

A photograph of children playing on a green field, possibly a school playground. The image is monochromatic, showing a green tint. In the foreground, a child is running towards the left. In the background, several other children are engaged in activities, some using hurdles and cones. The scene is bright and active.

SUMMARY REPORT

A Baseline Survey Of Timetabled PE In Primary Schools In Northern Ireland - 2009



The lead agency for the development of sport in Northern Ireland

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:

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

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 DCAL’s Statistics and Research Branch, devised a questionnaire 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.

2.2 In May 2009, all 873 primary schools listed by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI) were asked to complete the questionnaire. A total of 419 responses were returned – this represents a return rate of 48%. Data was then entered into a database for analysis.

¹ Sport Matters: Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009-19.

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.

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 TIME, TREND, PERCENTAGE AND RANGE

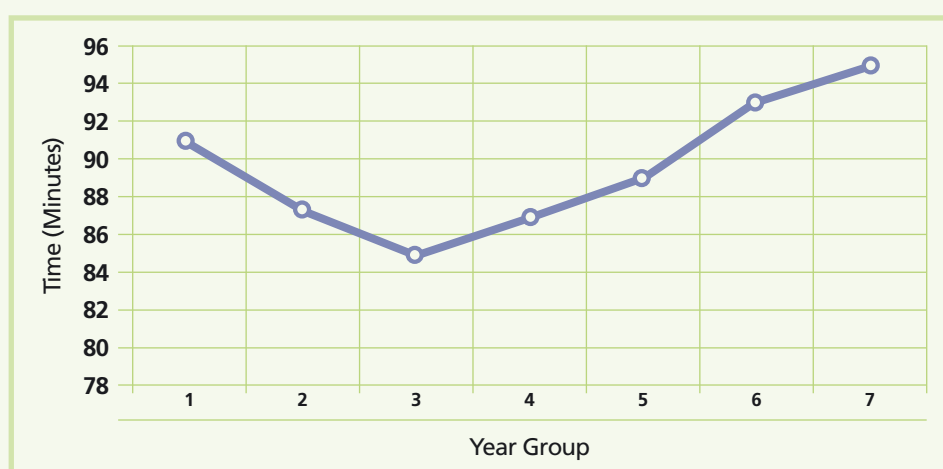
Figures 2 and 3 show that:

- The overall average time spent on curricular PE was 90 minutes⁷.
- Overall, the length of time decreased from Years 1-3 and then increased from Years 4-7.

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

AVERAGE TIME (MINUTES)	Year Group							OVERALL AVERAGE	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
	91	87	85	87	90	93	95		90
	Foundation Stage			Key Stage 1		Key Stage 2			
89		86		93					

Figure 3: Average PE time by Year Group



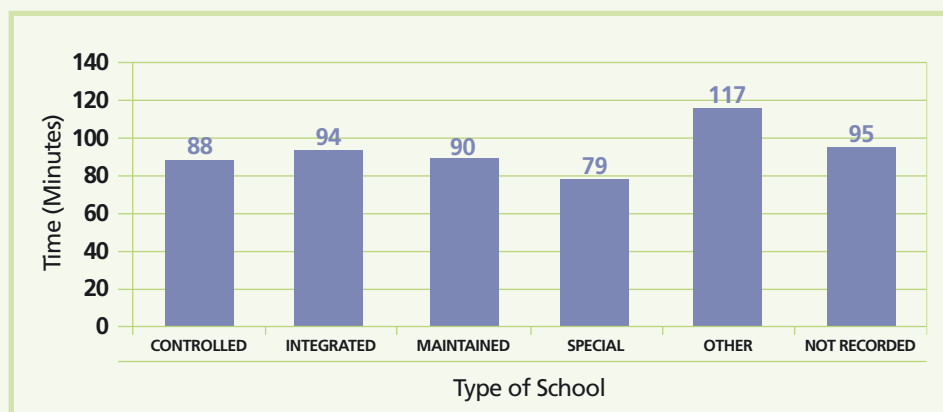
- 17%⁸ of the primary schools that took part in the survey delivered the recommended 2 hours of PE or more⁹.
- The lowest overall school average was 34 minutes and the highest overall school average was 240 minutes¹⁰.

3.2 SCHOOL STATUS

Figure 4 indicates 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).

Figure 4: Overall average PE time by School Status



⁷ The average curricular PE time in England is 125 minutes, PE and Sport Survey 2008-09, Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), 2009, page 14. An estimated global average of 100 minutes and European average of 109 minutes has been reported by Hardman k, Situation and sustainability of PE in schools, University of Worcester, UK, 2008, page 7.

⁸ 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 every week and 136,793 pupils did not, DENI's Statistics and Research Branch, October 2008.

⁹ 90% of primary-aged children in England participate in at least 120 minutes of curricular PE every week, PE and Sport Survey 2008-09, Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), 2009, page 14.

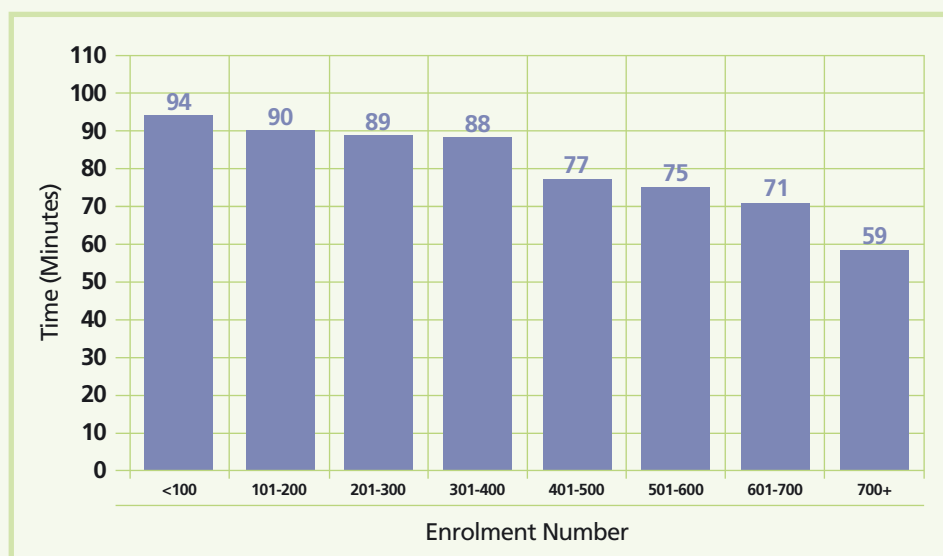
¹⁰ The range of curricular time raises equality of opportunity issues as it indicates that children are offered significantly more or less PE depending on which school they attend. Whether those schools with very low average times are able to deliver the statutory minimum entitlements for PE, as requested by the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 and the Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order (Northern Ireland) 2007, to every child in less than the recommended 2 hours should be questioned.

3.3 SCHOOL SIZE

Figure 5 demonstrates that:

- 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).
- 45% of the schools that delivered the 2 hour target had enrolment figures of less than 100 pupils¹¹.

Figure 5: Overall average PE time by School Size

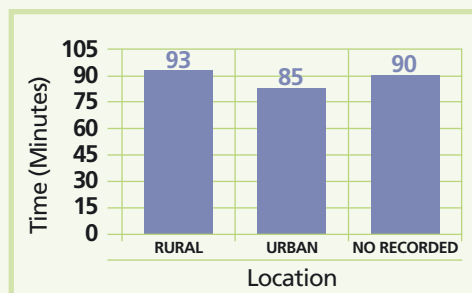


3.4 SCHOOL LOCATION

3.4.1 URBAN/RURAL

- Figure 6 highlights that 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.

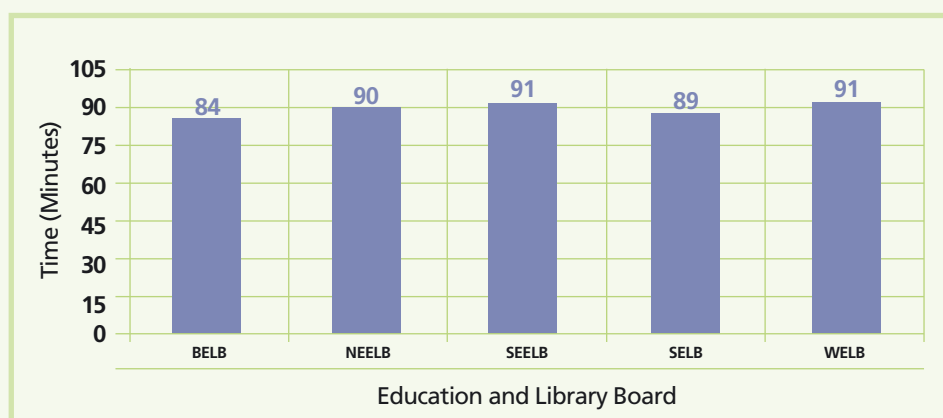
Figure 6: Overall average PE time by rural/urban location



3.4.2 EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD

- Figure 7 shows that 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).

Figure 7: Overall average PE time by ELB



3.4.3 COUNCIL AREA

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

¹¹ These findings should be read in conjunction with the Bain Report of the Independent Strategic Review of Education (2006), which recommended that the minimum 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.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1** 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 life¹².
- 4.2** 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.
- 4.3** 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)¹³.
- 4.4** However, despite statutory entitlement¹⁴ 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.
- 4.5** 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.
- 4.6** All schools should be encouraged, enabled and appropriately resourced to deliver the recommended 2 hours of quality PE every week.
- 4.7** 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.
- 4.8** 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.
- 4.9** This goal is achievable through agreed strategic direction, appropriate funding¹⁵ and effective partnerships with shared responsibilities for all vested agencies involved in policies and their implementation.
- 4.10** 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 lifestyles¹⁶.
- 4.11** 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.
- 4.12** 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.

¹² Hardman, K, Situation and sustainability of PE in schools: a global perspective, University of Worcester, UK, 2008, page 13.

¹³ The Northern Ireland Curriculum, Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), 2007, page 2.

¹⁴ The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 and the Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order (Northern Ireland) 2007.

¹⁵ An estimated government investment of £780 million is expected to deliver the 5-hour offer, as detailed in the PE and Sport Strategy for Young People (PESSYP), from 2008-11 in England. 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 Ireland. An additional £36.8 million will be required during the next Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) period between 2011-14.

¹⁶ This is of particular concern as the health and well-being of children in Northern Ireland continues to be threatened due to rising childhood obesity rates which are associated with physical activity, (Inquiry into Obesity, Northern Ireland Assembly, 2009).

**The full report can be
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Sport Northern Ireland
House of Sport
2a Upper Malone Road
Belfast BT9 5LA

T: (028) 9038 1222
E: info@sportni.net
W: www.sportni.net



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