

TO FITNESS TEST – OR NOT?

In June 2015, just after the summer edition of *Physical Education Matters* went to print, ukactive published *Generation Inactive*, a report which states the challenges of addressing childhood inactivity. It explores the current understanding of children's physical activity in primary schools and investigates measures that are, or could be, used to track the activity and fitness levels of primary-age pupils. After exploring some of the arguments for and against such measures, the report comes out strongly in favour of the formal measurement of children's fitness – as long as it can be done in a fun, inspiring and engaging way.

It would be considered as unacceptable if a child was allowed to leave school without parents and teachers having a basic understanding of their ability in maths and English, yet we appear willing to accept the concept of children leaving primary school without a formal understanding of their fitness levels and the impact this could have in later life. (Generation Inactive, 2015)

One of the report's recommendations – and the one that made most of the headlines – was for government to extend the National Child Measurement Programme, which currently measures primary-age children's body mass index, to measure children's fitness.

In response to this report, the Association for Physical Education (afPE) – amongst others – issued its position statement on fitness testing of pupils in primary schools. This led to further debate between afPE members who specialise in pedagogy and physical education and other professionals who specialise in sports science and physical fitness. *Physical Education Matters* welcomes the debate on this issue, recognising that the discussion reflects PE and sport practitioners' varying views on how best to increase children's levels of physical activity. The following articles illustrate these different views but also reinforce that, whatever our perspective, our common goal is to encourage and support children and young people to lead active, healthy lifestyles – now and throughout the life-course.

Association for Physical Education Response to Generation Inactive

The Association for Physical Education (afPE) welcomes a report that raises awareness of physical inactivity. We believe that it is vital that all young people learn how to lead healthy active lifestyles.

However afPE does NOT support formal fitness testing in primary schools. It considers this a retrograde step in terms of promoting healthy, active lifestyles.

It takes this position for the following reasons:

- Fitness testing is not good use of the limited curriculum physical education time in primary schools.
- Fitness testing is not a proven effective strategy for promoting active lifestyles.
- Fitness testing can be dull, dreary and dreaded, especially by the very children whom we want to be more active.
- Fitness test scores can be misleading and do not accurately reflect physical activity levels.

afPE fully supports effective promotion of active lifestyles in primary schools and considers that this requires:

- Increased curriculum physical education time in primary schools (many primary schools only have PE twice a week and this is not sacrosanct as it is sometimes shortened or cancelled).
- Increased time on training primary teachers to teach high quality physical education (this should include teaching a sequence of PE lessons during training and working alongside teachers with good knowledge of high quality PE). Well qualified staff teach PE that is more active for children as they plan better, are clearer about what is being taught and how learning is progressed over time, and can adapt tasks so that pupils of all abilities fully participate in and enjoy lessons.
- The identification of primary children who do not meet the current World Health Organisation/UK physical activity recommendations of being active for a minimum of at least one hour a day, followed by offering these children free access to additional, enjoyable opportunities to be active within the school environment, and also liaising with their parents/carers to support them in being active at home and in their free time.
- Increasing the proportion of primary children who are active during break times, lunch times and before and after school (there are still many children who are not active at these times).
- Increased physical activity in curriculum time involving the teaching of subjects in 'active' ways which require pupils to get up and move to learn, where appropriate, both within the school building and in the outside environment. This will help to reduce the amount of time children are sedentary during the school day.

afPE believes that the confidence and self esteem of children to take part in physical activity and develop a desire to lead a healthy and active lifestyle will start through experiencing a high quality PE curriculum.

The Association has consulted with afPE lead advisers on health and fitness, Dr Jo Harris and Dr Lorraine Cale. We thank them for their support in compiling this response on behalf of the afPE Management Board.