



A Sporting Life

PHYSICAL EDUCATION CAN IMPROVE STUDENTS' HEALTH AND WELLBEING; EQUIP THEM FOR EMPLOYMENT; AND INCREASE ATTAINMENT ACROSS THE CURRICULUM – SO GETTING IT RIGHT SHOULD BE A PRIORITY IN EVERY SCHOOL...

The Youth Sport Trust is an independent charity devoted to changing young people's lives through sport. It is passionate about improving the physical education and school sport experience for all young people in order to help them achieve their full potential in life and in sport, and committed to demonstrating how PE and sport can be used to help raise achievement in schools. This is an area in which it has significant expertise and over many years it has supported schools to evidence that having healthy, active pupils who are engaged positively through sport can boost performance across the curriculum.

Much of the Youth Sport Trust's work is based on consultation with headteachers and the organisation has a range of steering groups and a network of headteacher ambassadors who share its values and belief in the power of PE and sport to raise attainment and improve school standards.

Here, experts from the Trust look at three key areas of interest for schools: how

physical education is best placed within the curriculum; the impact of physical activity on health, wellbeing and learning; and the sometimes controversial issue of competitive sports.

1. PE WITHIN THE CURRICULUM



**Annette Montague,
Assistant Director
(Education), writes:**

Through our regular contact with headteachers up and down the country we are acutely aware of impending education policy changes and the possible consequences of these on schools.

We know many headteachers are concerned about the impact that the new school performance measures could have on the place of PE in the curriculum and the time allocated to core PE in particular.

The pressure to produce examination results in specific subjects is understandable, but we believe that any reduction in the quality or quantity of PE will have harmful

short and long term consequences for individuals and possibly a whole generation.

Therefore, it is heartening to also hear that a good number of headteachers are looking to actively promote the significance of PE and sport as part of a refreshed curriculum. By being clear about the important role the subject has on the development of employability skills and improving the overall wellbeing and academic performance of young people, they are positioning the subject in the strongest possible way.

Driving improvement

The role of PE within the curriculum should reflect its centrality to young people's overall development and its place as a compulsory subject at all key stages of the National Curriculum. It also needs to embrace the uniqueness of the physical context that is its foundation. It truly is the only subject that is able to directly improve health and wellbeing, so crucial to achieving academically. Ensuring that Physical Education is an 'active' learning experience is crucial.

It is essential that the PE curriculum is reflective of the needs of all young people. It has to challenge and stretch all abilities, including the most able and those with SEN and disabilities. It is equally important to involve young people in the decision making process of how PE should be delivered. At the Youth Sport Trust we have developed PE Change Teams – groups of pupils and staff working together to improve the PE



experience at their schools. Not only do these teams listen to the views of young people, they involve the pupils in making the decisions around PE delivery and empower them to drive change.

What works

We believe that the best physical education experiences make a unique contribution to a young person's wider skill development as well as his or her overall emotional wellbeing and achievement. These intra- and inter-personal skills, valued by employers, need to be taught overtly and intentionally to ensure young people demonstrate, articulate and transfer these skills to other areas of their academic and personal lives, and ultimately the workplace. Sport is an effective context to demonstrate and develop such skills and schools that are clear which skills and values their overall curriculum seeks to develop, are best able to ensure that their Physical Education curriculum supports this.

Finally, it is important for young people to be offered an appropriate range of high quality PE and sport-related qualifications at secondary school. Such qualifications recognise the achievements, talents and skills of young people. They are also a way of preparing them to contribute to society through volunteering in sport or for careers in sport-related industries, which would include performance sport, sport

administration, leisure services, health and education. We know that these are attractive careers to young people and with an increased requirement on schools to know the destinations of school leavers, now would be a good time to review whether schools are offering a wide enough range of high quality, sport-related qualifications.

2. COMPETITIVE SPORTS IN SCHOOLS



Alison Oliver, Managing Director, writes:

There has been much written recently about the benefits and perceived pitfalls of competitive school sport. On the one side you have those who did not enjoy PE at school and would do everything possible to avoid a competitive sports day; on the other, those that loved the excitement of competition and the opportunity to challenge themselves against others.

There is no right or wrong answer to this debate. The truth is that everyone is different and it is important that schools recognise this and provide a variety of activities that are best suited to their pupils. Some will have a natural pull towards competition and thrive in that environment whilst others will be more

comfortable taking part in activities and sports for other outcomes such as fun, health and friendship. It is also important to recognise that young people can be competitive with themselves – looking to improve, and beat, their own personal best.

However, there are three essentials that must not be overlooked. First, to be able to enjoy competing children need to have developed physical literacy at an early age, equipping them with the skills and self confidence to compete. Secondly, rather than being turned off competition due to the experience itself, many are simply excluded from it due to the nature of team selection, dampening their enthusiasm if they are not amongst the very best who get selected to represent the school in inter-school competition. Thirdly, young people have an interest and in this digital world are exposed to many sports, not just the narrow range of traditional team sports, which only appeal to some students.

Something for everyone

A well structured competitive school sport programme should offer the opportunity for all young people to be involved in a range of sports and provide a meaningful experience, whatever their age or ability. This does not mean that selection and winning and losing are bad things, but it does mean that the needs of all young people should be considered, and a

competition offer put in place to support them whether through relatively informal intra-school competition in an alternative sport, or achieving selection to represent your school in a traditional team sport.

Competitive sport develops a range of life skills that can support young people as they progress through school and into adult life. Everything from the benefits of teamwork, resilience and leadership skills, to the respect and humility in handling success or disappointment. In addition, the skills gained by involving pupils in volunteering at a sport event, becoming an official, or developing writing skills as a journalist in a young media team, can all be included in a modern competitive school sport programme. This is exactly what we are looking to achieve through the Sainsbury's School Games, which the Youth Sport Trust delivers and is supported by National Lottery funding from Sport England.

Regardless of their engagement in competitive school sport, the number one priority for all young people is to engage in some form of physical activity. The best schools develop the fundamentals of physical literacy through the curriculum, have a broad and inclusive competition programme involving both intra and inter school competition, and promote health and wellbeing through a commitment to physical activity.

3. HEALTH AND WELLBEING



John Steele, Chief Executive Officer, writes:

Being physically active from a young age has a range of health benefits. For example, it can reduce stress, tackle obesity, ward off anxiety and feelings of depression, and boost self-esteem and emotional wellbeing.

At the Youth Sport Trust we have established a network of 90 Health and Wellbeing Schools that are hubs of innovation in PE and sport delivery. With a focus on health outcomes they are finding creative ways of strengthening the resilience of their pupils, helping them tackle exam-related stress and boosting their pupils' life skills such as self confidence, team work and communication. It is a formula that is working; by targeting certain groups of pupils



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these schools are helping young people achieve in lessons and lead healthy lifestyles.

In 2010 the Institute of Sport, Loughborough University and the Youth Sport Trust conducted a review of literature of the impact of PE and sport on educational outcomes. It discovered a wealth of evidence that demonstrated that physical education, physical activity and sport have been shown to impact positively on the extent to which young people feel connected to their school; the aspirations of young people; the extent to which positive social behaviours exist within school; and the development of leadership and citizenship skills.

Ensuring all young people get the support they need to lead healthy, active lifestyles is a Youth Sport Trust priority. It also needs to be a national priority if we are to make significant changes in habits and attitudes, and realise the potential for a healthier and happier generation.



SPORT FOR CHANGE



Bethan Gill of Samuel Cody Specialist Sports College in Farnborough is one of over 50,000 students nationwide who last year took part in Sky Sports Living for Sport, a free initiative delivered in partnership with the Youth Sport Trust that uses sport to improve attainment and

achievement in over one third of secondary schools.

Bethan was honoured as Sky Sports Living for Sport Student of the Year by sporting icons David Beckham and Jessica Ennis-Hill at a ceremony broadcast in May. She was chosen for the remarkable progress she has made after five years of involvement in Sky Sports Living for Sport projects, all designed to raise self-confidence using Athlete Mentors to inspire Bethan and her peers.

Having been a selective mute at primary school, meaning extreme anxiety prevented her from speaking in specific situations or to specific people, her confidence has grown to such an extent that she now acts as a sports leader, house captain and sports ambassador for her school. Bethan is set to join the Military Preparation College to take a BTEC level 1 in Sport and Active Leisure; a real indication of just how far she's come.