

Top tips for embedding physical activity in your school

Physical activity has a positive impact on pupils' physical and mental health, from increasing concentration to improving self-esteem. Children who do regular physical activity are also more likely to become physically active adults.¹

Yet three in four children are doing less than 30 minutes of physical activity each day. It is recommended that children do at least 60 minutes each day, half of which should be in school.²

A whole-school approach is one of the most effective ways of increasing physical activity in young people.¹ Embedding activity throughout the school day will encourage pupils to develop active habits that will improve their physical and emotional health and wellbeing.

Find out more

To find out more, including how other headteachers have successfully embedded physical activity in their schools, see '[What works in schools and colleges to increase physical activity](#)' and our [Change4Life school case studies](#).

1

Involve families and the whole school community

Think about the places in your school that families visit, such as the reception area or playground, and use these areas to display messages and activity ideas.

Assemblies, drop off and pick up times are also great opportunities to engage families. You could encourage families to join in and play with equipment, like hoops or skipping ropes. Take a look at our [Active school day ideas](#) for inspiration and ideas and encourage families to search 'Change4Life' so they can continue the fun at home.

2

Make learning active

Physical activity can improve concentration and learning, making exercise a cost-effective way of improving academic achievement.³ Moreover, physical activity is most effective when embedded across the curriculum.¹

You could encourage teachers to get pupils moving before and during learning. Inspire them to try our [Active role play lesson starters](#) or organise termly ideas to get pupils moving more in class, for example, marching on the spot during registration.

3

Empower pupils

Consider encouraging older pupils or school councillors to take the lead. They could plan and implement activities to get the rest of the school community active, such as organising playground games. Take a look at our [Play Leaders resources](#) or [Active school day ideas](#).

To further empower pupils, you could task them with motivating their peers by thinking up ways to reward progress. Pupils could even write motivational articles for the school website or newsletter.



¹What works in schools and colleges to increase physical activity? (2019)

²Sport England, Active lives children and young people survey, attitudes towards sports and physical activity (academic year 2017/18)

³Hillman et al (2009), Neuroscience 159, 1044-1054

4

Promote physical activity throughout the school day

Physical activity shouldn't be restricted to PE. You could use lessons, lining up time, assembly, after school and breakfast clubs as opportunities to move. Our activities can be adapted to any time of day when pupils might be sedentary or less active.

Organise the playground and indoor areas with zones that encourage pupils to be active, for example, a ball games area.

5

Offer choice and variety

Offering a variety of physical activity opportunities for children to take part in can increase participation. In addition, a focus on games and fun, as well as the more traditional sports or competitive activities, can help to encourage participation, particularly among inactive pupils.

6

Encourage staff development

Evidence shows that ensuring staff have the confidence and competence to offer high quality experiences of both physical education and physical activity across the school day can contribute towards higher activity levels in children .

7

Encourage active travel

Travel plans which include a range of active travel options increase physical activity levels among children and young people. You could encourage your pupils to walk, cycle or scoot to school.

8

Celebrate and evaluate success

It's a good idea to evaluate the effectiveness of physical activity interventions using baseline information, interim outputs or milestones and outcomes.

Celebrating success is also important. You could involve your staff, parents and pupils in setting realistic goals that focus on actions (rather than outcomes). For example, completing a 10 Minute Shake Up every day or doing daily laps of the playground.

Share the goals with the whole school community, perhaps on the school website or in the school newsletter, and take time to celebrate successes, for example, by awarding certificates.

It's also helpful to remember that children should be feeling warm and/or out of breath when working at the required intensity.

