

Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

Inquiry into the physical activity of children and young people – discussions with pupils and staff of Bassaleg School, 7 December 2017

Discussions with school pupils

Group of young ambassadors

- The group was made up of young ambassadors¹.
- Part of the role of the ambassadors is to be a voice for pupils who don't like sport.
- The ambassadors have been working with Newport University on communication skills and team building to help them engage with other pupils, particularly those who are not interested in sport.
- The school has a lot of facilities but not all are suitable for pupil needs.
- Facilities and equipment are out of date.
- Need more indoor facilities.
- Football pitches are only used for matches.
- Transport is not available for after-school activities. Have to rely on parents or walk.
- In Year 11 pupils are able to choose the activities they want to participate in.
- Being given an option is good, particularly for those who don't want to take part in formal exercise.
- School has well rounded approach. Choice is very important.
- Equality of access has improved.
- This group of pupils only had 1 hour of PE a week, there are opportunities to do lunchtime and break time activities, and after school clubs.
- Summer holidays are an issue, if the pupils only do exercise whilst they're in school, they will go 6 weeks without doing any physical activity, rugby outside of school also comes to an end and the season begins again in September, however, cricket continues throughout the holidays.

¹ The Sport Wales Young Ambassador programme aims to empower and inspire young people to become leaders through sport, to help encourage their inactive peers to become hooked on sport.



- The pupils think that the school facilities need to be upgraded so that their school can facilitate tournaments. There are also no indoor netball facilities, the gyms aren't big enough, and when the weather is poor, the pupils have to compromise and would stray from the curriculum.
- The pupils that don't engage in physical activity outside of school, tend to be the same students that dislike PE lessons in school.
- The school has tried to cater the PE lessons to everyone, the pupils get to choose between 2 sports, one being competitive, and one being non-competitive.
- The school has 5 ambassadors, the ambassadors attended a training course at Newport University to learn confidence building skills, this enables them to engage with the other students.
- The ambassadors want more sport lessons in school.
- During exam season, their PE lessons are put at risk because the school uses the halls for the exams, and if the weather is bad, they have no facilities to continue with their lesson.
- There is a healthy eating group in the school.

Group of 11 – 12 year olds

- Teachers do make sport quite fun.
- What is provided is good but the equipment is quite old, particularly the gym equipment.
- Curriculum is set at the start of the year but they would like the opportunity to choose the sports they participate in.
- There is therefore a feeling of being forced to take part in something they don't like.
- Ability to choose was seen as very important.
- Opportunities to take part in particular sports is determined by ability, there is a top set and bottom set for PE.
- There is a feeling that some of the people in the top set are there because they play sports outside of school.
- People who are good at sport get picked and that's not fair on people who want an opportunity to improve.



- Girls and boys don't have equity of access. It was felt that the boys were disadvantaged as they can't do dance or play netball.
- In the winter, the boys still have to play outside while the girls are allowed indoors.
- Girls are allowed to wear leggings in the cold weather while the boys still have to wear shorts.
- On Dragons Challenge (physical ability test):
 - The children are broken into groups with people of similar physical abilities to each other.
 - The children would go to the 'forge' gym to complete obstacles.
 - The tests are based on accuracy, speed, balance and time.
 - They believe that this gives the children a learning curve.
 - Once the tests are complete, the girls are split into two groups, half will do dance, football or netball, and then swap, and the boys are split into two groups, half will do rugby, and the other half will do netball, and then they swap.
 - For the pupils that don't like these sports, there are additional choices like frisbee or long ball, and learning new sports that they'd never heard of.
 - There are after school clubs that the children are able to join that will help them improve during their PE classes.
- On physical activity:
 - Most of the children are within walking distance to the school and do so everyday.
 - The children want their PE lessons to be before lunch, after lunch, or at the end of the day, this means that they can prolong their lessons instead of wasting time getting changed.
 - Time commitments make some of the children dislike sport outside of school hours.
 - Some of the children are missing out on certain sports because of time clashes.
- On Primary school:
 - The facilities were a lot smaller.
 - No variety in sport.
 - No assessment on their ability, the children weren't learning how to improve their technique.
 - Equipment wasn't good enough.
- On healthy eating:



- Primary school lunch was a lot more monitored to what the children were eating.
- Bassaleg School has a lot more options, there are healthy options available, and they don't sell sugary drinks, instead there are water machines in the canteen.
- The children have their own swipe cards, with these, their parents can monitor what their child has eaten at school, however, these cards are easy to lose and other people use their cards.

Group of 12–13 year olds (male and female)

- What members of the group like: gymnastics – letting off steam; football (girls); football (outside school); football and body conditioning; trampoline/mountain biking; rugby; football; tennis; cricket; dance acrobatics; trampolining.
- What does the school do to help? There are a variety of activities – gives choice; after school clubs – more advanced for those who are keen, and they push you which is good. Different types of ball games. Rotation between sports. Having qualified PE teachers is good.
- More children and young people are active at Bassaleg School compared with primary school. Tuition is better at Bassaleg School.
- Helping inactive children and young people. Sport with technology e.g. Wii, Fitbit helps. Some children and young people need role models to encourage them. Give them a sport they like. 'Bounce' [trampolining] is good for people who don't like sport.
- Sports day – includes a wide range of sports.
- Teachers are very encouraging and push the children and young people; they make them aware of activities.
- They do 'tacticals' – core skills and tactics.
- Dragon Challenge at start of year – testing physical ability. Children are then put into ability groups – helps to develop skills. Do they discuss the results of the test at home? Yes.
- Boys and girls do not have the same opportunities when it comes to taking part in physical activity.
- Some sports such as rugby and football were perceived as more aggressive and considered '*boy sports*', whilst sports such as dance and netball were considered



'girl sports'. Pupils said that stereotypes played a part in preventing some people from taking part in sports they're interested in.

- Some girls did comment that the school now offers more opportunities for taking part in sports such as rugby, which was welcomed. Girls' rugby was introduced by the school in approximately April 2016.
- Pupils said that peer pressure was a reason why some children and young people are reluctant to take part in certain sports/physical activity.
- Certain sports were viewed as 'not cool'. Some boys in the group commented that they would be picked on if they chose to take part in certain sports such as dance, although conceded that if a group of boys were interested in taking part, they would be more inclined to participate.
- Schools should offer more opportunities for pupils to take part in mixed sports where boys and girls are able to play together on the same team and/or compete against each other.
- Some female pupils commented that giving greater attention to female sports and sport stars in the media would encourage more girls to take part in physical activity. Role models were considered important.
- A lack of, or facilities in need of updating, were considered barriers to taking part in physical activity. Pupils agreed that cost was a factor in the school's failure to upgrade facilities.

Group of 13–14 year olds (boys and girls)

- Rugby is big in the school.
- Year 7 training for 170 people.
- Last year the team was unable to attend the cup final due to lack of money for transport.
- Do they do sport mainly in or out of school? About half and half. Some of the group also help to coach younger children. Some do more outside school, e.g. athletics and tennis, although it varies throughout the year.
- What works well? Skilful teachers; good coaching skills. The group felt they don't do PE that much – difficult to fit it in. Three hours/fortnight isn't enough.
- Group was in favour of a longer school day for sport, especially in summer. If it was part of the regular routine it would be easier e.g. regarding transport.



- Improvements they would like – less repetition of sports, more mixed gender sports (they could learn from each other), more sports teachers. The group didn't believe the school would agree to more mixed gender sports.
- School Sports Council – they organise sports day but the group didn't know much about them. Sports Council is not directly involved in sports sessions.
- Do they learn about the wider issues around physical activity? They use FitBit e.g. for monitoring heart rate. They do a fitness session for a few weeks and monitor the effect of physical activity on the body.
- They had an assessment of fitness when moving from primary to secondary school. The results were used to put them into sets/groups. Does the school talk to their families about the outcomes of the fitness assessment? The group didn't think so. Some parents wouldn't welcome advice on obesity.
- There was a Year 8 Community Week – it was a good event, included bike rides, walks up the mountain. They learned about value of protein intake pre-activity.
- They are taught about nutrition but people don't take it on board. The school nurse is good on unhealthy eating and there are posters warning about unhealthy eating but they're in the nurse's office where few people go. Information should be put up elsewhere in the school.
- More gym equipment would help – open it up to the wider community, not everyone can afford gym fees.
- What about those children and young people not interested in sport? The group suggested showing them the effects of lack of exercise on the body. Some don't like the competition. Do a deal with reluctant children regarding participation in sport rewarded with time playing on the Xbox.

Year 11 pupils (female)

- Both boys and girls have the same opportunities when it comes to taking part in physical activity at school. Opportunities for taking part in a variety of sports have increased for both boys and girls at the school over the past few years. Rugby was cited as an example of a sport that is now available for girls to take part in. This was welcomed.
- As they get older, girls' bodies change and they tend to be more reluctant to take part in physical activity as they are more self-conscious.
- Some pupils were comfortable taking part in sports alongside/against boys whilst others were uncomfortable with the idea. Two of the pupils said they often play football with boys and have no problem with it.



- Fitbit was popular amongst the majority of pupils. The competitive element, where a tally is kept of steps taken, was considered motivating.
- Year 11 pupils currently do one hour of PE a week, which was not considered enough. Some pupils will take part in physical activity outside of school hours, although if they live a considerable distance from a sports club or gym, then taking part can be difficult. The cost of joining a gym or sports club was also considered a barrier to young people.
- Some parents may consider non-academic subjects such as physical education less important and are therefore unlikely to encourage their children to participate in physical activity/sport.
- Pupils said there are pressures from other subject areas at GCSE level which means there is less time for physical activity, unless physical education is a subject which a pupil has chosen to study at GCSE level.

Discussion with staff

- 1,800 pupils.
- Difficult to fit physical activity in to the timetable given the pressures of the curriculum. Schools are heavily judged on academic performance.
- Sports Council group, elected by other pupils. Has raised profile of physical activity and initiated improvements.
- More competition for the attention of children and young people with social media.
- 3 hrs physical activity per fortnight year 7; from years 9–11 it's 2 hrs. "5 times 60" programme has made a massive impact.
- A longer school day would give more opportunities for physical activity. Some pupils catch buses home so it's difficult to stay late.
- Physical activity also contributes to better mental health.
- Physical activity co-ordinator, partly funded by Welsh Rugby Union (WRU).
- Dragons Test – all year 7s is revealing some trends regarding poor physical health. PE and wellbeing is being lost at primary school and picked up at secondary level. Possible to have clustering arrangements with primary/secondary schools.
- Facilities – most schools linked to leisure centres, but not Bassaleg School.



- Physical literacy co-ordinator – every school should have one. WRU person based at school which pays £10k pa towards the cost. The scheme works really well and is not just about rugby.
- Recommendations – facilities are needed to make the best of the time we have with children and young people (18% of their time). A plan needs to be formulated for the whole community – allow it to use the facilities outside school hours. Also, having a physical literacy coordinator on site is very successful.

