

Active after-school clubs are important for improving children's physical activity

Professor Russell Jago, Dr Simon Sebire and Dr Emma Solomon-Moore, University of Bristol

About the research

The Government's current [childhood obesity strategy](#) outlines a key role for school-based physical activity in the prevention of obesity in children. Large numbers of primary school children do not meet the Chief Medical Officer's recommendation of an hour per day of moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical activity (activities that make children slightly out of breath and sweaty).

Active children are more likely to become active adults, which is important because adult physical activity is associated with a reduced risk of a number of diseases such as heart disease. Childhood is a key period for the development of the skills and confidence needed to be active across the life-span. Active children also have better physical and mental health.

This briefing highlights the finding that after-school is a key time for children to be physically active. It also identifies training for existing school staff as a potentially cost-effective way of increasing physical activity provision.

“Training Teaching Assistants can have a massive impact on their confidence and ability to deliver physical activity in and out of the curriculum.”

Richard Clark, Headteacher of Stoke Lodge Primary School and Executive Headteacher of The Olympus Academy Trust

Policy implications

- Children, parents and schools are supportive of after-school physical activity programmes. A greater number of high quality and affordable programmes should be made available.
- Current after-school physical activity provision in primary schools is dominated by team sports, which many children do not enjoy. Schools need to diversify this offer and provide a broader range of active opportunities that aid children's physical and emotional development.
- Enjoyment of physical activity is critical for participation. Schools need to ensure that after-school provision is delivered in a child-friendly and supportive manner with a focus on fun and inclusiveness.
- School staff welcome opportunities to deliver after-school programmes but they often need training and support to do so. Training school staff is a viable and potentially cost-effective means of running after-school programmes in a sustainable way.

Contact the researchers

Professor Russ Jago, Centre for Exercise, Nutrition and Health Sciences, School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol:
russ.jago@bristol.ac.uk

Key findings

- A systematic review showed that physical activity programmes delivered outside of school hours play an important role in the physical activity of children and young people.
- In more than 40% of primary schools after-school clubs are run by external providers.
- Enjoyment and empowerment are important foundations of children's physical activity. After-school programmes need to build skills and confidence by creating supportive and enjoyable environments.

University of Bristol researchers worked in partnership with Bristol City Council to develop a physical activity programme called Action 3:30 in which Teaching Assistants were trained to deliver after-school physical activity programmes for Year 4 and 5 pupils.

- Action 3:30 was well liked by children, parents and schools.
- Action 3:30 increased the physical activity patterns of children and particularly boys. More research is needed to develop provisions that are highly appealing to girls.
- Action 3:30 was not expensive, costing around £2 per child per session. This is less than many commercial providers.



Further information

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