

Estyn response to Health, Social Care and Sport Committee into Inquiry into physical activity of children and young people

Context

‘Creating an Active Wales’ (Welsh Government 2009) emphasises the provision of high-quality physical education and the effective delivery of physical literacy as essential for young people to develop the skills and confidence for lifelong participation in sport and physical recreation. It identifies well-delivered and appropriately designed physical education programmes, complemented by a range of school-based activities, as critical factors in helping children and young people to live active lives and become active adults. This aim is reinforced in the Welsh Government’s ‘Programme for Government 2011-2016’ (Welsh Government 2011), which sets out its commitment to promote physical activity for people of all ages.

In our core inspections and related thematic surveys, Estyn gains useful evidence about the physical activity levels of children in Wales as well as opportunities and differences in gender-based attitudes towards participation in physical activity. This evidence is acquired, for example from lesson observations particularly in physical education, consideration of the range and levels of participation in extra-curricular sporting and recreational activities as well as discussions with pupils and staff. In many school inspections (both primary and secondary), inspectors will observe physical education lessons or visit these lessons as part of a learning walk. Estyn also considers a broader range of evidence such as 5x60 records and the findings of the Sport Wales School Sport Survey. These provide helpful evidence about provision and pupils’ attitudes and levels of participation in sport and physical recreation.

Estyn has carried out three thematic surveys that relate directly to this inquiry into physical activity of children and young people:

Girls' participation in physical activity in schools July 2007

<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-reports/girls-participation-physical-activity-schools-july-2007>

Progress in implementing the PE and School Sport Action Plan - May 2008

<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-reports/progress-implementing-physical-education-and-school-sport-action-plan-may-2008>

Physical Education in secondary schools – February 2012

<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-reports/physical-education-secondary-schools-february-2012>

Evidence from inspection

Wellbeing

In coming to judgements about pupils' wellbeing, inspectors consider how well pupils understand how to make healthy choices relating to diet and physical activity. Inspectors consider how well pupils use this understanding in their own lives in school and respond positively to opportunities to undertake physical activity, for example during lessons, at break and lunchtimes and through after-school clubs and activities. The evidence inspectors consider to inform their inspection activity and judgements always includes pupils' responses to pre-inspection questionnaires and discussions with individuals and groups of pupils. It may well include observations of a sample of extra-curricular activities, records of pupils' participation rates in various activities compiled for example by a 5x60 officer and consideration of the findings of the School Sport Survey conducted by Sport Wales.

As part of inspections of the quality of care, support and guidance, inspectors will consider how successfully the school's provision helps pupils to understand the impact of lifestyle choices and behaviours on their present and future mental and physical health and wellbeing.

Estyn's Annual Report 2016/2017 reported on the cycle of inspections from 2010-2017 and included the following statements about pupils' wellbeing.

Primary wellbeing

- Most pupils understand the importance of healthy eating and regular exercise and make sensible choices about what they eat during snack time.
- The quality of care, support and guidance has been consistently good or better in over nine-in-ten schools across the inspection cycle. These schools provide purposeful opportunities to promote healthy living, for example by encouraging pupils to run the daily mile and take part in a variety of extra-curricular activities.

Secondary wellbeing

- Pupils' wellbeing has been a strong feature in secondary schools over the cycle of inspection (2010-2017). Wellbeing is good or better in almost three-quarters of schools.
- In schools that provide excellent care, support and guidance, there is an engaging personal and social education programme that prepares pupils well for the challenges and choices in their lives and helps them to understand the importance of physical and mental health.

Committee Questions

What do we know about physical activity levels in children in Wales?

In all core inspections, Estyn surveys a sample of pupils about a broad range of aspects of the school's work. These surveys include specific questions about the extent to which the school teaches pupils to be healthy and the opportunities for pupils to get regular exercise. The charts and comments below summarise the responses from more than 50,000 secondary pupils and around 96,000 primary school pupils.

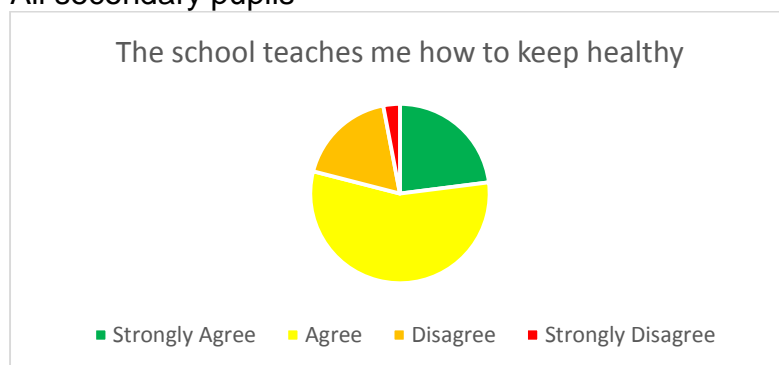
The survey contains a series of statements (*in italics below*) that pupils respond to. In primary schools, pupils from Year 3 to Year 6 complete the survey, responding to statements with either 'agree' or 'disagree'. In secondary schools, samples of pupils from all year groups complete the survey. They respond to the statement using a four point scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'.

The school teaches me how to be healthy

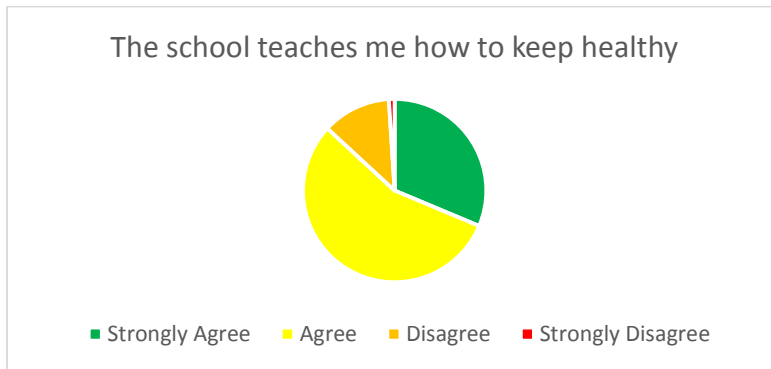
Around 80% of secondary pupils say that the school teaches them to be healthy with around a quarter of pupils strongly agreeing with this statement. 55% of key stage 3 pupils agree and 31% strongly agree with this statement, slightly higher than at key stage 4 where 56% agree and 16% strongly agree.

In primary schools, 96% of pupils say that the school teaches them to be healthy. This is a particularly high proportion of pupils.

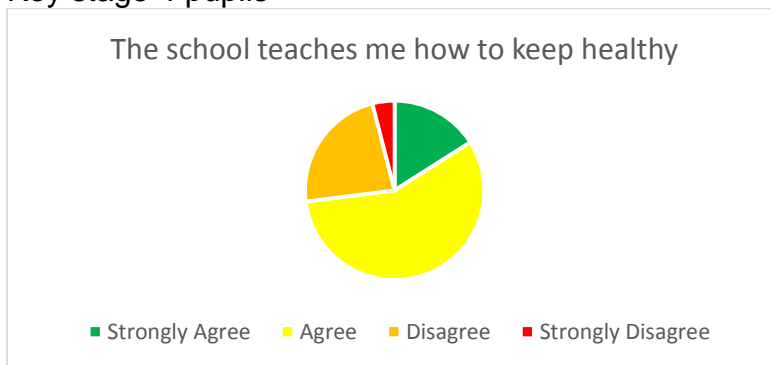
All secondary pupils



Key stage 3 pupils



Key stage 4 pupils

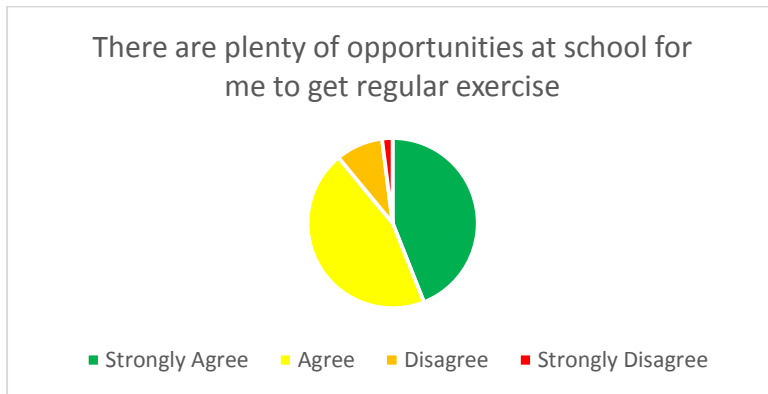


There are plenty of opportunities at school for me to get regular exercise.

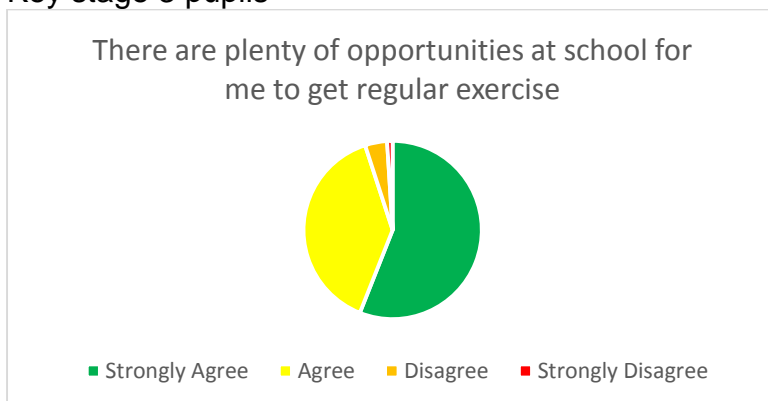
Around 90% of secondary pupils believe that there are plenty of opportunities for them to get regular exercise with 44% agreeing strongly with this statement. 39% of key stage 3 pupils agree and 55% strongly agree, slightly higher than at key stage 4 where 51% agree and 35% strongly agree. This may be due to the fact that in many schools at key stage 4 there is less time allocated to core physical education than at key stage 3.

In primary schools, 95% pupils say that there are plenty of opportunities at school for them to get regular exercise. This is a particularly high proportion of pupils.

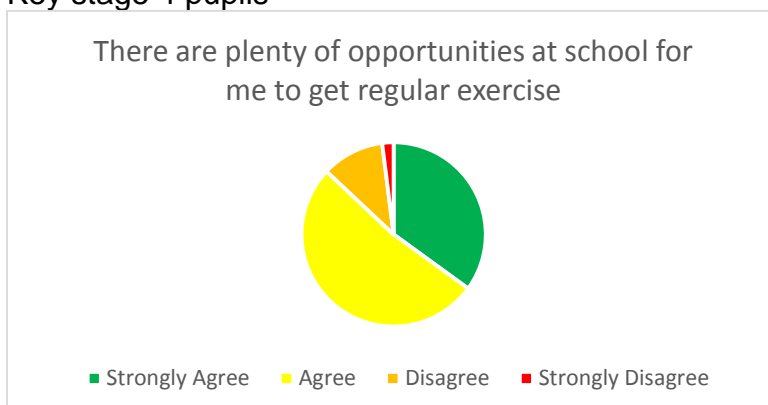
All secondary pupils



Key stage 3 pupils



Key stage 4 pupils



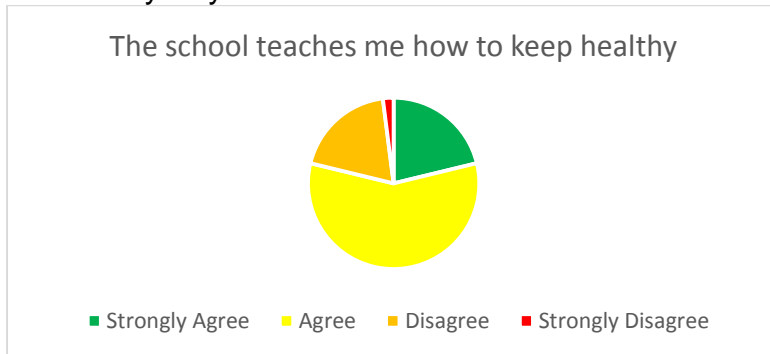
Differences in gender-based attitudes towards, and opportunities for, participation in physical activity in Wales.

The school teaches me how to be healthy

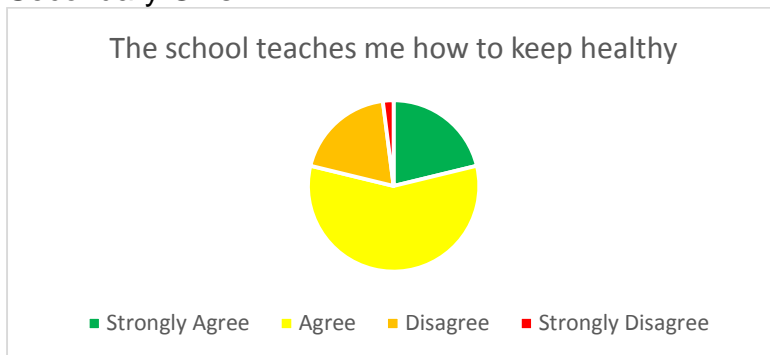
There is little difference between the proportions of girls and boys in secondary schools who agree and strongly agree with this statement. However, 25% of boys compared with 21% of girls strongly agree with the statement.

96% of boys and 97% of girls in primary schools agree that the school teaches them to be healthy.

Secondary Boys



Secondary Girls

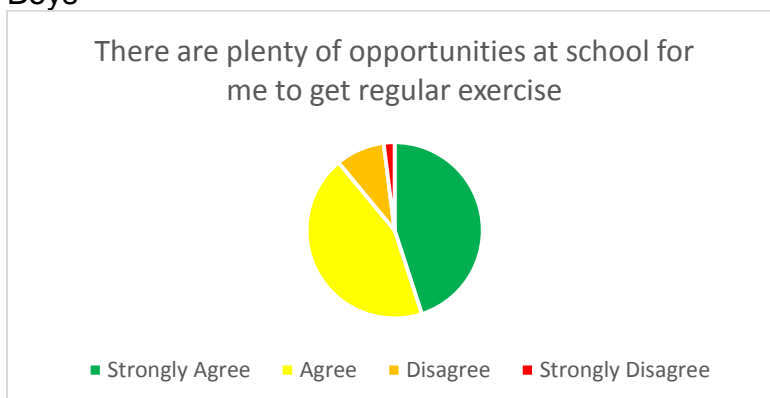


There are plenty of opportunities at school for me to get regular exercise.

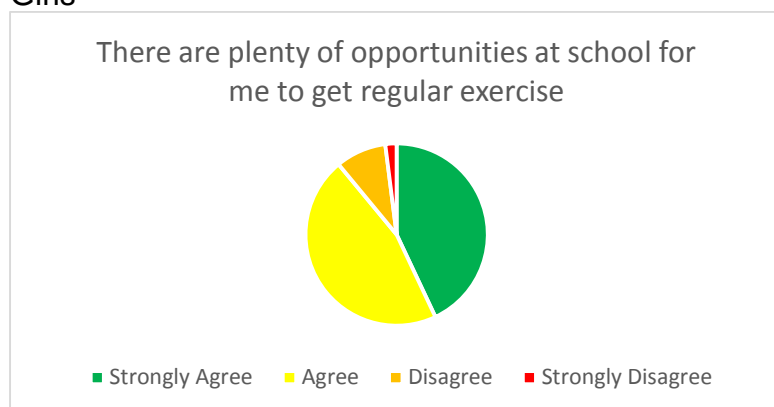
There is little difference between the proportions of girls and boys in secondary schools who agree and strongly agree with the statement at 89%. However, 45% of boys compared with 43% of girls strongly agree with the statement.

In primary schools, 95% of boys and 96% of girls agree that there are plenty of opportunities for them to get regular exercise.

Boys



Girls



The Estyn report on girls' participation in physical activity in schools (see below) noted that there are many factors that influence the take up of physical activities by girls in school. The historical development of sports, peer pressure, parental attitudes and the coverage of women's sport in the media all have an effect. The report stated that many physical education teachers offer a predominantly traditional team games programme and that many girls would prefer greater variety including more creative and fitness activities. As a result, in some schools, there are notable numbers of girls who find excuses to avoid participating in physical education, especially in key stage 4.

The report recommended that schools should acknowledge the importance of physical activity for all by raising the profile of sport and physical activity in school and show equal respect for girls' and boys' achievements and participation in physical education and sport. It also recommended that schools should consult with girls to offer the activities within the physical education curriculum that girls want to do and make a wider range of activities available, other than traditional team games, including at lunch times and after school.

Many schools have made notable progress in addressing these issues. The Estyn report on physical education in secondary schools (see below) stated that generally, schools are increasing the emphasis on creative and adventurous activities and health, fitness and wellbeing activities at key stage 3 and this has helped to engage girls more successfully. However, many of the underlying issues remain and continue to present a challenge to increasing levels of physical activity among this group of pupils.

Barriers to increasing the levels of physical activity among children in Wales, and examples of good practice in achieving increases in physical activity, and in engagement with hard to reach groups, within Wales, the UK and internationally.

There are potential barriers to increasing the levels of physical activity among children in Wales. These include reductions in the time allocated to physical education in both primary and secondary schools. At key stage 4, very few schools provide two hours of physical education as part of pupils' core provision and entitlement. The Estyn report on physical education in secondary schools (see below) stated that in almost all schools visited, key stage 4 pupils have just one hour of core physical education each week. This restricts opportunities for these pupils to become informed and competent participants in physical activity.

Schools have an important role to play in developing pupils' essential fundamental physical skills and competencies as well as developing a love for activity, fun, and competition that will support them to be active participants in sport and recreation.

In a minority of physical education lessons, there is often not enough emphasis on ensuring pupils are physically active for sustained periods, which is arguably a primary purpose of the subject. This is often because there is a greater focus on developing pupils' communication and leadership skills as well as their ability to analyse performance. Of course, these are important skills and good practitioners build these aspects seamlessly into their lessons without reducing the emphasis on developing pupils' physical competencies. However, too often teachers do not achieve a suitable balance and a lot of time is lost in tasks that are not suitably challenging or beneficial. The Estyn report on physical education in secondary schools (see below) stated that in a few lessons, pupils are not active enough and there is a lack of intensity in their work, which leads to a loss of interest.

Physical education lessons are complemented by the school's extra-curricular programme. Participation in such activities can help pupils experience at least two hours of physical activity and contribute to the more aspirational involvement in five sessions of 60 minutes each week. The Estyn report on physical education in secondary schools (see below) stated that most schools promote healthy lifestyles well. The 5x60 initiative has been successful in complementing the more traditional, largely team-based extra-curricular programmes most schools offered previously. The report indicated that activities such as aerobics, street dance, pilates, zumba and boxercise have had a positive impact on the participation levels of girls.

In many schools, these opportunities are enhanced by close links with local sports clubs and leisure centres. The Estyn report said that the 5x60 initiative has contributed well to improving and extending links with local sports clubs and organisations. The success of a particular activity has occasionally led to the establishment of a new community club, for example a tennis, street-dancing or girls' football club, often based at and making use of school facilities. However, too often there has not been a close enough link with local clubs and organisations, which could offer enthusiastic pupils a chance to develop their interests after and beyond school.

Despite these initiatives, there is a danger that those pupils who most need to attend such clubs are less likely to do so. This is perhaps because they have not developed the confidence and interest to get involved in exercise, sports and activities out of school. In

the majority of schools, the time available at lunchtime often restricts the range of clubs/activities offered to pupils. Similarly, in many rural communities transport requirements limit pupil participation in after-school activities.

A further potential barrier is that of teacher expertise. The Physical Education and School Sport (PESS) initiative was successful in improving the quality of teaching in primary schools and the consequently higher standards that pupils in these schools are achieving. Estyn's report on the progress in implementing the PE and School Sport Action Plan stated that large numbers of teachers have benefited from the extensive training programme for teachers, both through central and school-based in-service training organised by the Sports Council for Wales, in association with local authorities and initial teacher training institutions. Most larger primary schools make effective use of specialist teachers to deliver the PE programmes. Many other schools develop aspects of PE successfully through the use of outside providers such as Powys Dance group to deliver sessions to pupils during lessons and in after-school clubs. In very few primary schools, pupils lead physical activity sessions. For example, at one school the Bronze Ambassadors lead activity sessions successfully to develop pupils' physical skills and increase participation levels during the school day. These sessions include leading the 'hip hop' dance activity for foundation phase pupils. However, there remain issues over the competencies and experiences primary teachers acquire as part of their initial teacher training.

The role of schools, parents and peers in encouraging physical activity, and the role of Sport Wales, NHS Wales and Public Health Wales in improving levels of physical activity

There is no single solution to improving physical activity levels in children. It requires concerted joint action by a broad range of stakeholders including schools, local authorities, community sports clubs and associations, Sport Wales, NHS Wales and Public Health Wales. Parents arguably have the ultimate responsibility to encourage and support their children to be physically active. However, often the children who would benefit most from greater levels of physical activity come from families that are less able and perhaps less inclined to access the opportunities available to them.

Schools can make a notable contribution to improving pupils' physical activity levels. Many schools have suitable personal and social education programmes that help pupils understand how to make healthy choices relating to diet, physical activity and emotional wellbeing. In the best schools, senior leaders ensure that all pupils experience at least two hours of core physical education each week since they regard this as a basic entitlement for all pupils. These schools realise that pupils need to develop the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding that provide the necessary foundations for lifelong participation in physical activity. If children do not develop the appropriate skills at a young age, then many will struggle to enjoy physical activity and thus not continue to participate or engage in activities outside the curriculum lessons. This has massive long-term implications for their health and well-being.

The best schools have well-structured physical education programmes and extensive opportunities for pupils to participate in an ever increasing range of stimulating sporting and recreational extra-curricular clubs and activities. These schools consult pupils regularly to make sure that the physical education programme and extra-curricular opportunities meet their needs and interests and that lessons and activities engage them successfully. This approach has been underpinned by opportunities provided by the Sport Wales schemes such as Dragon Sport and Multiskills, and the 5 x 60 programme. The best schools establish effective links, for example with local sports clubs. These links can provide valuable opportunities for pupils to pursue their particular interests, develop their skills and to engage in more challenging, competitive activities. A few schools have an extended school day that allows more time and better opportunities for pupils to participate in a broad range of physical activities.

It is essential that all schools support pupils to improve their fitness levels by keeping them physically active throughout all physical education lessons and engaging them in regular, high intensity vigorous activity for sustained periods of time. Teachers should also raise their expectations of what more able pupils are capable of achieving and provide them with suitably challenging, competitive activities that lead to high standards of performance.

An increasing number of schools across the UK and internationally have introduced specific initiatives such as the daily mile. This provides children with the freedom to run in the fresh air with their friends. It is an inclusive rather than a competitive event. Many children will mix running, jogging and walking. However, it allows pupils of all abilities to set personal targets and goals that they can achieve. This can have significant benefits to pupils' fitness levels and personal self-esteem as well as helping to establish good habits and a commitment to being physically active. It can also benefit children's mental, social and emotional health.

The Young Ambassadors scheme is a particularly beneficial initiative in developing the leadership skills of these young people. Young ambassadors are making a strong contribution to promoting the positive values of sport and through being the youth voice of sport in their schools and the community. They can be effective role models and can help to increase participation opportunities and healthy lifestyles for other pupils. Similarly those young people who undertake a qualification in sports leadership benefit significantly from developing effective communication and organisational skills. These leaders support teachers of younger pupils and those in primary schools through leading basic physical activities during lessons or as part of the extra-curricular programme. Often sports leaders are particularly effective in engaging and inspiring younger pupils through their enthusiasm and sporting skills.

In order to achieve these ambitions it is essential that all teachers in primary schools are competent to deliver physical education effectively on completion of their initial teacher training. It is also beneficial for these staff to be supported, where appropriate, by well-qualified, specialist teachers who can work with schools to

ensure high-quality provision. The challenge to teach physical education to primary level children, who may have widely different levels of ability and enthusiasm, by teachers with relatively little training is significant.

Evidence from Estyn's thematic reports

Girls' participation in physical activity in schools - July 2007

<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-reports/girls-participation-physical-activity-schools-july-2007>

In 2007, Estyn published a thematic report entitled 'Girls' participation in physical activity in schools'. This report was produced in response to a request from the Welsh Government for information on how well secondary schools have used different programmes and initiatives to help to increase girls' participation in physical activity.

The report noted that there are many factors that influence the take up of physical activities by girls in school. The historical development of sports, peer pressure, parental attitudes and the coverage of women's sport in the media all have an effect. The school curriculum and facilities also have an important role. The report stated that many physical education teachers offer a predominantly traditional team games programme and that many girls would prefer greater variety including more creative and fitness activities. As a result, in some schools, there are notable numbers of girls who find excuses to avoid participating in physical education, especially in key stage 4.

The report stated that to attract girls to participate more, sports facilities must meet the expectations that girls might have in the 21st century. Modern, high-quality, well-appointed changing rooms, including clean private shower areas and toilet facilities, and bright, attractive, safe areas for activities are essential for full and successful participation by girls. Similarly, the requirement to wear unfashionable physical education kit is often a barrier to girls' participation. In creative and fitness activities, where the formal school dress code has been relaxed or changed, the freedom for girls to wear their own choice of clothes, while still complying with hygiene and safety requirements, has led to increased participation. Physical education and sport activities are more likely to be pursued by pupils of both sexes when senior managers give health and fitness activities high priority and secure reasonable allocations of lesson time.

The report included a wide range of relevant recommendations including that:

- **Senior managers in schools should:** acknowledge the importance of physical activity for all by raising the profile of sport and physical activity in school; show equal respect for girls' and boys' achievements and participation in physical education and sport; improve changing and shower facilities; and ensure that indoor facilities are available throughout the school year.
- **Physical education teachers should** consult with girls and make every effort to offer the activities within the physical education curriculum that girls want to do; make a wider range of activities available, other than traditional team games, including at lunch times and after school; and ensure girls are comfortable with the kit selected for physical education whilst giving due consideration to hygiene and health and safety issues.

Progress in implementing the PE and School Sport Action Plan - May 2008

<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-reports/progress-implementing-physical-education-and-school-sport-action-plan-may-2008>

In 2008, Estyn published a thematic report evaluating the progress that had been achieved in implementing the PE and School Sport Action Plan. The initiative was introduced in 2001 in response to the action plan from the PESS task force. The evaluation was undertaken in the context of the Welsh Government's vision for a healthier and better educated country, expressed in 'One Wales: A progressive agenda for the government of Wales' (2007). The PESS initiative had a number of strands that included raising standards in physical education in the curriculum; making sure that initial teacher education and training gives trainees the necessary confidence, knowledge, skills and understanding to teach physical education; and establishing accredited continuing professional development programmes in physical education for all teachers.

The report judged that standards in physical education have improved in almost all schools that have been involved with the initiative for some time. Standards are improving very quickly in the primary schools in the newer development centres. It stated that pupils are acquiring a much greater awareness of personal health and well-being and of the importance of regular physical activity. In these schools, pupils of all ages know about the physical, social and mental benefits of physical activity and can explain the importance and benefits of exercise to a healthy lifestyle.

The report stated that work on the key stage 2 and 3 transition has been one of the of the most successful strands of the PESS initiative. This work has had a considerable impact on the quality of teaching and learning across partnership schools. Large numbers of teachers have benefited from the extensive training programme for teachers, both through central and school-based in-service training organised by the Sports Council for Wales, in association with local authorities and initial teacher training institutions.

The most apparent long-term benefit and sustainable aspect of the initiative has been the improvement in the quality of teaching in primary schools and the consequently higher standards that pupils in these schools are achieving. In addition, the impact of the work of the specialist projects such as dance and gymnastics will be sustainable after the life of funding for PESS because there will be many trainers and mentors across Wales who can support schools, as and when required.

Physical Education in secondary schools – February 2012

<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-reports/physical-education-secondary-schools-february-2012>

In 2012, Estyn carried out a thematic report on 'Physical Education in secondary schools'. The report was undertaken in the context of the Welsh Government's vision for a physically active and sporting nation as outlined in its strategies 'Climbing Higher' and 'Creating an Active Wales'. These documents identified well-delivered and appropriately designed physical education programmes, complemented by a range of school-based activities, as critical factors in helping children and young people to live active lives and become active adults.

- The report stated that generally, schools are increasing the emphasis on creative and adventurous activities and health, fitness and wellbeing activities at key stage 3 and this has helped to engage girls more successfully. Most schools promote healthy lifestyles well. The 5x60 initiative has been successful in complementing the more traditional, largely team-based extra-curricular programmes most schools offered previously.
- Standards were good or better in around two-thirds of lessons observed for this survey and broadly similar at key stage 3 and key stage 4. In many lessons, pupils recall previous learning well and understand key concepts. They make good progress in developing and refining their subject-specific skills and in acquiring wider skills.
- At key stage 3, pupils make good progress in health, fitness and wellbeing activities. Many pupils have a sound appreciation of the short-term and long-term effects of exercise on the body. In a few cases, pupils display a well-developed understanding of the key principles that underpin health and fitness.
- In about a third of lessons observed, there are shortcomings in the standards pupils achieve. In particular, more able key stage 3 pupils do not make as much progress as might be expected. In key stages 3 and 4, the most common shortcomings in the standards that pupils attain are their:
 - poorly co-ordinated and controlled movements and actions;
 - difficulties in transferring skills successfully from practice to game situations; and
 - lack of confidence in developing ideas or solutions to problems.
- Teaching is good or better in about three-quarters of lessons observed. In many cases, teachers plan learning activities that keep pupils physically active and enable them to compete at an appropriate level; build on previous learning and help pupils move forward at the right pace; and develop pupils' understanding of key principles, terminology and technique.
- In many lessons, pupils are physically active although the degree of intensity varies according to the nature of the activity. However, in a few lessons, pupils are not active enough and there is a lack of intensity in their work, which leads to a loss of interest.

- Most schools offer pupils a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities. The 5x60 initiative has been successful in complementing the more traditional, largely team-based programmes most schools offered previously. New activities such as aerobics, street dance, pilates, zumba and boxercise have had a positive impact on the participation levels of girls. 5x60 initiative has also contributed well to improving and extending links with local sports clubs and organisations. The success of a particular activity has occasionally led to the establishment of a new community club, for example a tennis, street-dancing or girls' football club, often based at and making use of school facilities. However, too often there has not been a close enough link with local clubs and organisations, which could offer enthusiastic pupils a chance to develop their interests after and beyond school.
- In many schools, key stage 3 pupils receive two hours of physical education each week. This is generally the case in each year group although, in a few schools, Year 9 pupils have less than two hours a week. Most schools are increasing the emphasis on creative and health, fitness and wellbeing activities as well as adventurous activities. In many schools, modifications to the curriculum have helped engage girls more successfully. This has been achieved through greater emphasis on creative aspects and health, fitness and wellbeing activities that include activities such as aerobics, pilates and street dancing.
- At key stage 4, very few schools provide two hours of physical education as part of pupils' core provision and entitlement. In almost all schools visited, key stage 4 pupils have just one hour of core physical education each week. This restricts opportunities for these pupils to become informed and competent participants in physical activity.

The report recommended that to improve standards of physical education at key stage 3 and key stage 4:

Physical education departments should make sure that lessons provide suitable opportunities for pupils to keep physically active and engage in sustained physical activity;

Local authorities should use the 5x60 initiative to promote more effective links with local clubs and organisations to promote healthy lifestyles and lifelong participation in sport and physical recreation;