

A blue-tinted photograph of children playing a game on a school playground. The children are running and jumping over hurdles. The scene is captured from a high angle, showing the layout of the game area with white lines, hurdles, and cones on the asphalt. The overall mood is active and energetic.

REPORT

A Baseline Survey Of Timetabled PE In Primary Schools In Northern Ireland

2009

isport
Northern Ireland

The lead agency for the development of sport in Northern Ireland

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report contains the findings from a Physical Education (PE) Survey conducted by Sport Northern Ireland in May 2009, which identified the following key findings:

1.2 OVERALL TIME, PERCENTAGE, RANGE AND TREND

- The overall average time allocated to curricular PE in primary schools in Northern Ireland during the academic year 2008–09 was 90 minutes;
- Only 17% of the primary schools that took part in the survey delivered the recommended 2 hours of PE or more - the average time for these 73 schools was 137 minutes;
- On the basis of the reported data, there appears to be significant equality of opportunity issues given the range in average time spent on PE reported by schools. The lowest school average time spent on PE was 34 minutes and the highest school average was 240 minutes; and
- Overall, the length of time decreased from years 1-3 and then increased from years 4-7.

1.3 SCHOOL STATUS

- Integrated schools had the highest overall average time of PE (94 minutes). There was very little difference (2 minutes) between the amount of PE delivered in controlled schools (88 minutes) compared to maintained schools (90 minutes).

1.4 SCHOOL SIZE

- There was a negative correlation between enrolment figure and time, as the amount of time allocated to PE steadily decreased as enrolment figures increased;
- Schools with enrolment figures of less than 100 spent the most time on PE (94 minutes), whereas those with enrolment figures greater than 700 spent the least amount of time (59 minutes); and
- 45% of the schools that delivered the 2 hour target had enrolment figures of less than 100 pupils.

1.5 SCHOOL LOCATION

- Schools in rural locations delivered more PE (93 minutes) than urban schools (85 minutes);
- 68% of the schools that delivered the 2 hour target resided in rural locations;
- Schools in the Western Education and Library Board (WELB) and South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) allocated the most time to PE (91 minutes), and schools residing in the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) allocated the least time to PE (84 minutes); and
- Schools residing in Magherafelt Council area achieved the most amount of PE time (111 minutes) and schools in Limavady Council area achieved the least (73 minutes).

2. BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

2.1 DEVELOPING PHYSICAL LITERACY

2.1.1 ‘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.

2.1.2 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.

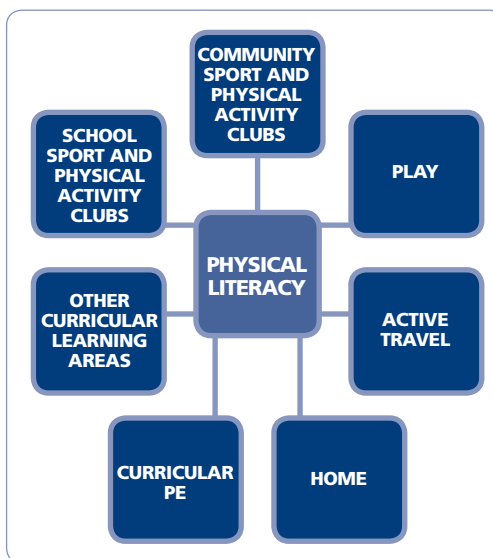
2.1.3 Physically literate children will be able to perform a range of fundamental movement skills e.g. hop, climb or catch at levels of agility², balance³ and coordination⁴ appropriate to their capabilities. A child’s movement confidence will develop as they become more competent in performing these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

2.1.4 Physical literacy is essential for children’s:

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

2.1.5 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:

Diagram 1: Opportunities for developing physical literacy



2.1.6 Diagram 1 recognises that the development of physical literacy is not confined to one particular setting or indeed the responsibility of one particular provider. A range of individuals and organisations are required to:

- Encourage children to participate in all of these different opportunities in order for them to achieve their full potential; and
- Create and sustain a range of different opportunities for developing physical literacy.

2.2 DEVELOPING PHYSICAL LITERACY THROUGH PE

2.2.1 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

2.2.2 Article 4 of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 imposes a statutory obligation on boards of governors and principals to ensure that the school “offers a balanced and broadly based curriculum that:

- Promotes the spiritual, emotional, moral, cultural, intellectual and physical development of pupils at the school and thereby of society; and
- Prepares such pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life by equipping them with appropriate knowledge, understanding and skills.”

2.2.3 In order to meet their statutory requirements, schools must provide learning opportunities in relation to six Areas of Learning. PE, as one of the six Areas of Learning, focuses on the development of knowledge, skills and understanding through play and a range of activities. The enactment of 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.

¹ Sport Matters: Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation, 2009-19, Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL).
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, page 32.
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, page 32.
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, page 32.
⁵ Lifelong Involvement In Sport and Physical Activity (LISPA) theoretical framework for sports development, Sport Matters: Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation, 2009-19, Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL).
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.

2.2.4 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
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2.2.5 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.

2.3 CURRENT BASELINES

2.3.1 Post-primary

The Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitude Survey⁷ (YPBAS) of 2007 will help to establish a baseline for the post-primary sector. This survey was carried out in a representative sample of 62 post-primary schools across Northern Ireland. Overall, 3,463 pupils (Years 8-12 inclusive) participated in the sport module of the survey.

2.3.2 A secondary analysis of the data by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) Statistics and Research Branch published in September 2009 highlighted the following results for the post-primary sector:

- 51% of respondents reported that they spent 2 hours or more per week doing PE/games;
- 45% spent up to 2 hours; and
- 3% did not spend any time doing PE/games at school.

2.3.3 Primary

An evaluation⁸ commissioned by DCAL and conducted by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) in December 2008 involved primary aged children and produced the following results:

- 50% of the children reported they had spent about 1 hour per week in PE per week;
- 24% claimed they spent about 2 hours in PE per week; and
- 14% responded they spent 3 or more hours in PE per week.

This evaluation involved only 11 primary schools and children aged 9-10 and it is therefore not representative of all primary schools in NI. The need to establish a more robust baseline was identified.

⁷ Conducted by Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Branch (NISRA) on behalf of a range of government departments including Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL).

⁸ "An evaluation of the contexts in which children and young people engage in sport and physical recreation, the extent of their engagement and their attitudes to sport and physical recreation", Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI), June 2009, page 2.

3. METHODOLOGY

- 3.1** Sport Northern Ireland, with assistance from DCAL's Statistics and Research Branch, devised a questionnaire (Appendix I) that would help establish a baseline for the amount of time-tabled PE in primary schools in Northern Ireland during the 2008-09 academic year.
- 3.2** In May 2009, all 873 primary schools listed by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI) were asked to complete a postal survey. A follow-up questionnaire was also electronically distributed for on-line completion in June 2009.
- 3.3** The questionnaire asked schools to record how much time was devoted to curricular PE⁹ per week within each year group 1-7. Schools were advised that structured/un-structured play, break/lunch-time initiatives and extra-curricular activities should be excluded.
- 3.4** To encourage honest and accurate reporting schools were assured that all responses would be treated in confidence and reported anonymously; for this reason respondents were not requested to provide details of the school name. The following information was requested:
- School status;
 - School size;
 - Location - Education and Library Board;
 - Location - Council area; and
 - Location - urban or rural.
- 3.5** A voucher for sports equipment provided an incentive for schools to return completed questionnaires. Schools were given the option to return a separate form listing their school details with the completed questionnaire if they wished to be entered for the voucher competition. The separate forms were detached immediately from the completed questionnaires when received to ensure confidentiality assurances were adhered to.
- 3.6** A total of 419 responses¹⁰ were returned – 413 by post and 6 online. This represents a return rate of 48%. Data was then entered into a database for detailed analysis.

⁹ Curricular PE is defined as the planned teaching and learning programme during curricular time that meets the minimum statutory requirements of the Northern Ireland Primary Curriculum for Physical Education.

¹⁰ A breakdown of the 419 responses is provided in Figure 2A (school status); Figure 3A (school size); Figure 4A (ELB); Figure 5A (council area) and Figure 6A (urban/rural location).

4. FINDINGS

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

4.1 OVERALL TIME, TREND, PERCENTAGE AND RANGE

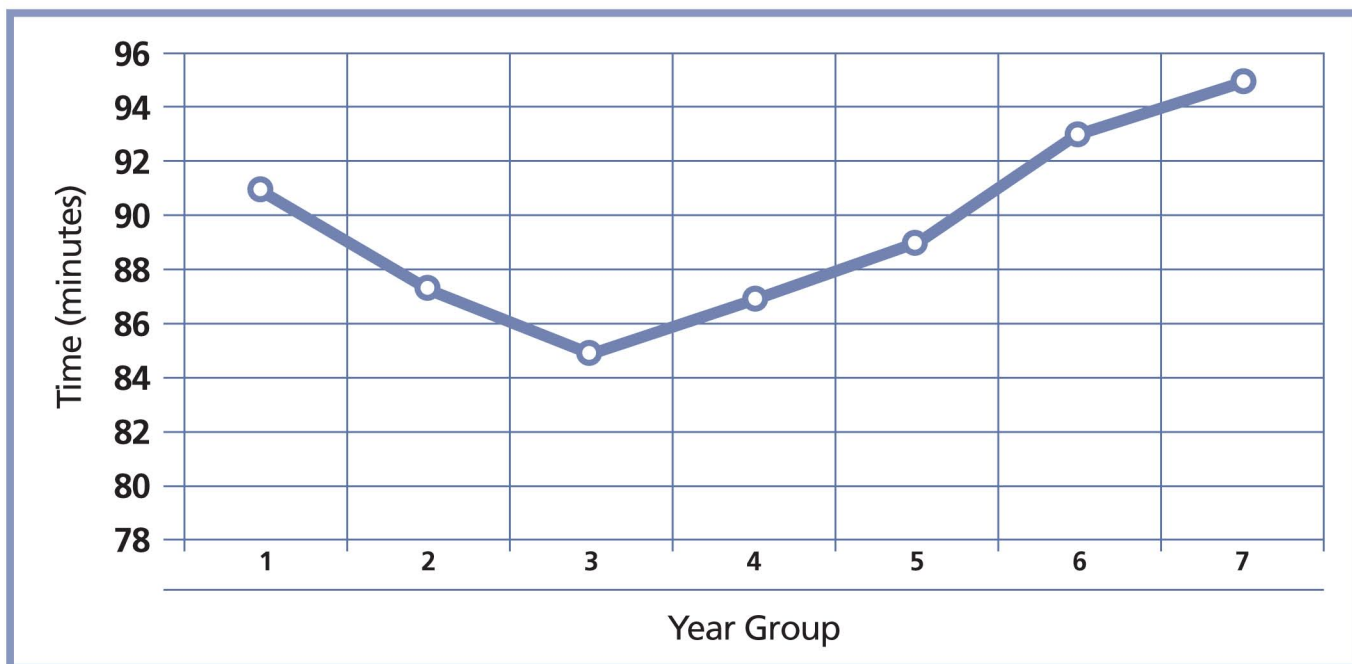
Figures 1A and 1B show that:

- The overall average time spent on curricular PE was 90 minutes;
- Pupils in Year 3 received the least amount of PE (85 minutes) and pupils in Year 7 participated in the most amount of PE (95 minutes); and
- Overall, the length of time decreased from Years 1-3 and then increased from Years 4-7.

Figure 1A: Average PE time by year group and key stage

		Year Group								
Average time (minutes)		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Overall average	
		91	87	85	87	90	93	95		90
		Foundation Stage		Key Stage 1		Key Stage 2				
		89		86		93				

Figure 1B: Average PE time by year group



Figures 1C and 1D show that:

- 17% of the primary schools (73 schools) that took part in the survey delivered the recommended 2 hours of PE or more - the average time for these 73 schools was 137 minutes; and
- 83% of the primary schools (346 schools) that took part in the survey delivered less than the recommended 2 hours of PE – the average time for these 346 schools was 80 minutes.

Figure 1C: Frequency and cumulative frequency of PE time

Time spent on PE	Frequency	Cumulative Frequency
30-39	2	2
40-49	8	10
50-59	18	28
60-69	83	111
70-79	74	185
80-89	51	236
90-99	54	290
100-109	38	328
110-119	20	348
120-129	43	391
130-139	6	397
140-149	3	400
150-159	7	407
160-169	6	413
170-179	1	414
180-189	3	417
190-199	0	417
200-209	0	417
210-219	0	417
220-229	0	417
230-239	0	417
240-249	2	419

Figure 1D: Number and percentage of schools that achieved the 2 hour target

Number of schools that achieved the 2 hour target	Number of schools that did not achieve the 2 hour target
73	346
% of schools that achieved the 2 hour target	%of schools that did not achieve the 2 hour target
17%	83%

- Figure 1E shows that 42% of the schools that delivered the 2 hour target had maintained status and 38% of the schools that achieved the 2 hour target had controlled status.

Figure 1E: Number and percentage of schools that achieved the 2 hour target by school status

School Status	Number of Schools	% of Schools
Controlled	28	38.36
Integrated	6	8.22
Maintained	31	42.46
Special	0	0
Other	3	4.11
Not disclosed	5	6.85
Total	73	100

- Figure 1F shows that 45% of the schools that delivered the 2 hour target had enrolment figures of less than 100 pupils.

Figure 1F: Number and percentage of schools that achieved the 2 hour target by school size

School Size	Number of Schools	% of Schools
<100	33	45.2
101-200	20	27.4
201-300	12	16.44
301-400	4	5.48
401-500	1	1.37
501-600	1	1.37
601-700	0	0
700+	0	0
Not disclosed	2	2.74
Total	73	100

- Figure 1G shows that 29% of the schools that delivered the 2 hour target resided in the WELB.

Figure 1G: Number and percentage of schools that achieved the 2 hour target by ELB

School Size	Number of Schools	% of Schools
BELB	2	2.74
SEELB	14	19.18
SELB	17	23.29
WELB	21	28.76
NEELB	17	23.29
Not disclosed	2	2.74
Total	73	100

- Figure 1H shows that none of the schools that took part in the survey that resided in Ballymoney and Limavady council areas delivered the 2 hour target.

Figure 1H: Number and percentage of schools that achieved the 2 hour target by council area

Council Area	Number of Schools	% of Schools
Antrim	1	1.37
Ards	2	2.74
Armagh	4	5.48
Ballymena	1	1.37
Ballymoney	0	0
Banbridge	1	1.37
Belfast	2	2.74
Carrickfergus	1	1.37
Castlereagh	1	1.37
Coleraine	1	1.37
Cookstown	3	4.11
Craigavon	2	2.74
Derry	5	6.85
Down	3	4.11
Dungannon	6	8.22
Fermanagh	6	8.22
Larne	1	1.37
Limavady	0	0
Lisburn	4	5.48
Magherafelt	6	8.22
Moyle	5	6.85
Newry and Mourne	3	4.11
Newtownabbey	1	1.37
North Down	3	4.11
Omagh	2	2.74
Strabane	6	8.22
Not disclosed	3	4.11
Total	73	100

- Figure 1I shows that 68% of the schools that delivered the 2 hour target were in a rural location.

Figure 1I: Number and percentage of schools that achieved the 2 hour target by location

Council Area	Number of Schools	% of Schools
Rural	50	68.49
Urban	19	26.03
Not disclosed	4	5.48
Total	73	100

- Figure 1J shows that the lowest overall school average was 34 minutes and the highest overall school average was 240 minutes.

Figure 1J: Range of overall average PE time

Time (minutes)	Overall School Average
Lowest	34
Highest	240
Range	206

- Figure 1K shows that the biggest range in PE time per year group was in Year 2 – the lowest reported time in Year 2 was 30 minutes and the highest reported time in Year 2 was 360 minutes.

Figure 1K: Range of PE time by year group

Average Time (minutes)	Year Group						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Lowest	30	30	30	30	30	30	38
Highest	300	360	300	240	180	270	270
Range	270	330	270	210	150	240	232

4.2 SCHOOL STATUS

Figures 2A, 2B and 2C show that:

- Based upon known school status integrated schools had the highest overall average of PE (94 minutes);
- There was very little difference (2 minutes) between the amount of PE delivered in controlled schools (88 minutes) compared to maintained schools (90 minutes); and
- As noted in paragraph 4.1, generally the length of time decreased from Years 1-3 and then increased from Years 4-7, with the exception of special schools where the length of time was static between Years 1-3 and then increased between Years 4-7.

Figure 2A: Average PE time by school status

School Status ¹¹	Year Group							Overall Average	Number of Respondents
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
Controlled	90	85	83	85	87	91	93	88	183
Integrated	92	91	88	89	96	103	103	94	18
Maintained	90	88	86	88	91	94	94	90	189
Special	80	80	80	70	90	90	90	79	3
Other	135	130	120	100	115	100	96	117	6
Not recorded	91	92	86	89	98	96	100	95	20
								Total: 419	

Figure 2B: Overall average PE time by school status

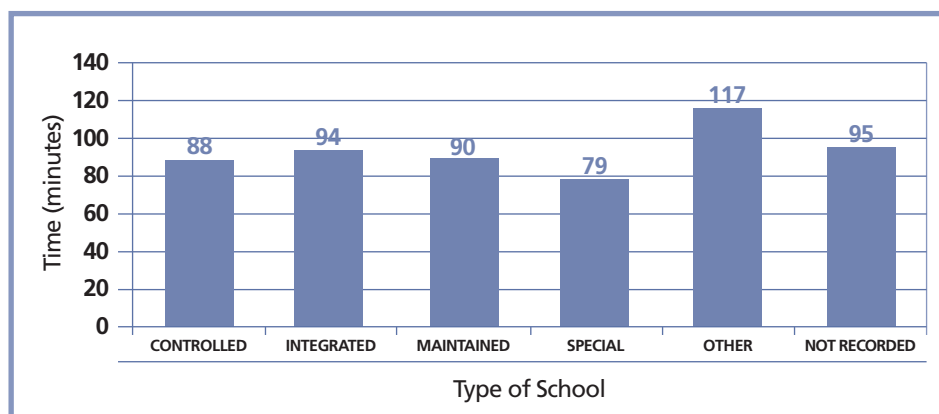
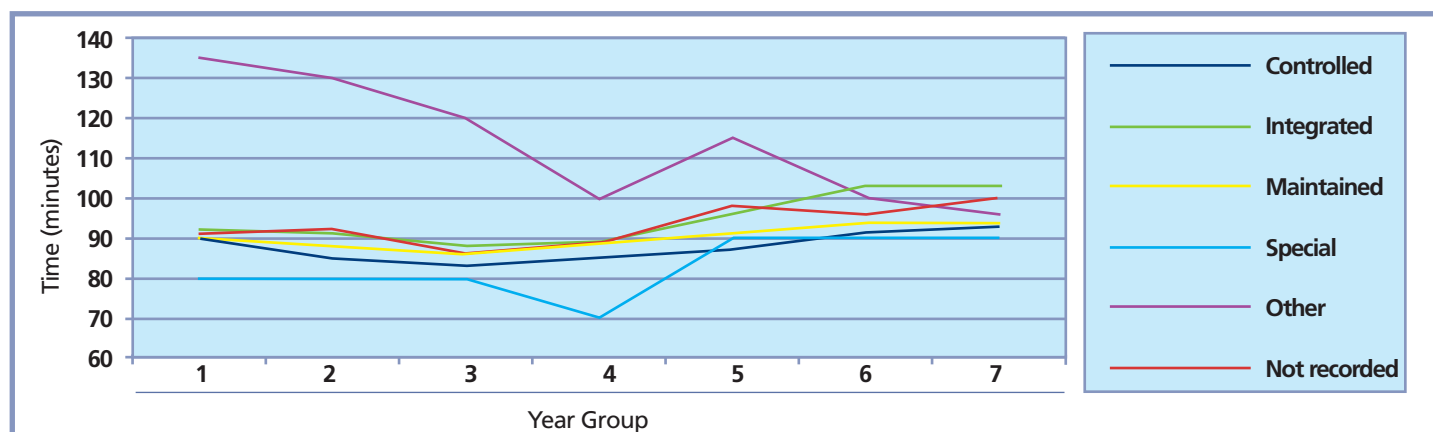


Figure 2C: Average PE time per year group by school status



¹¹ As some schools could be identified based on the details they provided, schools were given the option to record their school status as "other" to ensure confidentiality.

4.3 SCHOOL SIZE

Figures 3A, 3B and 3C show:

- There was a negative correlation between enrolment figure and time, as the amount of time allocated to PE steadily decreased as enrolment figures increased; and
- Schools with enrolment figures of less than 100 spent the most time on PE (94 minutes), whereas those with enrolment figures greater than 700 spent the least amount of time (59 minutes).

Figure 3A: Average PE time by school size

Enrolment Figure	Year Group							Overall Average	Number of Respondents
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
<100	89	89	88	92	97	102	100	94	144
101-200	95	89	86	87	90	92	95	90	125
201-300	90	86	86	89	91	93	94	89	69
301-400	98	95	83	83	82	83	91	88	34
401-500	91	82	75	68	72	73	75	77	20
501-600	73	71	71	71	76	81	82	75	8
601-700	66	66	71	79	74	69	69	71	6
700+	59	56	56	59	59	59	68	59	5
Not recorded	88	88	93	81	90	90	90	93	8
									Total: 419

Figure 3B: Overall average PE time by school size

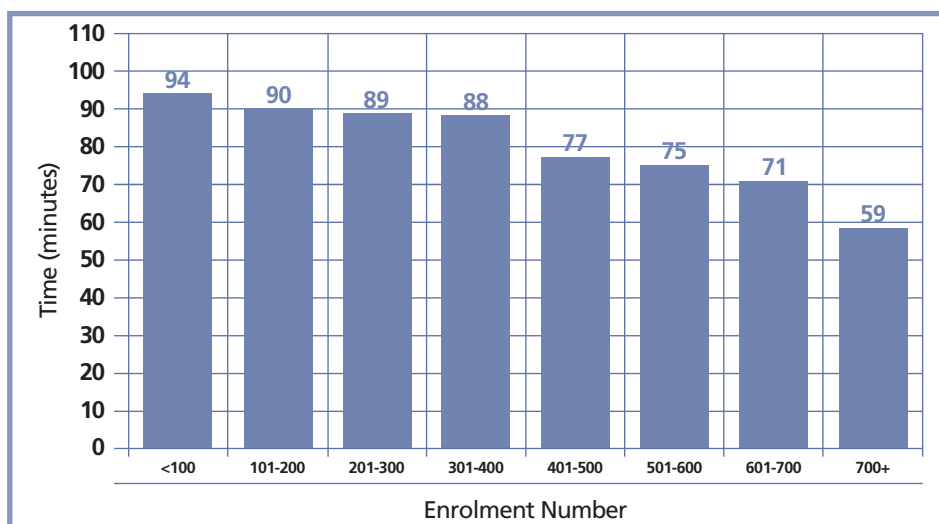
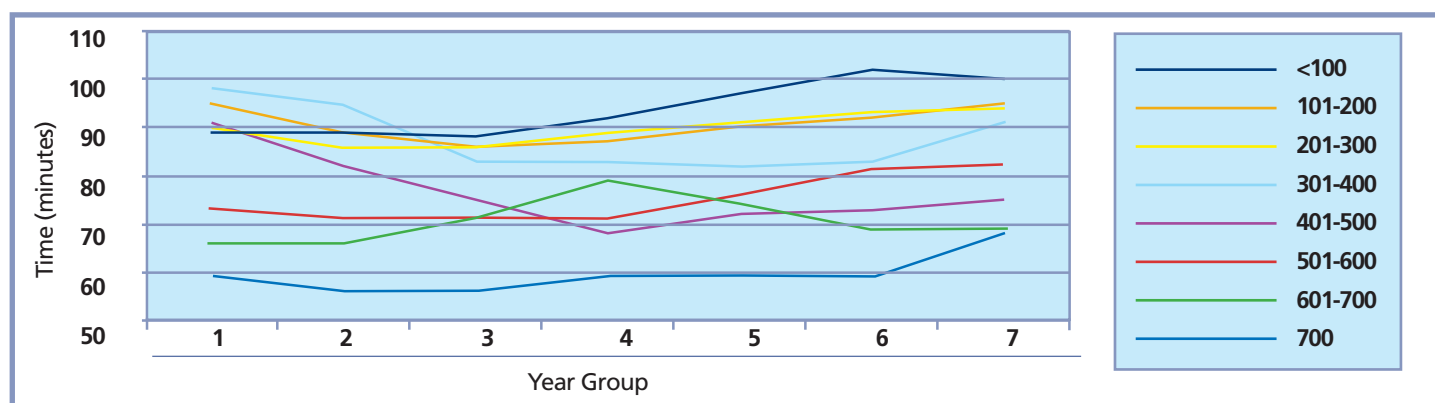


Figure 3C: Average PE time per year group by school size



4.4 LOCATION - EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARDS

Figures 4A, 4B and 4C show that:

- Schools in the WELB and SEELB allocated the most time to PE (91 minutes) and schools residing in the BELB allocated the least time to PE (84 minutes); and
- As noted in paragraph 4.1, generally the length of time decreased from Years 1-3 and then increased from Years 4-7, with the exception of schools in the NEELB where the length of time decreased from Years 1-4 and then increased from Years 5-7.

Figure 4A: Average PE time by ELB

ELB	Year Group							Overall Average	Number of Respondents
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
BELB	90	84	78	81	82	88	92	84	30
NEELB	95	90	84	82	88	93	95	90	107
SEELB	94	88	86	89	94	93	92	91	81
SELB	86	85	84	89	90	93	95	89	105
WELB	88	87	87	89	93	95	97	91	90
Not recorded	105	105	103	102	96	96	104	106	6
									Total: 419

Figure 4B: Overall average PE time by ELB

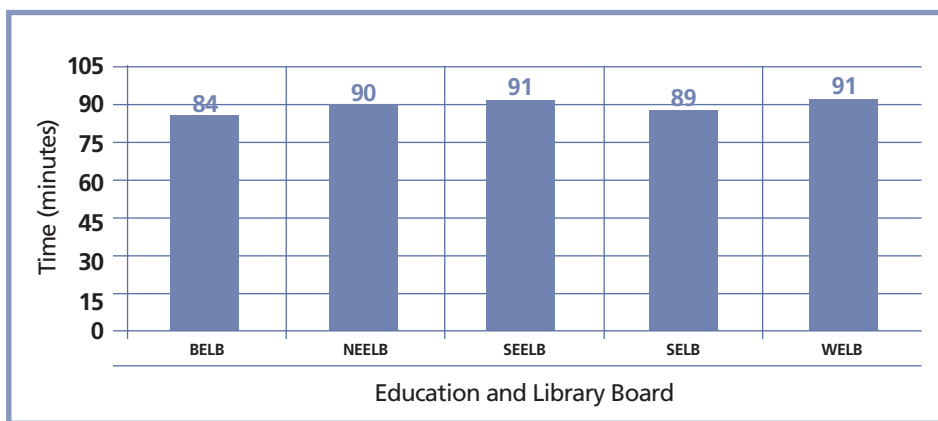
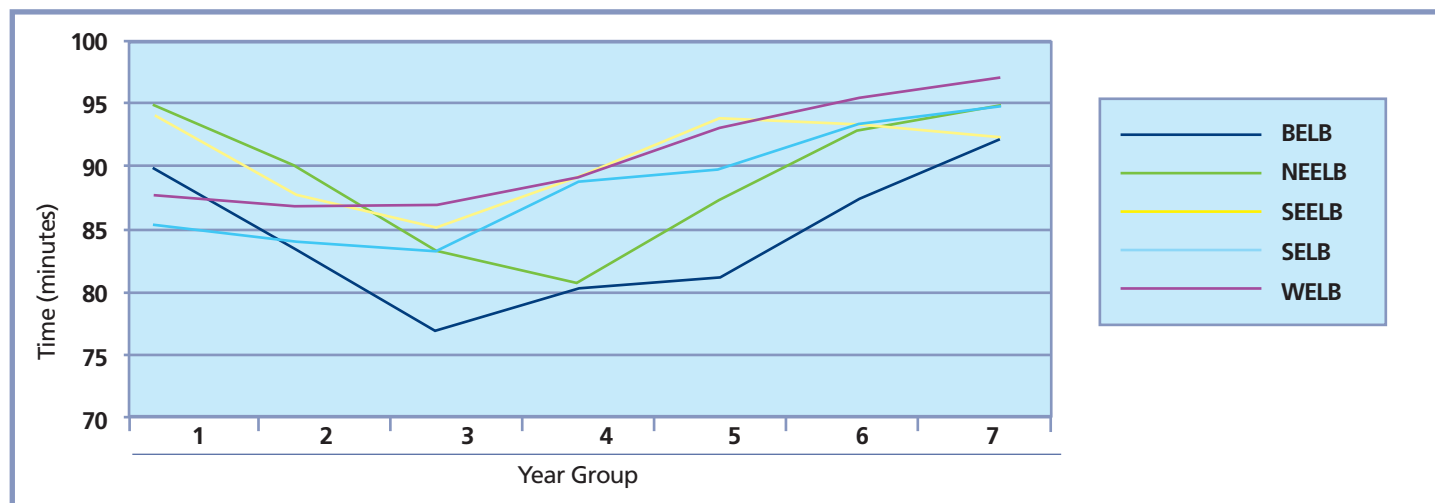


Figure 4C: Average PE time per year group by ELB



4.5 LOCATION - COUNCIL AREA

Figure 5A shows that:

- Schools residing in Magherafelt Council area achieved the most amount of PE time (111 minutes) and schools in Limavady Council area achieved the least (73 minutes).

Figure 5A: Average time spent on PE by council area

Council Area	Overall Average (mins)	Number of respondents
Magherafelt	111	17
Cookstown	105	13
Strabane	99	18
Dungannon	98	17
Castlereagh	95	7
Lisburn	95	18
Armagh	93	16
Moyle	93	14
Antrim	92	13
Derry	92	24
Fermanagh	91	23
North Down	90	12
Not Recorded	90	18
Down	89	22
Ards	88	17
Ballymoney	88	6
Omagh	87	14
Coleraine	86	11
Newtownabbey	85	13
Carrickfergus	84	8
Larne	84	7
Newry and Mourne	84	32
Craigavon	83	18
Belfast	82	23
Banbridge	81	12
Ballymena	80	18
Limavady	73	8
		Total: 419

4.6 LOCATION – URBAN/RURAL

- Figures 6A, 6B and 6C show that schools in rural locations delivered more PE (93 minutes) than urban schools (85 minutes).

Figure 6A: Average time spent per year group on PE by urban/rural location

Location	Year Group							Overall Average	Number of Respondents
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
Rural	91	88	87	91	95	98	99	93	245
Urban	90	85	81	81	84	85	89	85	152
Not recorded	92	92	88	84	86	88	90	90	22
									Total: 419

Figure 6B: Overall average PE time by rural/urban location

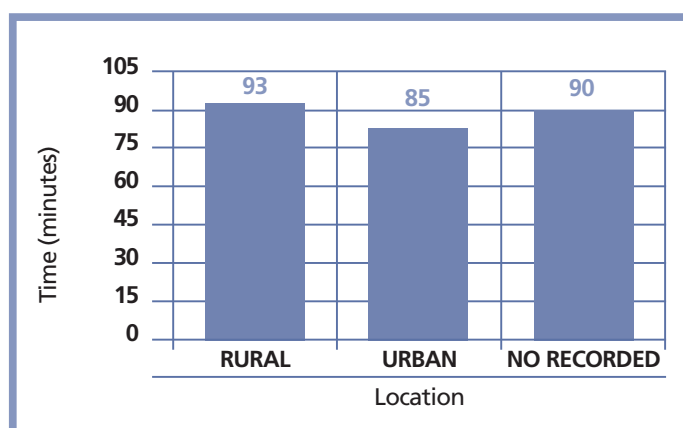
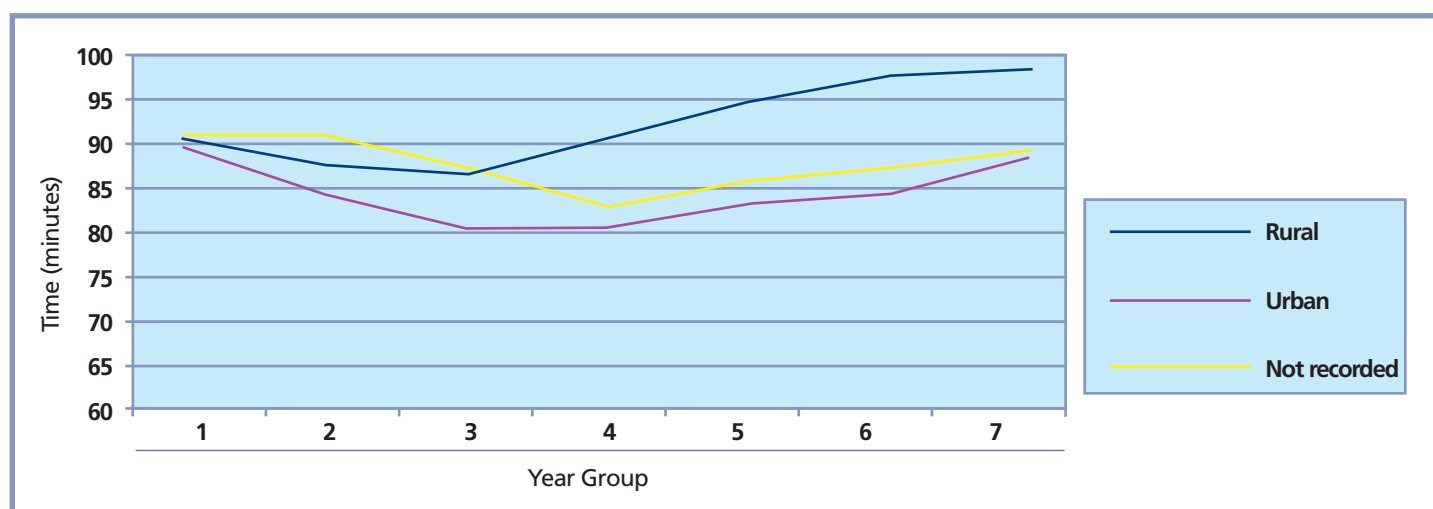


Figure 6C: Average time spent per year group on PE by rural/urban location



5. DISCUSSION

5.1 OVERALL TIME

5.1.1 The survey revealed that the overall average time allocated to curricular PE in primary schools in Northern Ireland was 90 minutes. This can be compared to the results of a recent survey in England¹⁰ which found that the average curricular time for PE in primary schools was 125 minutes. Comparisons may also be made with an estimated global average of 100 minutes and a European average of 109 minutes¹¹.

5.1.2 Numerous studies have confirmed a global decline and/or marginalisation of PE in schools in many countries of the world with notable deficiencies in curriculum time allocation¹². A European average of 121 minutes in primary schools was reported in 2000 thus indicating a reduction in curriculum time allocation in the period 2000-07¹³.

5.1.3 The global decline in curriculum time allocation can be attributed to a number of factors, including:

- Low subject status;
- Lack of support from head teachers and senior management;
- Insufficient teacher training at the various stages of professional development;
- Low teacher confidence and competence;
- Competition with other subjects;
- Lack of facilities and equipment;
- Availability of facilities and equipment; and
- Adverse weather conditions.

5.1.4 Children and young people in Northern Ireland are already disadvantaged when compared to their European counterparts as they are offered less time to develop their physical literacy skills through PE.

5.1.5 This is of particular concern as the health and well-being of children and young people in Northern Ireland continues to be threatened due to rising childhood obesity rates¹⁴ which are associated with physical inactivity.

5.2 OVERALL PERCENTAGE

5.2.1 Only 17% of primary schools that participated in the survey reported achieving the recommended 2 hours of PE. If the 17% rate is applied to all primary schools in Northern Ireland, this suggests that 28,018 pupils received the recommended 2 hours of PE a week and 136,793 pupils did not¹⁵.

5.2.2 This overall percentage can be compared to the finding¹⁶ that 90% of primary aged children in England participate in at least 120 minutes of curricular PE. This significantly higher percentage can be attributed to the successful implementation of the PE and Sport Strategy for Young People (PESSYP) which is a Government funded initiative which aims to get more young people taking part in high quality PE and sport.

5.2.3 Central government, through the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), is working to deliver Public Service Agreement (PSA) 22, indicator five, which is to:

“Deliver a successful Olympic Games and Paralympic Games with a

sustainable legacy and get more children and young people taking part in high quality PE – through the creation of a world-class system for PE and sport.”

5.2.4 The PESSYP sets out how this measure will be achieved through the delivery of the 5 hour offer:

5 HOUR OFFER

2 HOURS CURRICULAR PE	1 HOUR SPORT ORGANISED BY SCHOOLS	2 HOURS MIXTURE OF SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY/ CLUB ORGANISED SPORT
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5.2.5 Effective implementation of this strategy has resulted in significant developments, including an increase in the percentage of children participating in at least 2 hours of high quality PE and sport each week (rising from 25% in 2002¹⁷ to 90% in 2009).

5.2.6 Successful delivery of PESSYP and the 5-hour offer has undoubtedly been facilitated by extensive government support and resourcing in England. An estimated government investment of £780 million is expected to deliver the 5-hour offer from 2008-11 in England¹⁸.

5.2.7 By comparison, the Northern Ireland Executive has estimated that £25.1 million is needed to deliver the 4-hour offer from 2008-11 in Northern Ireland¹⁹. An additional £36.8 million will be required during the next Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) period between 2011-14.

¹⁰PE and Sport Survey 2008-09, Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), 2009, page 14.

¹¹Hardman, K, Situation and sustainability of PE in schools: a global perspective, University of Worcester, UK, 2008, page 7.

¹²Harman K and Marshall J, Update on the state and status of PE worldwide, University of Worcester, 2005, page 7.

¹³Harman K and Marshall J, Update on the state and status of PE worldwide, University of Worcester, 2005, page 7.

¹⁴Inquiry into obesity, Northern Ireland Assembly, 2009.

¹⁵A total of 164,811 pupils were enrolled in all primary schools for academic year 2008-09, DENI Statistics and Research Branch, October 2008.

¹⁶PE and Sport Survey 2008-9, Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), 2009, page 15.

¹⁷The PE and Sport Strategy for Young People, A Guide to delivering the 5-hour offer, Youth Sport Trust (YST), 2009.

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

¹⁹The Draft Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2007-17, Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), page 44.

5.3 OVERALL RANGE

5.3 The lowest overall school average was 34 minutes and the highest overall school average was 240 minutes. This finding raises equality of opportunity issues as it indicates that children are offered significantly more or less PE, depending on which school they attend.

5.3.1 Article 7 of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 requires “each pupil at the school to be taught the minimum content within that area of learning” and that teaching is “consistent with the minimum content”. These disparities in the range of curricular time devoted to PE between schools, raises the question whether those schools with very low average times are able to deliver the statutory minimum entitlements²⁰ for PE to every pupil in less than the recommended 2 hours.

5.3.2 A school’s ability and duty²¹ to effectively promote and assess arrangements for the promotion of health and well-being of pupils may also be compromised in those schools where insufficient curricular time is allocated to PE.

5.4 OVERALL TREND

5.4.1 The length of time allocated to curricular PE decreased from Years 1-3 and then increased from Years 4-7 in primary schools in Northern Ireland, whereas in England the amount of curricular PE time steadily increased from Years 1-6²². The decline in the time allocated to PE during Years 2 and 3 suggests that existing and future support and resources should initially be targeted at these particular year groups.

5.5 SCHOOL SIZE AND LOCATION

5.5.1 The research highlighted a negative correlation between enrolment figure and time, as the amount of time allocated to PE steadily decreased as enrolment figures increased. Schools with enrolment figures of less than 100 spent the most time on PE (94 minutes), whereas those with enrolment figures greater than 700 spent the least amount of time (59 minutes). 45% of the schools that delivered the 2 hour target had enrolment figures of less than 100 pupils.

5.5.2 The research also reported that schools in rural locations delivered more PE (93 minutes) than urban schools (85 minutes), and that 68% of the schools that delivered the 2 hour target were in a rural location.

5.5.3 These findings should be read in conjunction with the Bain Report²³, which recommended that the minimum (not optimal) enrolments for primary schools should be 140 pupils in urban areas, and 105 pupils in rural areas. Furthermore, when the enrolment in an existing school falls below the relevant level, the future of the school should be reviewed.

5.5.4 Full implementation of the Bain recommendations could result in the closure of a number of primary schools that are currently achieving the 2 hour target.

²⁰The Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order (Northern Ireland) 2007

²¹The Education (School Development Plans) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.

²²PE and Sport Survey 2008-09, Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), 2009, page 14.

²³Professor Bain G, Report of the Independent Strategic Review of Education, 2006.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1** It is widely accepted that developing physical literacy skills through PE, will make a positive contribution to the development of children and the overall enhancement of their quality of life²⁴.
- 6.2** Allocating sufficient curricular time for PE is vital to the provision of a quality PE experience for all children. This survey has highlighted a significant shortfall in the provision of the recommended 2 hours of PE in primary schools in Northern Ireland.
- 6.3** The Northern Ireland Primary 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)²⁵.
- 6.4** However, despite official commitment to entitlement²⁶ to a broad and balanced curriculum, the research indicates that equal access to and provision of PE is not necessarily assured for all children 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.
- 6.5** A similar finding of insufficient curricular time and inconsistent provision between schools for Literacy and Numeracy would be considered unacceptable and would warrant immediate intervention. It is asserted that deficits and variances in the delivery of PE, and hence opportunities for developing physical literacy, should be viewed as equally unacceptable and concerning.
- 6.6** All schools should be encouraged, enabled and appropriately resourced to deliver the recommended 2 hours of quality PE every week.
- 6.7** The achievement of this aspiration will necessitate an immediate and sustained application of political support that will ensure that this issue is at the forefront of the political agenda.
- 6.8** Inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations will then need to work together to ensure that all children in Northern Ireland have equal access to 2 hours of quality PE every week regardless of their age or the status, size or location of their school.
- 6.9** This goal is achievable through agreed strategic direction, appropriate funding and effective partnerships with shared responsibilities for all vested agencies involved in policies and their implementation.
- 6.10** Insufficient provision of PE will inevitably restrict children’s opportunities to improve 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.
- 6.11** Sport Matters articulates a series of commitments to increasing participation in lifelong physically active lifestyles. Sport Matters’ world view of “lifelong” is predicated on the Lifelong Involvement In Sport and Physical Activity (LISPA) framework for sports development, which in turn underscores the centrality of providing children and young people with high quality, early experiences of physical activity. Physical education is a cornerstone of these experiences.
- 6.12** This report highlights the scale of challenge faced by all of those stakeholders (public, private, community and voluntary) with a responsibility for ensuring that children are equipped with the necessary skills to be active, engaged and informed citizens. This report also informs the baseline position for Sport Matters and identifies the need for future sustained and increased investment in sport and physical activity for children and young people.

²⁴Hardman, K, Situation and sustainability of PE in schools: a global perspective, University of Worcester, UK, 2008, page 13.

²⁵The Northern Ireland Curriculum, Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), 2007, page 2.

²⁶The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 and the Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order (Northern Ireland) 2007.

APPENDIX 1

PRIMARY PE SURVEY – May 2009

AIM: To establish a baseline for the length of time that is devoted to PE within the primary sector.

REQUEST: Please record the average length of time devoted to the delivery of **curricular PE** every week for each year group (this does not include break/lunch-time initiatives, structured/un-structured play and extra-curricular activities).

Year Group	Average time of curricular PE per week	
	Hours	Minutes
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		

Please tick one or more (where applicable) of the following boxes:

Enrolment Number

- <100
- >101-200
- >201-300
- >301-400
- >401-500
- >501-600
- >601-700
- >700

Type of School

- Controlled
- Maintained
- Integrated
- Special
- Other

ELB

- SEELB
- NEELB
- BELB
- WELB
- SELB

Location

- Rural
- Urban

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