; 51% compared to 40% BAME.

62% of BAME girls are happy with the amount of physical activity they do, compared with only 49% of white girls. White girls are more likely to say they understand the importance of an active lifestyle; 83% compared with 76% of BAME girls. Over half of BAME girls (52%) believe the skills they learn in PE are relevant to day to day life, compared with 42% of white girls, and are more likely to feel encouraged by their parents to be active; 71% compared to 63% of white girls.

BAME girls spend more minutes on a typical day doing physical activity than white girls; 74 minutes compared to 69 minutes. BAME girls also do more minutes of PE each week; 105 minutes compared to 98 minutes.

• Motivations

BAME girls are much less motivated to take part in sport, PE and physical activity to spend time with their friends. 43% of white girls select this as a motivation compared with 31% of BAME girls.

• Barriers

There are some barriers which differ between white and BAME girls when taking part in sport, physical activity and PE at school. A higher proportion of BAME girls, 26%, don’t enjoy it compared with 21% of white girls. BAME girls are also more likely to report an injury as a barrier; 17% compared with 12% of white girls. 17% of BAME girls report their breasts feeling uncomfortable as a barrier compared with only 10% of white girls, and they are also more likely to report not liking the PE kit; 15%, compared to 9% of white girls.

In relation to barriers to doing more physical activity and sport outside of school, BAME girls are much less likely to report not having time because of their school work; 25%, compared with 33% of white girls. They are also less likely to report that their school work is more important; 4% compared with 10% of white girls. White girls are more likely to report that they have no-one to be active with; 15% compared with 5% of BAME girls. 19% of BAME girls say they don’t enjoy physical activity compared with 11% of white girls.

• Leadership

A higher proportion of BAME girls say they are coaches inside or outside of school; 15% compared with only 7% of white girls. They are also much much more likely to report they are a leader; 24% compared to 14% of white girls. BAME girls are also much more likely to report wanting to be a coach (43% compared to 34% white girls), a leader (53% compared to 38% white girls) and an administrator/organiser (43% compared to 28% white girls).

• Attitudes

A higher proportion of BAME girls are happy with the way their body looks; 41% compared to 35% white girls.

The previous Girls Active survey in England with over 10,000 responses showed that overall BAME figures mask significant differences between ethnic groups, with Asian girls generally being less confident, engaged and supported by their parents than black, white and multiple ethnicity girls.
Disability

10% of girls said they have a long-term illness, health problem or disability which limits their daily activities or the work they can do. This section will focus on areas where responses differ between people with and without a disability or long-term illness.

• Activity

Girls with a disability or long-term illness are much less likely to say they like taking part in physical activity; 63% compared with 77% of those who have not reported a disability or long-term illness. They are less likely to report that they like taking part in PE; 46% compared with 69% of girls who don’t have a disability or long-term illness. Only 39% of girls with a disability or long-term illness believe physical activity is an important part of their life compared with 55% of girls who have not reported a disability or long-term illness, and are less likely to think they learn skills relevant to their day to day life (36% compared with 44% of girls with no disability or long-term illness).

Less than a third (32%) of girls with a disability or long-term illness said they look forward to taking part in PE compared with 53% of girls with no disability or long-term illness. Only 30% look forward to taking part in extracurricular sport compared with 45% of girls with no disability or long-term illness. Dance was the most popular option for girls with a disability or long-term illness, although this was only selected by 22%, and gym was selected by 18%. All other options received fewer than 14% of responses. Girls with a disability or long-term illness are less likely to like competitive lessons, with only 30% saying they like this compared with 46% of girls who do not have a disability or long-term illness.

The highest proportion of girls with a disability or long-term illness would like to be grouped with their friends; 41%, which is substantially higher than for girls with no disability or long-term illness at 34%.

Only 8% of girls with a disability or long-term illness meet the Chief Medical Officer’s activity guidelines of 60 minutes of activity every day, although this is the same as for girls with no disability or long-term illness. Worryingly, over half (55%) of girls with a disability or long-term illness take part in no sport or physical activity outside of PE lessons. Interestingly, girls with a disability or long-term illness reported spending on average 77 minutes per day being physically active compared with 71 minutes for girls with no disability or long-term illness. 81% understand the importance of an active lifestyle and yet less than half (45%) say they are happy with the amount of physical activity they do.

Girls with a disability or long-term illness are less likely to report feeling encouraged to be active by their parents (52% compared with 66% of girls with no disability or long-term illness) or school (54% compared with 62% of girls with no disability or long-term illness).

• Motivations

Girls with a disability or long-term illness are much less likely to select any of the motivations from the list provided than girls without a disability or long-term illness. For example, half of girls with a disability or long-term illness are motivated to be active to be healthy compared with 62% of girls with no disability or long-term illness. It would therefore be interesting to explore what would motivate girls with a disability or long-term illness to be active and how schools could apply this knowledge.

• Barriers

A higher proportion of girls with a disability or long-term illness selected each barrier compared with girls with no disability or long-term illness in terms of physical activity and sport in school. The most common barrier selected by girls with a disability or long-term illness was ‘I have a medical condition that prevents me taking part’. 43% of girls with a disability or long-term illness selected having their period as a barrier compared with 34% of girls with no disability or long-term illness. Around a third of girls with a disability or long-term illness said they are not confident and a similar proportion said they don’t like other people watching them.
For barriers outside of school, similar to girls overall, the most common barrier selected by girls with a disability or long-term illness was not having time because of school work, selected by 38%. 27% selected having their period as a barrier compared to 21% of girls with no disability or long-term illness. Again, high numbers (33%) selected having a medical condition as a barrier which prevents them taking part.

- **Leadership**

Positively 18% of girls with a disability or long-term illness said they are a leader (inside or out of school) compared with 15% of girls with no disability or long-term illness and 12% are an administrator or organiser compared with 8% of girls with no disability or long-term illness. Around a third of girls with a disability or long-term illness would like to be a coach, leader or an administrator/organiser.

Girls with a disability or long-term illness are less likely to express confidence in leading or influencing their peers; 30% of girls compared with 42% of girls with no disability or long-term illness.

- **Attitudes**

Only 27% of girls with a disability or long-term illness reported being happy with the way their body looks compared with 37% of girls with no disability or long-term illness.

A greater proportion of girls with a disability or long-term illness compared to girls with no disability or long-term illness said they always/often come up with and apply new ideas (49% and 38% respectively). However, they are less likely to report feeling confident; 37% compared with 50% of girls with no disability or long-term illness, and less likely to report feeling happy; 53% compared with 72% of girls with no disability or long-term illness.

### Less active and more active

Using the data on time spent exercising, we are able to divide the girls by activity level and here we compare less active girls with more active girls. Less active girls are those who are active on just one day (or less) per week, outside of compulsory PE sessions. More active girls are active 5-7 days per week outside of compulsory PE lessons.

- **Activity**

There is a huge difference in the proportion of less active girls who report liking taking part in physical activity compared with more active girls; 48% and 87% respectively. This difference is also significant when looking at the proportion of girls who report liking taking part in PE; 41% of less active girls compared to 79% of more active girls.

**Table 13 - How do you feel about the following (like it/like it a lot)?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Like (a lot/little)</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking part in physical activity</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking part in PE</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning at school</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Less active girls report being active for 30 minutes on a typical day, which is less than a third of the activity levels of more active girls (more active girls are active for 99 minutes on a typical day). Unsurprisingly, less than a quarter of less active girls (24%) say that physical activity is an important part of their life, compared with 75% of more active girls. 69% of more active girls are happy with the amount of physical activity they do compared with 27% less active girls, showing that less active girls are generally aware they should be doing more activity. However, 68% of less active girls understand the importance of an active lifestyle compared with 90% of more active girls. Only one fifth of less active girls believe the skills they learn in PE are relevant in day to day life compared with 56% of more active girls, highlighting the potential for increasing physical activity by addressing the value and relevance less active girls give to physical activity.

Less active girls are more likely to select wanting to be grouped with their friends; 42% compared with 33% of the more active. They are also much less likely to want to be in mixed groups, with only 13% selecting this option compared with 23% of more active girls. Only 29% of less active girls like lessons to be competitive compared with 59% of more active girls.

To engage less active girls, it is therefore important for PE teachers to understand the motivations and barriers for this group, and design lessons and activities which help to support girls to be more active. This could be through offering a choice of competitive or less competitive lessons or activities which involve friendship groups.

• **Motivations**

Less active girls are much less likely to select any of the motivations from the list provided than more active girls. The most popular motivator for more active girls is to be healthy, selected by 68% of girls. This is selected by only 43% of less active girls. Having fun is the most popular motivator for less active girls, selected by 45%.

Again, teachers need to consider the motivations of the less active girls and talk to them about what activities they would be most motivated to get involved in.

• **Barriers**

A greater proportion of less active girls select each of the barriers in relation to physical activity at school than the more active girls, except for having an injury. Having their period remains the top barrier for less active girls, selected by 47% of girls compared with 29% of more active girls.

Outside of school, not having time to be active because of school work remains the most common barrier, selected by 44% of less active girls. In contrast, only 24% of the more active girls select this as a barrier.

• **Leadership**

Less active girls are much less likely to report being a coach, leader or administrator than the more active girls. They are also less likely to report wanting to do one of these roles, although around a quarter have said they would like to be a coach or a leader and one fifth would like to be an administrator. For these girls, this shows the potential for engaging them in sport and physical activity through leadership and volunteering.

Only 25% of less active girls say they are confident to lead or influence their peers compared to 55% of more active girls.

• **Attitudes**

Only 29% of less active girls are happy with the way their body looks compared with 44% of more active girls.

Less active girls are less likely to feel they come up with and apply new ideas (30% compared with 52% of more active girls), feel they can achieve at anything they want to (44% and 68% respectively), and stick at tasks until they succeed (49% and 79% respectively). Confidence is low, with only 36% of less active girls saying they feel confident always or often (compared to 61%) and only 54% are happy compared to 81% of more active girls. These differences highlight the positive power of physical activity on health and wellbeing.
The post-intervention questionnaire was completed by 340 girls. No boys completed the post-intervention survey. A higher proportion of Year 8 girls took part in the post-intervention survey (38%) and no Year 12 students took part.

This section looks at the post-intervention data, and in particular highlights where there is significant change in comparison to the pre-intervention data for girls.

**Attitudes towards physical activity**

Positively, the percentage of all girls agreeing that physical activity is an important part of their life increased in the post-intervention survey by 10% to 62%.

Only two fifths of girls (43%) feel the skills they learn in PE are relevant in their day to day life, but this increases to 50% in the post-intervention survey.

The post-intervention survey highlights a positive change for girls in terms of how they feel about taking part in physical activity, rising from 75% reporting liking taking part in physical activity to 83% post-intervention – see Table 4. The percentage of girls saying they like taking part in PE also rose from 66% to 72% post-intervention.

The percentage of girls who like learning at school dropped over the period of the survey, from 60% to only 47%. However, this is likely to have been influenced by the girls undertaking school examinations during the time of completing the post-intervention survey.

Table 4 - How do you feel about the following (like it/like it a lot)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-intervention</th>
<th>Post-intervention</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taking part in physical activity</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking part in PE</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning at school</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>-13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The proportion of girls who look forward to extra-curricular activities increased in the post-intervention survey by 9% to 52%. The proportion of girls who liked competitive PE lessons also increased, from 44% to 54%.
Time spent exercising

There was a positive increase in the average number of days per week girls participate in physical activity, from 3.3 to 3.5 in the post-intervention survey. This is a significant increase as the programme had only been running for approximately four months when the post-intervention survey was completed. However, the average minutes per day remained similar.

Preferences in sport

Trampolining overtakes football and gymnastics as the most popular activity in the post-intervention survey, being selected by the largest proportion of girls (22% up from 17%). However, football and gymnastics still both saw increases from 18% to 20% of girls saying they would most like to do them in PE lessons, alongside swimming which was up from 14% to 18%.

Motivations

In the post-intervention survey, the most significant motivation for girls remained ‘to be healthy’ and increased from 60% to 67%. The proportion of girls selecting ‘to have fun’ also increased from 58% to 63%. The proportion of girls selecting ‘to feel good’ and ‘to look good’ decreased (to 39% and 19% respectively). 41% of girls are motivated to learn a new skill, up from 36% in the pre-intervention survey, and 19% of girls in the post-intervention survey said they are motivated to win competitions, an increase from 14%.

Motivators for taking part

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivators for taking part</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To lead activities for my peers</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To take part in activities delivered by my peers</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To win competitions</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To look good</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To set myself a goal to achieve</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To develop a new skill</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To spend time with my friends</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To try new sports or activities</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To feel good</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have fun</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be healthy</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was a small increase in the proportion of girls who felt encouraged by their school, from 61% in the pre-intervention survey to 64% in the post-intervention survey.
Barriers

In the post-intervention survey, the most significant barrier to taking part in sport and physical activity in school remains ‘when I have my period’, selected by 32% of girls. Positively, the proportion of girls reporting some barriers decreased. For example, ‘I am not confident’ was selected by 24% of respondents; a drop from 31% in the pre-intervention survey. There was also a decrease in the proportion of girls reporting they are not good at sport and physical activity, from 28% to 20%.

The proportion of girls selecting some barriers increased. In particular, ‘the changing rooms are not private enough’ increased from 19% to 25% of girls, and ‘I don’t like getting hot and sweaty’ increased from 19% to 23%.

In relation to barriers outside of school, the proportion of girls selecting ‘I don’t have time because of my school work’ drops significantly, from 31% to 17%. This may be in part as a result of girls recognising the importance of physical activity and starting to prioritise that. A greater proportion of girls said they have no-one to be active with, increasing from 14% to 21% in the post-intervention survey.

In relation to barriers outside of school, the proportion of girls selecting ‘I don’t have time because of my school work’ drops significantly, from 31% to 17%. This may be in part as a result of girls recognising the importance of physical activity and starting to prioritise that. A greater proportion of girls said they have no-one to be active with, increasing from 14% to 21% in the post-intervention survey.
Coaching, leading and administration

Positively, confidence for girls increased in the post-intervention survey from 41% to 48% as well as a decrease in the percentage reporting feeling ‘not very confident’ or ‘not at all confident’ from 24% to 20%.

7% of girls said that they were Girls Active Leaders (in the Girls Leadership and Marketing Squad - GLAMs) in the post-intervention survey. Of the 25 girls who said that they were GLAMs, the majority had been a leader for less than a year with only 8% being a leader for 1 to 2 years.
The survey identified significant improvements for the girls in their attitudes towards physical activity and PE during the Girls Active programme, with a greater proportion recognising the importance of an active lifestyle and feeling that the skills they learn are relevant.

- 10% more girls reporting that they understand the importance of an active lifestyle, an increase from 52% to 62%.
- A 7% increase in the proportion of girls who say the skills they learn in PE are relevant to their day to day lives (from 43% to 50%).

There was also a significant increase in the proportion of girls who reported enjoying PE and physical activity, a huge step towards increasing activity levels.

- An 8% increase in the proportion of girls who like taking part in physical activity, from 75% to 83%.
- A 6% increase in the proportion of girls who like taking part in PE, from 66% to 72%.
- An increase in the proportion of girls who look forward to extracurricular sport and who enjoy competitive PE.

The survey also established decreases in some of the barriers reported by girls, particularly in relation to confidence and self-efficacy.

- A decrease in the proportion of girls suggesting they are not good at PE from 28% to 20%.
- A decrease of 7% in the proportion of girls who selected ‘I am not confident’, from 31% to 24%.
- The proportion of girls selecting ‘I don’t like other people watching me’ decreased from 29% to 24%.
- Fewer girls selected ‘I don’t enjoy it’, from 21% to 14%.

The percentage of girls who said they were a coach, leader, or administrator/organiser increased slightly in the post-intervention survey. However, the percentage of girls saying they would like to be coaches, leaders or administrators saw bigger increases, most significantly for those saying they would like to be coaches outside of school, from 26% to 35%. This shows considerable unmet demand for leadership training and experiences which can, in time, be met through the programme.
Conclusion

The survey identifies significant improvements in girls’ attitudes towards physical activity and PE during their involvement in Girls Active. This programme was only running for four months before the post-intervention survey was completed, and yet the programme has already started to have a positive impact. The girls were more likely to report enjoying PE and physical activity, and reporting fewer barriers to taking part. They were also more likely to recognise the benefits of taking part in sport.

This positive improvement in attitudes translated into an 8% increase in the number of days per week girls participate in physical activity, from 3.3 to 3.5 days. This is a positive change after only four months of delivery from the time the girls attended the Girls Active Inspiration Day, but more time is required to embed these changes in attitude and create a long-lasting behaviour change.

The proportion of girls selecting ‘I don’t have time because of my school work’ as a barrier outside of school decreased significantly in the post-intervention survey, therefore demonstrating that the girls now place more of a relevance for physical activity in their lives.

Girls Active is one way that schools can take steps to address this, but we also need families to take a role in supporting and encouraging girls to be active.

Girls’ preferences for sport were varied, highlighting the need for schools and clubs to offer a range of activities to provide choice to the girls. Positively there was also a strong interest in being a coach or leader both within school and out of school, which, through continued delivery of the Girls Active programme, will start to be addressed.

BAME girls reported being more active than white girls, but selected slightly different barriers and motivations. Understanding this group in more detail would help to highlight where different options and support is required.

Girls with a disability or long-term illness are less active than girls with no disability or long-term illness and a higher proportion report barriers. It is therefore important to explore what motivates girls with a disability or long-term illness to be active and how we can support them to overcome the barriers to get involved.

Differences were most striking between active and non-active girls with substantial differences in attitudes towards sport and physical activity and this survey helps to highlight how schools can start to tackle this disparity.

Together, these findings identify the need for schools to continue to work with their girls to understand their barriers and motivations and deliver solutions together.
Section 5
Case studies

1. Killicomaine Junior High School
2. Craigavon Senior High School
3. St Patricks College, Banbridge
**Case study of effective practice**

**School:** Killicomaine Junior High School  
**Post Code:** BT63 5JE  
**Main Contact and role:** Rebecca Hillis, PE teacher  
**Date:** October 2017

*Please note, all quotes are from the PE teacher unless otherwise specified*

**Context (background info)**

Killicomaine is a Junior High School of about 500 pupils, covering Northern Ireland school years 8, 9 and 10 (i.e. ages 11-14, Key Stage 3). It is part of the Dickson Plan which means that selection takes place at the age of 14, rather than at age 11. Students therefore go on either to a grammar school or to a senior high school for Years 11 and 12.

The school is relatively academic and also prides itself on its sporting achievements, with children often choosing the school based on its sport offer. PE is taught separately to girls and boys and tends to offer fairly ‘traditional’ sports according to gender, i.e. girls are taught netball and hockey; boys are taught football and rugby. Volleyball is also popular in the school. There is a big emphasis on extra-curricular sports activities, although after-school clubs tend to be oriented towards training for the school teams in hockey, netball, athletics and tennis. This is in part due to staff limitations - there aren’t enough staff to offer extra-curricular sports in a full range of sports. There is also an element of the high-achievers in sport contributing to a potentially intimidating group feel for those who are less sporty.

The school is streamed into A, B and C streams, with A and B likely to go to grammar school and C more likely to go to the senior high. PE is taught within the academic streams.

The Girls Active programme has only been running in this school for five months.

**What were you trying to achieve? Are there links to any whole school priorities?**

Mrs Hillis wants to encourage all girls to be involved in sport, and to ensure that the school doesn’t just focus on developing teams and on the high achievers. She is keen that all the girls are able to get a chance to try different sports or physical activity so that they can see what suits them and what they enjoy, and carry that sense of enjoyment with them as they grow up.

“I really believe that sport should be for everyone.”
What actions were taken? Who was involved? What did you do? What did it look like?

1. Identifying the Girls Leadership and Marketing Squad (GLAMs)

Due to time-pressures Mrs Hillis chose the GLAMs herself and identified a group of six sporty girls, four from Year 10 and two from Year 9, that she thought would be suitable.

“I wanted them to be the pupil voice for the school and I knew they could represent the other girls... they’re mature enough to lead and to work together as part of a team.”

She could see why some might want to choose non-sporty girls as part of their GLAMs group, but she felt she wanted these girls to act as role-models.

“I also wanted girls who loved sports because I wanted them to be role models in the school.”

2. Survey and new extra-curricular sports for girls

The GLAMs developed their own short questionnaires to find out from other girls what they do/don’t like about PE, and what else they would like to be doing. They targeted the questionnaires towards girls that they know don’t enjoy PE or who don’t come to extra-curricular clubs.

After a good response, the girls analysed the results and, from the suggestions coming forward, drew up lists of what would be possible/less possible. The most popular wish coming out of the questionnaire was for girls’ extra-curricular football and rugby.

As a result, the school ran extra-curricular clubs for girls to take part in football and then rugby, with each sport running for six weeks. This was delivered in partnership with Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and supported by Portadown Rugby Club and Ulster Rugby. 20-25 girls attended the clubs, of which only around a third were regular attendees at other extra-curricular activities. Broadly, then, Mrs Hillis felt this was successful at bringing in a wider group of girls.

3. ‘Like a Girl’ video

The GLAMs worked with their teacher to create a video based on the ‘Like a Girl’ video created by Always. The girls filmed this over a period of weeks, interviewing several staff from the school on what it means to do something ‘like a girl’ and whether this is a good thing or not. They also shot footage of both boys and girls participating in different activities and with a montage of girls enjoying several of the activities available to girls within the school. The video is available here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=JsFSX_Q0oCo.

The GLAMs presented this video in an all-school assembly to every girl in the school. They introduced themselves as the GLAMs, spoke confidently about what Girls Active is and informed the assembly why physical activity is so important for health and wellbeing.

They encouraged everyone in attendance to consider taking part in more physical activity or to come and speak with them to find out what opportunities currently exist to be more active at the school, or how they can improve the current offer.
4. Sky Sports Living for Sport Programme

This was targeted towards the fifteen Year 10 girls in the lowest set (10C) who were struggling both with motivation in PE as well as more generally with their confidence levels and interaction with each other (there were a lot of conflicts within the group).

“These are the girls who hated PE, didn’t bring their kit, lots of drop outs.”

As part of the Sky Sports Living programme they were provided with an international Athlete Mentor, Louise Galvin, an Ireland rugby player. After presenting at an assembly, Louise helped the girls choose a project and plan it. The girls decided they wanted to deliver a sports session for children with disabilities. Disability Sport Northern Ireland delivered an inclusive games workshop for the girls. Unfortunately - due to complexities of arrangements - the girls didn’t get a chance to give their lesson at the local special school as planned, but did practise their lessons with the Year 8 children, which boosted their confidence and engagement.

As part of the programme the 10C girls were given the opportunity to try some different activities; this included archery, team-building games and then a water-sports session. This was very successful:

• It showed these girls that being active can be fun and that sport is something that they can do.
  “They were so happy and it was so much fun. It was great for them to experience that and see what you can get from being active.”

• They grew in confidence by conquering their fears, e.g. climbing on the banana boat.

• It also created a sense of teamwork and camaraderie among the group.
  “I’ve never seen the 10C girls get on so well; they were helping each other up on to the inflatables.”

What was the impact on participants? What have been the positive impacts of this work on the young people?

For the GLAMs, it has helped develop their teamwork and leadership skills, as well as highlighting to them the potential impact they can have as role-models:

“It’s also encouraged them to think about the girls who don’t do any exercise or sport, and to think about why they don’t do it, and that they, as the girls who like sport, actually have a responsibility to encourage others.”

For 10C, the involvement has meant they have left school with a really positive approach to PE, understanding that sport is something they can do, and hopefully taking that association between physical activity and enjoyment with them to their next school.
What was the impact on the school? Have they changed their offer or the way they deliver it? Which priorities has it impacted on?

As a pilot, this is still early days for the programme in the school and there is still work to be done to ensure it has a broader impact across the school. Ultimately there is a desire to broaden the school's sports offer and achieve a more inclusive approach.

“I think it could be more of a whole school approach.”

It has clearly made a difference to Mrs Hillis and how she approaches her work. She feels encouraged in her belief that sport should be for everyone, and that it can make a difference, and she feels it has influenced the way she approaches her job:

“It’s great to challenge your own abilities... I see it as part of my continued development as a teacher.”

It has also demonstrated - both to the student body and the staff/PE department - that sport can be for everyone, and that, as teachers, they have a role and a responsibility to try to be as inclusive as possible.

Top tips: What were the key things that made this work?

1. Patience on the part of Mrs Hillis. Undertaking this on top of normal responsibilities has been challenging within a small department. The school also has split lunches, so finding times when the GLAMs can all meet is not easy. Mrs Hillis has had to be flexible about when they can meet and adapt expectations accordingly.

2. Enthusiastic GLAMs girls. The girls have been keen to get on board with the project and excited about influencing those around them. They have taken on tasks with ease and made sure they have completed them by the deadlines. They have also been committed to meeting with the rest of the group to discuss ideas, make decisions and implement the project.

3. Support from Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council (ABC). The Youth Sport Trust Project Officer has been a great source of support to the school, providing advice, guidance and practical help and has enabled greater communication between the school and the council. The school have started to make use of the ABC Council Active Community coaches to offer more activities for pupils as part of the Every Body Active 2020 Programme.
Next steps: How are you embedding and sustaining the activity? How are you extending and developing the impact of this work?

- Plan to run new/additional extra-curricular activities again, but with a clearer target of drawing in girls who are less sporty. Potentially this might be achieved by limiting attendance to girls who attend no more than one other extra-curricular club.

- The GLAMs are keen to keep the momentum going with more activities this year, such as a P7 transition day for children coming up from primary school; and a Teachers’ Active Display Board which would showcase interviews with members of staff talking about their involvement in sport/physical activity.

- Make Girls Active more of a whole school approach.
School: Craigavon Senior High School
Post Code: BT63 5HJ
Main Contact and role: Elaine Walker, PE Teacher
Date: October 2017

*Please note, all quotes are from the PE Teacher unless otherwise specified

**Context (background info)**

This high school caters for students in Years 11 and 12 (Northern Ireland school years) who did not go to grammar school following the exams in Year 10. They are therefore at the lower end of academic ability.

“The children arrive at our school with low self-esteem. We have to help them build their self-esteem.”

It is a large school, with just under 300 students in each year. Each year comprises 11 streamed forms: G1-G7 who study for eight GCSEs and V1-V4 (the vocational streams) who do five GCSEs plus more vocational/apprenticeship-based training.

Engagement with PE tends to be good among the higher ability classes, but among the lower ability classes, girls, in particular are often reluctant to take part; they frequently ‘forget’ their PE kits, as a way of avoiding PE lessons.

“I have girls who would rather do a detention than do PE.”

There is a perception that the selective system leads to not just the academically talented going to the grammar school, but also a good proportion of those who are have a stronger interest in performing well at sport. It is particularly challenging as Years 11 and 12 are the time when girls especially are most self-conscious about participating in sport.

“We work with the girls in our school and try to get the best out of them.”

The PE department are enthusiastic and committed, and although the SMT are relatively new, the principal seems supportive of sport within the school.

Girls Active has been running in this school since January 2017.

**What were you trying to achieve?**

Mrs Walker wanted to see whether they could do a better job of motivating the girls who are not interested in taking part in PE. She felt that they could be doing more to challenge the mindset that many arrive with at the school - that they already hate PE - and to position this as a new start for them.

“How can I do this better... what else could I do to encourage them to take part?”
What actions were taken? Who was involved? What did you do? What did it look like?

- **Identifying the GLAMs and running the YST survey in the school**

  After a girls assembly she invited volunteers and six came forward from Year 11. Pleasingly, this was a good mix of girls from the G and V bands. After attending the inspiration day, the girls helped to run the YST survey at the school. Although valuable in providing a benchmark for how girls feel about PE, the survey was not as helpful as they had hoped it would be. The data was rather overwhelming and Mrs Walker felt she didn’t have the time to analyse the findings properly.

  “I’d have liked it if someone could tell us what it meant and what we could do with it. As it was it was too much for us to work through.”

  She feels it would have been more useful to run a much simpler survey to establish why girls aren’t doing PE, what the staff could do to help and what the girls would like to do for PE.

- **Teacher profiles**

  The GLAMs decided to create ‘sport profiles’ for female members of staff. Staff members were interviewed and asked about the exercise they do outside school and why exercise is important to them. The profiles – consisting of a photo of them engaged in sport/physical activity and a speech bubble describing how it makes them feel – were displayed initially on the PE corridor and then on the relevant classroom doors.

  Quite serendipitously, this created a mini-competition between the staff.

  “They all wanted to be up there; no female member of staff wanted to be left out.”

  As a result, this activity generated a real buzz around the school, because it got teachers and students talking about sport/physical activity, why they do it and why it’s good. It generated a positive rapport between staff and students, giving staff, including PE teachers, the opportunity to talk about sport and its benefits in a really positive way and helping to normalise physical activity as an important part of their lives. It also demonstrated that sport/exercise can be a really good way of dealing with stress, as a number of teachers mentioned that this is why they do sport/activity.

  “There are a lot of children with low self-esteem and seeing how we deal with our stresses is really good for them… Exercise can be seen as a good release.”

  Finally, it helped to show that even things like walking the dog can be a valuable form of exercise.
• Colour Run

Some of the GLAMs had done a colour run with the council and suggested they do one at school. It was planned for the last day of the Easter term. Usually the last day of term is a half day, with students allowed to come in their own clothes; attendance can be low, and the day can sometimes lack structure/purpose.

Mrs Walker co-ordinated with the council to supply the paint, and everyone who took part was asked to pay a voluntary £3 to cover the cost. Members of staff threw the paint at each station, and there was collaboration with other departments within the school, for example the art department designed a selfie board. The GLAMs designed posters, sign-up sheets and certificates and encouraged girls to sign up. Around 100 people – both boys and girls – took part and the event was very successful.

“It was brilliant… the students were so full of enthusiasm.”

It also had an impact on attendance with more students coming in than usual on the last day of term; two girls who were non-attendees that term specifically came to school that day to participate.

• Extra coaches

Additional coaches have been brought in over the course of the last two terms to provide lessons in tennis, tag rugby and dance (jive) as girls had indicated they were bored with ‘standard’ sports such as hockey. This has been successful in creating better levels of engagement with PE because:

• Having a new face taking PE pulls girls in and encourages them to take part.

• It allows the PE staff to watch and learn from some of the techniques and take them into the other classes they teach.

What was the impact on participants? What have been the positive impacts of this work on the young people?

For the GLAMs it has really built their self-confidence. This started right from their participation in the inspiration day, when it was possible to see how their confidence increased from beginning to the end of the day. Helping to organise the colour run and, in particular, encouraging others to take part has also contributed to their sense of achievement and pride. They are also feeling more confident about talking to others in the school about sport and why they like it.

“It’s empowered them and it’s given them an opportunity to talk about why they take part… they’ve realised that through sport they can build their self-confidence.”

She thinks that girls are now more willing to take part in PE, and she sees them enjoying sport/physical activity more than they were.
What was the impact on the school? I.e. have they changed their offer or the way they deliver it? Which priorities has it impacted on?

It has generated a buzz around the school and there seems to be interest in trying to run an event each term, including repeating, and improving on, the colour run next Easter.

As a PE teacher, Mrs Walker has realised that she needs to understand why girls may not be doing PE and to work with that, and to be more supportive and understanding of where they are coming from.

“I’m more empathetic to them, I want to know what the root of the problem is. I want to sit down with the children and ask what we can do… My job is to alleviate their fears… it’s made a real difference to my approach.”

Top tips:

- Support from ABC council and Youth Sport Trust for the colour run- bringing the idea to fruition, providing practical support and inspiration.

- Finding something that could get the whole school talking about sport (the teacher profiles); this allowed sport/physical activity to be more ‘normalised’ - to be seen as something that anyone can do and that has benefits for all. Teacher buy-in to this activity was crucial.

- Accepting what you can do in the time available: organising activities in the summer term would be challenging given the focus on exams, but accepting that, and focusing on what could be achieved within a shorter time period still brought great success.
Next steps: How are you embedding and sustaining the activity? How are you extending and developing the impact of this work?

- Mrs Walker is determined to maintain the momentum. This can be challenging as during the summer term there is such a strong emphasis on exams that everything else can fall by the wayside. At the start of the academic year she is aware that she needs to reengage with the GLAMs - now in Year 12 - as well as encourage some Year 11s to join the GLAMs group, with a view to running an event this term before Christmas. It would be helpful if YST could facilitate links between the schools involved to help with ideas and keep momentum going.

- They would like to do another colour run, and to improve it, based on what they have learnt (e.g. make sure everyone can change outside so that paint doesn’t get everywhere inside the school!), as well as encourage an even greater number to take part.

- She would like to continue to offer - when they can - a greater variety of sports/coaching in PE lessons.

- They have a long-term plan to raise money to build a fitness suite. The intention is for this to be available every day after school.

“It would be great for those girls that are more self-conscious and perhaps don’t want to be part of a team; it’s something they can do individually.”
Case study of Girls Active Leadership and Marketing Squad (GLAMs)

School: St Patrick’s College, Banbridge, Northern Ireland
Post Code: BT32 3AS
Main Contact and role: Marilyn McGinley, PE Teacher
Date: October 2017

*Please note, all quotes are from the GLAMs unless otherwise specified

Background
St Patrick’s is a secondary school of around 400 pupils, for Years 8-14 (ages 11-18). It is non-selective and has a broad intake of ability levels. Students arrive having gone through Northern Ireland’s transfer procedure, which can shape the mindset of the student body. After a number of years of falling enrolment, this year the school admitted 102 Year 8 students, which is a significant increase on previous years, driven by marked improvements in exam results.

In this context, sport, especially for girls, has not been a focus within the school curriculum. There has been no full-time female PE teacher for some time and PE has largely been taught by other teachers, supported by specialised classroom assistants with dual subject focus. However, this is likely to change as the new vice-principal has a PE background. The principal is very supportive, and PE seems likely to have a higher profile in the school.

Mrs McGinley teaches PE at the school one day a week. Girls Active has been running since January 2017.

The GLAMs
Hannah, Anna, Ellen and Aisling were Year 10 students and a group of friends who were invited to become GLAMs by their teacher; they are a mix of sporty and less sporty girls

What does Girls Active look like in their school?
They decided they wanted to run a P6 (for primary school Year 6) sports day because they wanted to have the chance to show younger children the importance of sport/activity and healthy lifestyles:

“When we were younger we didn’t realise how important PE was.”

At the time a local primary school was sharing the school site with St Patrick’s, while their new school building was being built, so Mrs McGinley established a link with this school. They designed a survey to find out what sports the girls would like to do and visited the school, introducing themselves to the P6 girls and helping them complete the questionnaire.

They took the results and analysed them and then organised the day with five activities; at least one of those five activities appeared in every girl’s top three choices in the questionnaire. The activities were archery, netball, trampolining, dance and tennis and each group got to try every activity.
On the day, the GLAMs:

- Welcomed the P6 girls to the school and encouraged them to take part in all the activities, and organised them into groups (away from their class groups).

- Delivered the netball session themselves, with supervision from their PE teacher: “We are part of the netball team; we wanted to be involved”. They really enjoyed this, especially as they had a mini-competition at the end, with two of the GLAMs supporting each team.

- Prepared fruit for break time – they wanted to get a message across about healthy eating. They also handed out bottles of water which they had labelled with the names of each of the participants. The water was supplied by a local retailer who was the father of one of the P6 girls and the fruit came from a local supermarket who had agreed to sponsor the event.

- Prepared certificates for all the girls to record their participation: “We wanted them to have something to remember the day.”

- At the end of the day handed out evaluation forms (everyone gave positive feedback) and gave a speech to the P6 girls, thanking them for participating and encouraging them to continue to be active.

The GLAMs really enjoyed the day and felt proud of how successful it had been. The P6 girls had clearly enjoyed the activities, the event had been well organised, and the GLAMs enjoyed getting to know the P6 girls.

“It was a real success, we were very proud of ourselves.”

“All the P6 girls were asking us if we were coming back.”

In addition, within their school, the GLAMs have set up a suggestion box for improving PE, aimed at encouraging girls in school Years 8-10 to put forward ideas for what they do and don’t like about PE, and what they’d like to do. There is also now a GLAMs board in the girls’ changing room, with photos of sports day and speech bubble quotes; they hope that this will encourage other girls to participate more in sport.
What have been the challenges?

Mrs McGinley only works one day a week so getting something off the ground and keeping it going has been challenging. She sees it as taking small steps at a time, building momentum, with the hope of bringing other teachers on board.

The girls were very nervous about running the P6 day, speaking in front of a group of girls and organising everything. At times it was stressful – particularly during the day itself when they had a lot to sort out – but they managed to get everything organised and it passed off smoothly.

Impact of Girls Active

• On participants - the P6 girls

They hope they’ve encouraged the P6 girls to be more enthusiastic and confident about sport.

“The teacher [from the primary school] said many of the girls didn’t like or participate in PE, and in the survey the girls said they didn’t like doing it with the boys.”

“We wanted the girls to know that even if you’re a girl you can still do it.”

They’d like to go back and see if they’ve made a difference to the girls and their attitude to sport/PE. They do know that during the course of the day the P6 girls got more confident and more willing to participate in the activities.

They also hope that they’ve given the P6 group a positive impression of the school – that it might encourage them to come to St Patrick’s, or at least mean they are less nervous about coming, when the time arrives.

“It gave them a chance to see the school so that if they decide to come here they’ll be familiar with it... They’ve got a good memory of the day.”

They hope that in the future, some of these P6 girls will become GLAMs, helping to keep the momentum going.

• On GLAMs

They were really proud of their P6 day and it had a big impact on their confidence. They changed from feeling very nervous when they first went to the primary school and met the girls, through to feeling confident and relieved, and happy to speak in front of all of them, by the end of the day.

They felt that organising the day and running it gave them lots of opportunities to do things they wouldn’t normally do; it felt very different to doing normal school work and meant they were more enthusiastic than they would normally be about coming into school towards the end of term.

“It was a great ending to the school year.”

“We want to do it and that’s unusual for something at school.”

As a group they feel they improved their teamwork skills, their confidence and learnt how to communicate to different groups of people. They have also realised that they have the opportunity to talk to their peers about the fun and importance of sport.

“We are the ones who participate in sport and we never spoke up to the girls who didn’t take part and now we talk to them.”

“It’s encouraged us to be more enthusiastic about sport.”
• On the school and PE

There are changes being made to the way PE is planned and taught within the school and the girls believe that at least in part, this is due to what has happened as part of Girls Active.

The PE teachers have now asked every group what they’d like to do as part of PE. Their group is now going to the gym as part of their PE lessons, a trainer has been organised and they’re doing circuits. This has had a significant impact on participation in their year.

“There are more girls participating in PE lessons now; this term so far there hasn’t been one girl that isn’t participating.”

For swimming lessons, girls and boys now go on alternate weeks so that the girls don’t feel uncomfortable or embarrassed about being in their swimming costumes.

From the principal’s perspective the P6 day was a positive way of building relationships with the primary school, and she hopes it might have an impact on the choices they make in Yr7 about which school to go to next.
Plans for next year

The GLAMs are now really encouraged by what they have achieved; they want to build on what they have done and feel confident enough to try and do more this year.

“We’re the GLAMs and we want to carry on doing this. Last year we were doubtful whether it would work but this year, we think we can do this and we will do this.”

They want to get more GLAMs on board from Years 9 and 10 in order to have a bigger squad that will make it easier to organise activities.

They would like to do another activity day this year, perhaps with a different primary school, in order to build a relationship with another school. If possible they are thinking they might try to do it with a different year group to see what it’s like to work with older or younger children.
To find out more about Girls Active visit:  
www.youthsporttrust.org/girls-active

For further information please contact:  
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