

Health, Social Care and Sport Committee review into the Physical Activity of Children and Young People

Adapted from my Western Mail/Wales Online column, published 24 November 2018: <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/news-opinion/five-point-plan-help-tackle-15455500>.

A simple manifesto for radical change:

1. Make Physical Education (PE) a core (compulsory) subject to properly fulfil the new Welsh curriculum's ambition of creating the "healthy, confident individuals" in the Donaldson report. This was the single, unequivocal and unanimous recommendation of Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson's seminal report for the Welsh Government back in 2013 (I was part of this task force). This would have made Wales the first country in the world to make PE a core subject alongside English, Welsh, maths and science. At the time, Tanni said: "We wanted to be radical in what we said because this is about the long-term future of Wales." She was right then and is right now so what happened to that commitment?
2. Make the 120 minutes target for PE a statutory expectation, not just guidance. The Welsh Government's guidance to schools is for pupils to undertake 120 minutes of PE a week. The Sport Wales School Sport Survey has shown that this ambition is not being met. The figures for 2018 showed that on average primary sector schools are achieving 99 minutes on average, while secondary schools average 95 minutes. Only 4 in 10 schools met the 120 minute guidance and no local authority reached the expectation on average overall for either primary or secondary education. Feedback from partners also suggests that these figures are optimistic at best. Clearly this guidance needs to become a statutory requirement if it is to be more than a token consideration.
3. Ensure that all teachers are properly trained and professionally developed to make sure that PE and sport is always fun and enjoyable and includes everyone. It's not that difficult and there is plenty of excellent practice out there to draw upon. There needs to be significant change to the amount of importance and training given to PE during the initial teacher training process. We are currently expecting, particularly at primary level, people to be delivering PE with little to no training or confidence in doing so. When we all want to see qualified teachers leading every lesson we need to ask specifically for PE is a qualified teacher really qualified.
4. Extend the school day to give space for extra-curricular sports (and arts, drama, music) to happen without being crowded out. Again, the Sport Wales School Sport Survey gives a very clear steer as to how participation can be increased for school pupils. 96% of pupils say they have a demand to do more sport but there are clear barriers to that. Pupils would take part in more sport if they didn't have to catch a bus; if they didn't have to go home, if they had the right equipment, if their friends were with them, if they had more time or if clubs were easier to get to. All of these barriers to participation can be overcome through an extension of the school day. We do not want to see an increased burden on the teaching profession, but by opening up schools as community

hubs for sporting opportunities we can ensure a captive audience of school pupils are able to access new ways of participation. Extending the school day to ensure buses are timetabled appropriately to allow children to have access to sport and activity after school and link this to all 21st Century schools investments, past and present, should be open to the community both after school and on weekends. We need to see an opening of the school gates to a lifelong enjoyment of sport. There is clearly a vitally important role for school governors in ensuring that this happens.

5. The Barnett consequential that may be passed during Birmingham 2022 should be ring-fenced for sport and physical activity. There is a strong likelihood that public investment in the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games should deliver a Barnett consequential for Wales. It should be strongly argued that the Welsh Government lobby to ensure this funding is forthcoming and that it is ring fenced for sport and physical activity initiatives.
6. Ensure that Estyn, the inspection agency for school quality and standards, does this properly for PE and school sport. Parents will then know what happens or doesn't happen in their child's school and in turn, can properly hold some feet to the fire and demand proper accountability.

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