Physical education and the state of play

Education evolves rapidly and at times we know that schools have to deal with a significant number of initiatives raining down on them. However, it has been refreshing to see that some initiatives are joined up, although it is sometimes difficult to see where.

Strategies for change

The Primary PE and Sport Premium was a strategy introduced with a vision that aimed for ‘All pupils leaving primary school to be physically literate and with the knowledge, skills and motivation necessary to equip them for a healthy lifestyle and lifelong participation in physical activity and sport.’ The single objective is at the time of writing this article: ‘To achieve self-sustaining improvement in the quality of PE and sport in primary schools’.

Sport England then published its strategy ‘Towards an Active Nation’ with a single aim, to get the nation active, starting with children as young as five. ‘Childhood Obesity: a plan for action’ includes a number of measures which aims to reduce England’s rate of childhood obesity within the next 10 years.

It’s important that all the above are not seen as separate strategies but are interlinked and that all agencies involved work collaboratively together to achieve the best possible outcomes.

What we must not lose sight of is that we have a statutory National Curriculum in state funded schools which includes physical education. The purpose and aims of the physical education curriculum include ensuring pupils are active and healthy in an environment that develops and nurtures emotional health and wellbeing.

Healthy body, healthy mind

We all know and recognise that a healthy body gives rise to a healthy mind; knowledge which is based on academic research; there is now a wealth of evidence proving the connectivity between activity, emotional wellbeing and improved academic achievement.

Since the National Curriculum of 2014, teachers are in control of the curriculum and this can be designed to meet the needs of pupils in their schools and within the context of local need.

Association for Physical Education illustrates this connection and asks the following questions:
What can you do to practically help children and young people in your schools to engage in physical activity, and ensure that they’re emotionally well so that they can achieve their potential?

1. It’s important that you ensure that your curriculum is fit for purpose because you are in control of how you design it. Involve pupils in order to find out what they like, what they want and what resources you need in order to deliver it.

2. You could create a pilot initiative to use with the most challenging class, providing additional physical activity before, during and after school.

3. Make active learning part of the whole school day with such activities as the ‘Daily Mile’ and/or undertaking short three minute exercise breaks in classroom lessons.

4. Undertake a check on pupil activity at break times and lunch times to find out if pupils are as active as they could be. Just 15 minutes activity over the lunch time period increases activity by 75 minutes a week.

5. In order to increase activity consult with the pupils and the workforce - this should also include a review of all physical education, school sport and physical activity.

6. Identify the areas for development and then ensure that the Primary PE and Sport Premium is spent on these areas. The premium can be used to fund resources, professional learning and additional staffing.

7. Embed any additionality by challenging staff to demonstrate how any activity within and outside the curriculum is extra to what has, or is being provided.

8. Finally check and challenge the sustainability and the impact of the Primary PE and Sport Premium on pupils’ health and wellbeing; it’s crucial to have a clear evidence base in order to demonstrate progress and success.

The Association for Physical Education (afPE) believes passionately in the value of high quality physical education, physical activity and participation in school sport. Each has an enormous impact on health and emotional wellbeing, as well as significantly impacting on whole school improvement. The quality of your physical education, physical activity and school sport should make a difference to the lives of young people in your school which is quite remarkable.

Find out more at afpe.org.uk

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