

SUMMARY REPORT

A Baseline Survey Of Timetabled PE In Post Primary Schools In Northern Ireland - 2010



1. BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

1.1 DEVELOPING PHYSICAL LITERACY

1.1.1 “Sport Matters” – The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009-19, aspires to “create a culture of lifelong enjoyment and success in sport and physical recreation”. Being physically active throughout life depends on an individual’s ability to feel competent and confident in an activity setting. This competence and confidence normally comes from having developed physical literacy skills as a child.

1.1.2 Physical literacy can be defined as the ability to use body management, locomotor and object control skills in a competent manner, with the capacity to apply them with confidence in settings which may lead to sustained involvement in sport and physical recreation¹.

1.1.3 Physically literate children will be able to perform a range of fundamental movement skills e.g. hop, climb or catch at levels of agility², balance³ and coordination⁴ appropriate to their capabilities. A child’s movement confidence will develop as they become more competent in performing these skills.

1.1.4 Physical literacy is essential for children’s:

- Long-term health and well-being; and
- Lifelong Involvement in sport and physical activity⁵.

1.1.5 Physical literacy needs to be actively developed through a range of appropriate opportunities as it is unlikely to occur naturally as part of normal growth:

Figure 1: Opportunities for developing physical literacy



1.2 DEVELOPING PHYSICAL LITERACY THROUGH PE

1.2.1 One of the main opportunities for developing physical literacy is through sustained participation in PE:

“The aim of Physical Education is to develop physical competence so that all children are able to move efficiently, effectively and safely and understand what they are doing ... the outcome, physical literacy, along with numeracy and literacy, is the essential basis for learners to access the whole range of competencies and experiences as they begin their journey to become independent, confident and responsible citizens.”

Association for Physical Education (2009)⁶

1.2.2 Sport Matters recommends that government pursue a target of 2 hours of curricular PE and sport per week. This will form part of an overall 4 hour offer:

4 HOUR OFFER	
2 hours curricular PE and sport	2 hours extra-curricular sport and physical recreation

1.2.3 Sport Matters further recommends establishing a baseline for the number of children participating in a minimum of two hours quality PE a week as this will assist in strengthening the link between research and policy, and provide the evidence-base to inform subsequent investment programmes.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Sport Northern Ireland, with assistance from:

- Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA);
- Inter-Board Panel for PE and School Sport;
- Department of Education for Northern Ireland’s (DENI) Statistics and Research Branch; and
- DCAL’s Statistics and Research Branch,

Devised a questionnaire that would help establish a baseline for the amount of time-tabled PE in post primary schools in Northern Ireland during the 2009/10 academic year. In June 2010, all 253 post primary schools, including special schools, listed by DENI, were invited to complete an online or a postal survey.

2.2 A total of 136 responses were returned – 21 online and 115 by post. This represents a return rate of 54%. Data was then electronically scanned and entered into a database for analysis.

¹ Sport Matters: NI Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009-19, Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), page 9.

² Agility is the movement of the body at speed when it is both balanced and coordinated, An Introduction to the Fundamentals of Movement, Sports Coach UK, 2009, P32.

³ Balance is a state in which a body or object remains reasonably steady and stable, An Introduction to the Fundamentals of Movement, Sports Coach UK, 2009, P32.

⁴ Coordination is the skilful and balanced sequencing of the body and its segments to produce movement of the body and generate force, An Introduction to the Fundamentals of Movement, Sports Coach UK, 2009, P32.

⁵ Lifelong Involvement In Sport and Physical Activity (LISPA) theoretical framework for sports development.

⁶ Professor Talbot M, Valedictory reflections on politicians, bureaucrats and experts, PE Matters, Association for Physical Education (AfPE), 2009, Vol. 4, No 4, Page 8.

3. FINDINGS

The key findings generated from data analysis are detailed in the tables and comments below:

3.1 OVERALL AVERAGES (TIME, TREND, PERCENTAGE AND RANGE)

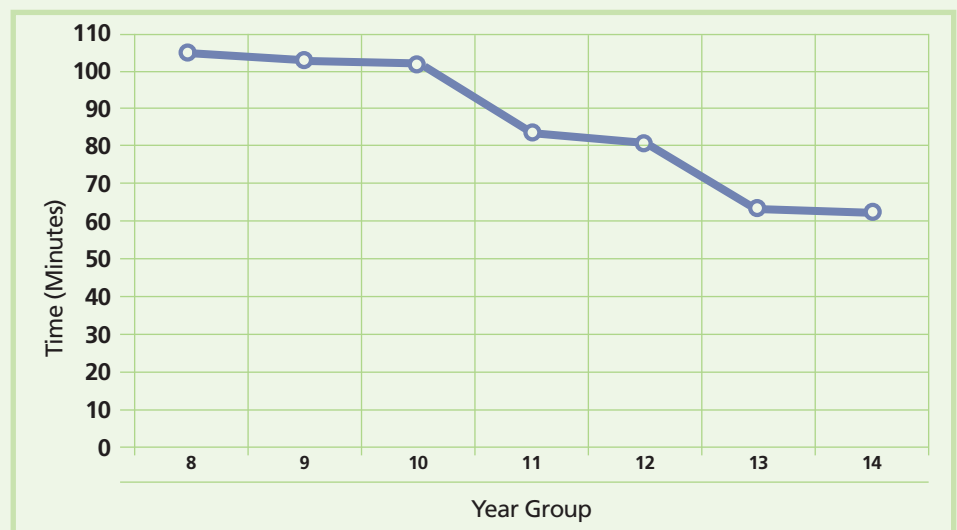
Figures 2 and 3 show that:

- The overall average time spent on curricular PE was 89 minutes;
- Pupils in Year 14 received the least amount of PE (62 minutes) and pupils in Year 8 participated in the most amount of PE (105 minutes); and
- Overall, the length of time decreased from Year 8 to Year 14.
- 9% of the schools (12 schools) that took part in the survey delivered the recommended 2 hours of PE or more; and
- The lowest overall school average was 38 minutes and the highest overall school average was 252 minutes.

Figure 2: Average PE time by Year Group and Key Stage

AVERAGE TIME (MINUTES)	Year Group							OVERALL AVERAGE	
	8	9	10	11	12	13	14		
	105	103	102	82	80	64	62		89
	Key Stage 3			Key Stage 4		Key Stage 5			
103			81		63				

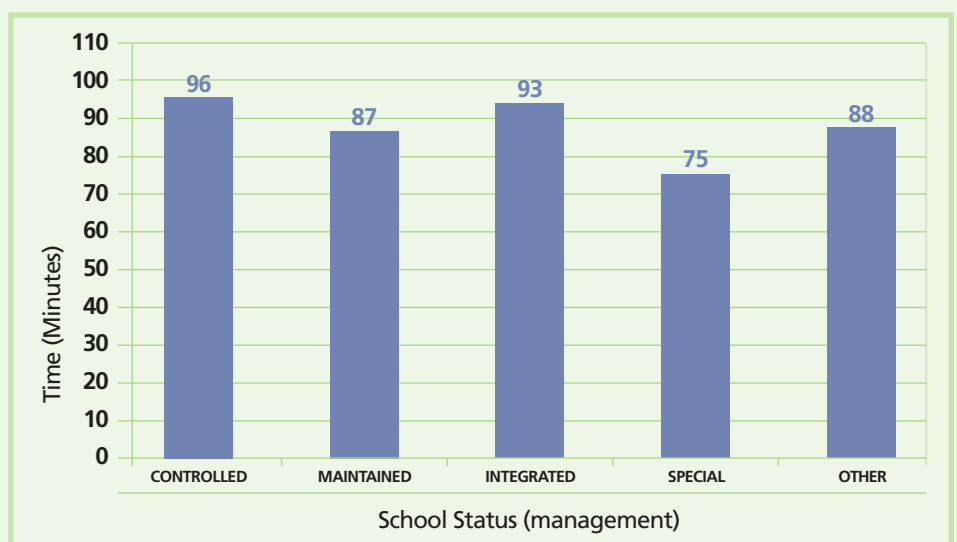
Figure 3: Average PE time by Year Group



3.2 SCHOOL STATUS (MANAGEMENT)

Figure 4 shows that based upon known school status controlled schools had the highest overall average of PE (96 minutes) and special schools had the lowest (75 minutes).

Figure 4: Overall average PE time by school status (management)

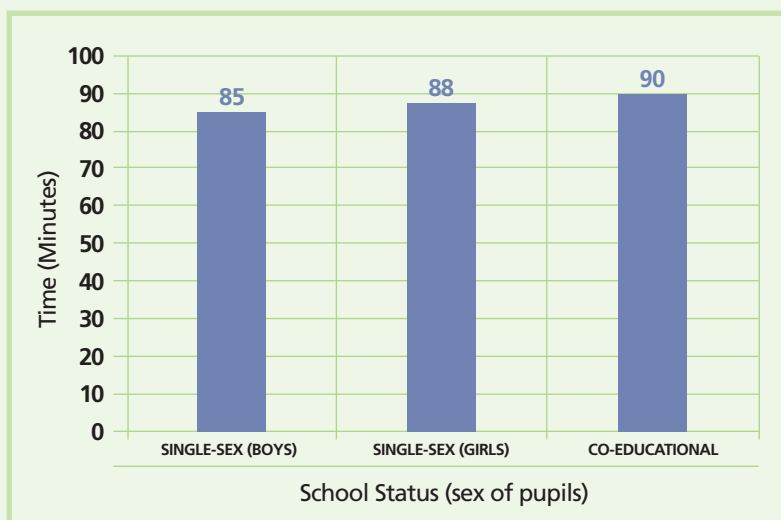


3. FINDINGS continued

3.3 SCHOOL STATUS (SEX OF PUPILS)

Figure 5 indicates that based upon reported data, co-educational schools had the highest overall average of PE (90 minutes).

Figure 5: Overall average PE time by school status (sex of pupils)



3.4 SCHOOL SIZE (ENROLMENT FIGURE)

There does not appear to be any correlation between enrolment figure and the amount of time allocated to curricular PE as schools with the lowest and highest enrolment figures allocated the least amount of time (60 minutes and 75 minutes respectively).

3.5 Location – ELB

- Schools in the North Eastern and Education Library Board (NEELB) allocated the most time to PE (95 minutes) and schools residing in the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) allocated the least time to PE (85 minutes).

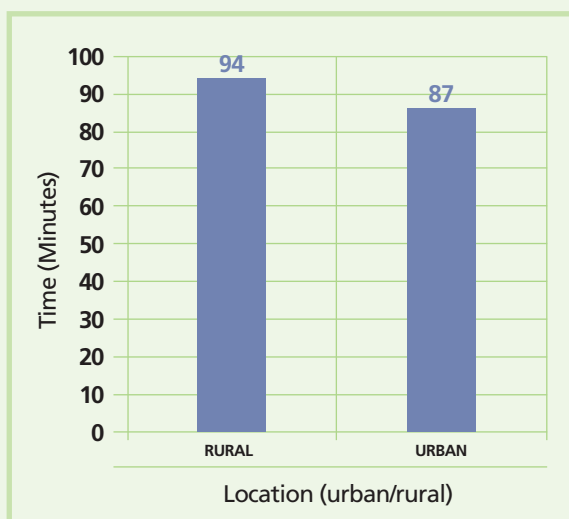
3.6 Location – council area

- Schools residing in Ballymoney Council area achieved the most amount of PE time (115 minutes) and schools in Newry and Mourne Council area achieved the least (72 minutes).

3.7 Location – urban/rural

- Figure 6 indicates that the overall average PE time is higher in a rural location (94 minutes) than an urban location (87 minutes).

Figure 6: Overall Average PE time by urban/rural location



3.8 Location – social need/ free school meals

- There does not appear to be any correlation between the number or percentage of free school meals and the average PE time per year group.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 EQUAL ACCESS AND PROVISION

4.1.1 Although the pedagogical underpinnings of the Northern Ireland PE curriculum are highly developed and premised on a child-centred approach to children and young people's holistic development, the reality of the delivery of PE is less impressive.

4.1.2 The allocation of sufficient curricular PE time in every year group in every school is critical to the provision of a quality PE experience as for many children and young people, curricular PE remains their only guaranteed exposure to physical activity and sport⁷. The Department of Education has previously recommended that schools should seek to deliver 2 hours of PE per week to every child.⁸

4.1.3 This survey and the Primary PE survey conducted in 2009 have highlighted significant deficits and disparities in the delivery of the recommended 2 hours of PE in primary and post-primary schools in Northern Ireland.

4.1.4 The Northern Ireland Curriculum advises that:

"Schools have a responsibility to provide a broad and balanced curriculum for all children and schools should aim to give every child the opportunity to experience success in learning and to achieve as high a standard as possible." Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (2007)⁹

4.1.5 However, despite official commitment to entitlement¹⁰ to a broad and balanced curriculum, the research indicates that equal access to and provision of PE is not necessarily assured for all children and young people in Northern Ireland due to inconsistencies in the localised implementation of the PE curriculum. It follows that not every child is being provided with an equal opportunity to experience success and achievement in PE.

4.1.6 A similar finding of insufficient curricular time and inconsistent provision between schools for Literacy and Numeracy may be considered unacceptable and would warrant immediate intervention. It is reasoned that deficits and variances in the delivery of PE, and hence opportunities for developing physical literacy, should be viewed as equally unacceptable and concerning.

4.1.7 Political support is vital to ensure that all children and young people in Northern Ireland have equal access to and provision of 2 hours of quality PE every week regardless of their age or the status, size or location of their school.

4.2 STRATEGIC DISSEMINATION OF EVIDENCE-BASED RESEARCH

4.2.1 The preamble to the European Parliament's Resolution¹¹ on the Role of Sport in Education alludes to PE as:

"... the only subject, which seeks to prepare children for a healthy lifestyle and focused on their overall physical and mental development, as well as imparting important social values such as fairness, self-discipline, solidarity, team spirit, tolerance and fair play ..."
(November, 2007)

4.2.2 While the contribution of PE to children's physical, social and emotional development is widely recognised, PE is often perceived as the poor relation of the school curriculum and therefore receives less time and attention than examination subjects¹².

4.2.3 Numerous global studies have linked physical activity with cognitive development and educational attainment, and proved that daily PE does not adversely impact on academic performance¹³. Many schools may have wrongly reduced or eliminated curricular PE time under the assumption that more classroom instructional time will improve academic performance and increase examination performance.

4.2.4 To address this issue, the evidence-base linking PE and educational attainment should be strengthened and disseminated¹⁴. This will inform and convince policy makers, head teachers, teachers, parents and pupils that participation in PE does not detract from academic performance, rather it can contribute to cognitive development and academic achievement, in addition to physical and psychological well-being. This approach should assist in elevating the status afforded to PE within schools and may indirectly effect more curricular time allocated to the delivery of PE.

⁷ A Manifesto for a World Class System of PE, Association for Physical Education (AfPE), 2008.

⁸ DENI Circular Number 2003/14, Subject: Education (School Information and Prospectuses) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003, issued 5 September 2003, paragraph 5.

⁹ The Northern Ireland Curriculum, Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), 2007, page 2.

¹⁰ The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 and the Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order (Northern Ireland) 2007.

¹¹ European Commission, European Parliament Resolution on the Role of Sport in Education, Strasbourg, 13 November, 2007, Ref: 2007/2086NI.

¹² MacPhail A and Halbert J, 2005, The implementation of a revised physical education syllabus in Ireland; circumstances, rewards and costs, European Physical Education Review, Vol.11, pp 287-308.

¹³ Active Education: Physical Education, Physical Activity and Academic Performance, Active Living Research, A National Report of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Research Brief, 2007.

¹⁴ Evidence emanating from Sport Specialist Colleges in Northern Ireland linking sport specialist status with improved GCSE performance, Game of Three Halves Conference, Regional Training Unit (RTU), December, 2009.

4. CONCLUSIONS continued

4.3 STATUTORY REQUIREMENT AND ENTITLEMENT

- 4.3.1** Although Sport Matters recommends that government pursue a target of 2 hours of PE per week, and the Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order (Northern Ireland) 2007 provides every child with a statutory minimum entitlement to all areas of the curriculum, including PE, there is no statutory entitlement to 2 hours of PE per week.
- 4.3.2** Notably, in the European Parliament's Resolution, is the call on Member States to make PE compulsory in primary and secondary schools with a guaranteed principle of at least 3 PE lessons per week. Recommendations¹⁵ by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers in 2003 featured a significant reference to PE time allocation including an agreement to "move towards a compulsory legal minimum of 180 minutes weekly, with schools endeavouring to go beyond this minimum where this is possible."¹⁶
- 4.3.3** In light of the extent of insufficient curricular time and the inconsistent provision between schools, a statutory requirement of, and entitlement to, 2 hours of PE a week should now be considered. To ensure full implementation of any statutory requirement or entitlement, all schools should be appropriately supported and resourced.

4.3.4 In the absence of a statutory requirement of and entitlement to 2 hours of PE, achievement of this aspiration may be pursued through effective dissemination and implementation of the guidance contained in a DENI circular relating to information in school prospectuses.

4.3.5 The Education (School Information and Prospectuses) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 prescribes the minimum requirements for information which must be included in a school's prospectus and Annual Report Of the Board of Governors. The Regulation requires all schools to provide details of sporting activities open to, and the facilities available to, pupils at the school¹⁷. A corresponding DENI Circular explains that:

"The Department continues to encourage schools to use the flexibility that exists in school timetabling to offer at least 2 hours of energetic physical activity for children, in keeping with any guidance on health education and physical activity that may emanate from the Department or its partner bodies from time to time."¹⁸

4.4 PARTNERSHIPS AND POLICY INTEGRATION

4.4.1 Although the Department of Education has statutory remit for curricular PE, the findings of this report also present challenges and opportunities for Sport policy and Health policy.

4.4.2 Sport policy has been traditionally concerned with extra-curricular sport played in the schools and clubs within the community, however within recent years an important policy evolution has occurred whereby sports promotion programmes have extended into curricular PE. Whilst the core orientations of Education and Sports policy are not identical, they arguably overlap in important ways and are likely to support each other¹⁹.

4.4.3 It has been argued that the health and health promotion sector should not have central responsibility for the inputs to children's PE in the form of policies, structure or expenditure, and that they should have only a background role in these areas, as their main interest lies in the outputs of PE rather than the inputs and structures that determine its effective delivery²⁰.

4.4.4 However, it may be counter-argued that because participation in quality PE yields considerable health benefits both in childhood and in later adulthood²¹, the health and health promotion sector should directly contribute to policy formulation, investment and implementation relating to the provision of PE. This rationale is becoming increasingly more credible and relevant as obesity rates²² in children and young people in Northern Ireland continue to rise.

¹⁵ Council of Europe, Committee of Ministers, Recommendations Rec (2003)6 of the Committee of Ministers to member states in improving PE and sport for children and young people in all European countries, Strasbourg, Council of Europe, 30 April 2003.

¹⁶ Hardman, K, Situation and sustainability of PE in schools: a global perspective, University of Worcester, UK, 2008, page 18.

¹⁷ The Education (School Information and Prospectuses) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003, Schedule 3, Section 21.

¹⁸ DENI Circular Number 2003/15, Subject: Education (School Information and Prospectuses) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003, issued 5 September 2003, paragraph 5.

¹⁹ Fahey T, Delaney L and Gannon B, School Children and Sport in Ireland, The Economic and Social Research Centre and The Irish Sports Council, 2005, page 1.

²⁰ Fahey T, Delaney L and Gannon B, School Children and Sport in Ireland, The Economic and Social Research Centre and The Irish Sports Council, 2005, page 2.

²¹ Koplan JP, Liverman CT and Kraak VI, Preventing Childhood Obesity, Health in the Balance, Committee on the Prevention of Obesity in Children and Youth, Institute of Medicine of the National Academies, Washington, National Academy Press, 2005, page 114.

²² Inquiry into Obesity, Northern Ireland Assembly, 2009.

4.4.5 In 2008 a cross-departmental Obesity Prevention Steering Group (OPSG) was established to oversee and drive forward Fit Futures²³. The OPSG and its Advisory Groups are now working towards the development of an Obesity Prevention Strategic Framework with a view for publication in the Summer of 2010. The development of a Strategic Framework could provide an opportunity for an existing cross-departmental partnership to issue an authoritative recommendation of 2 hours of quality PE per week to assist in off-setting the decline in activity levels.²⁴

4.4.6 Undoubtedly, there are numerous examples²⁵ of recent positively, implemented programmes and good practices in PE that have originated in Education, Sports and Health policies. The impact of these institutional endeavours could be optimised through an agreed, strategic and co-ordinated approach by the three respective government departments.

4.4.7 Cross-departmental commitment to co-ordinating strategies and sharing resources will enhance the quality and quantity of PE delivery within all schools and ultimately enrich the PE experiences of all children and young people in Northern Ireland.

4.4.8 Formulation of this proposed cross-departmental partnership may also effect an obligation on Education, Sports and Health professionals to exchange the best of insights, practices and research available from their respective profession that will be fully integrated not only into curricular PE, but also extra-curricular PE, sport and physical activity.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Insufficient provision of PE will inevitably restrict children's opportunities to develop and apply their physical literacy skills. Without the development of physical literacy, many children and young people will withdraw from sport and physical activity, and are more likely to become inactive and lead unhealthy lifestyles.

5.2 The Sport Northern Ireland Primary and Post-primary PE surveys have highlighted the challenges and opportunities faced by all those stakeholders with a responsibility for ensuring that all children and young people are equipped with the necessary skills that will empower and enable them to fulfil their potential, and access a whole range of valuable experiences in life as they continue their journey to become informed, responsible and healthy citizens.

5.3 On the basis of the findings of this research and the discussion of results therein, the following recommendations are noted:

5.3.1 Equal access and provision

Immediate and sustained application of political support that will ensure equal access to and provision of 2 hours of curricular PE for every child and young person in Northern Ireland is at the forefront of the political agenda;

5.3.2 Strategic design and dissemination of evidence-based research

Strategic design and dissemination of evidence-based research relating to the physical, psychological and cognitive benefits of PE, that will assist in elevating the status of PE and increase allocated curricular time;

5.3.3 Statutory requirement and entitlement

A statutory requirement of, and statutory entitlement to, at least 2 hours of quality PE each week for every child and young person in compulsory education, which is effectively resourced and monitored; and

5.3.4 Partnerships and policy integration

Cross-departmental commitment to share resources, and fully align and integrate PE into Education, Sport and Health policy.

²³ Fit Futures: Focus on Food, Activity and Young People, Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for Northern Ireland, (DHSSPSNI), <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/fit-futures-implementation-plan.pdf>, 2007.

²⁴ In Scotland, 20% of 12 year olds are clinically obese with a further third diagnosed as overweight. Consequently a Scottish Executive established Physical Activity Task Force has recommended a target of 2 hours of quality PE per week for all school children by 2007 to assist in offsetting the decline in health-related fitness and activity levels.

²⁵ Downey R, Developments in Northern Ireland, Physical Education Matters, Association for Physical Education (AfPE), Vol.3, No.1, Spring 2008.

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