



Department  
for Education

# **The PE and sport premium: an investigation in primary schools**

**Research brief**

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**Meg Callanan, Alexandra Fry, Matthew  
Plunkett Jenny Chanfreau, Emily Tanner -  
NatCen Social Research**

## Introduction

This research brief reports the findings of a two year study, commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) and carried out by NatCen Social Research, to investigate the use and the perceived impacts of the PE and sport premium in primary schools across England. It presents the main findings from two surveys of primary schools drawing on qualitative findings from tracker school interviews and case studies.

The PE and sport premium is a cross-departmental funding initiative of over £150 million per year. The aim of the funding is to improve the quality and breadth of PE and sport provision, including increasing participation so that all pupils develop healthy, active lifestyles and realise their potential<sup>1</sup>.

## Aims and methods

The aims of the study were to:

1. Investigate how primary schools in England are spending the premium.
2. Understand the decision-making processes and the perceived impacts of the new funding on primary schools and pupils.
3. Track in more depth how 40 primary schools used the premium.

The study used the following methods:

1. School surveys were carried out online and by telephone with 586 schools in the first year of the policy (Wave 1 - 2013/14) and 533 schools in the second year (Wave 2 - 2014/15). Of the Wave 2 schools 322 had also taken part in the Wave 1 survey (the main sample) and 211 took part in Wave 2 only (the boost sample). The surveys were designed to be representative of primary schools that were open prior to the introduction of the PE and sport premium; however academy schools were over sampled to enable comparisons between academy and LA maintained schools. A sample of 1,925 schools was selected to be contacted and to measure changes over the first two years of the premium.

The response rates were 55 per cent for the main sample and 42 per cent for the boost sample. The responses were weighted to correct for non-response bias so the sample for analysis was representative of primary schools in England.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/150-million-to-boost-primary-school-sport>

2. Semi-structured telephone interviews were carried out with 40 tracker schools in the first and second year of the policy to follow how they were using the premium, as well as a short online survey in 2013/14 with tracker schools.
3. Qualitative case-studies were conducted in a sub-sample of 12 of the 40 tracker schools to give a more detailed understanding of how the funding was being used in schools and the perceived impact on pupils.

## Key findings

### Making decisions about spending the PE and sport premium

- Addressing gaps in provision (71%) and sustainability (69%) were the primary considerations for schools spending the PE and sport premium.
- Schools predominantly drew on local sources of advice and guidance to inform their decision-making – School Sport Partnerships (60% in 2013/14 and 58% in 2014/15), headteachers and staff in other primary schools (55% in 2013/14 and 53% in 2014/15), and their Local Authority (50% in 2013/14 and 49% in 2014/15).

### PE and sport provision using the premium

- The most common uses for the PE and sport premium were to up-skill and train existing staff (86% in 2013/14 and 81% in 2014/15), buy new equipment (76% in 2013/14 and 86% in 2014/15) provide more extra-curricular activities (74% in 2013/14 and 69% in 2014/15) and employ new sports coaches (67% in 2013/14 and 68% in 2014/15).
- Since the introduction of the PE and sport premium there has been an increase in the number of schools with a specialist PE <sup>2</sup>teacher from 30 per cent before the premium to 46 per cent in 2014/15.
- The majority of schools reported that they have introduced new sports in both curricular PE (74%) and extra-curricular sport (77%) since the premium was introduced.
- Schools perceived the quality (81%) and range (74%) of equipment to have increased since the introduction of the premium.
- Seventy per cent of schools reported that participation in inter-school competitions had increased, while 53 per cent reported an increase in intra-school competitions.
- The mean average time schools reported spending on curricular PE has increased from 109 minutes before the premium to 118 minutes in 2014/15, having peaked at 124 minutes in 2013/14. The median time schools reported spending on PE has remained constant at two hours per week. Amongst schools who reported

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<sup>2</sup> The term specialist PE teacher was not specifically defined, but was used consistently throughout the study.

doing less than two hours prior to the introduction of the premium, the mean average time increased from 78 minutes before the introduction of the premium to 111 minutes in 2014/15.

## Targeting

- The majority of schools reported some form of targeting of their premium funds, with only 12 per cent reporting no targeting of any kind.
- The least active pupils (51%) and disadvantaged pupils (51%) were the groups most commonly targeted.
- Targeting took the form of 'direct' targeting of particular groups, and 'indirect' targeting, whereby the conditions were created to encourage participation (e.g. costs reduced or range of activities widened) in the expectation that this would increase the engagement of particular groups.

## Perceived impacts and sustainability

- Eighty-four per cent of schools reported an increase in pupil engagement in PE during curricular time and in the levels of participation in extra-curricular activities.
- Schools reported almost universally that the PE and sport premium had had a positive impact on physical fitness (99%), healthy lifestyles (99%), skills (98%) and behaviour of pupils (96%).
- Eighty-seven per cent of schools reported that the quality of PE teaching had increased since the introduction of the premium.
- Schools sought to sustain the impact of the PE and sport premium by:
  - Investing in staff CPD;
  - Taking into consideration the availability of external sports clubs in the local area when selecting the sports to offer as part of the curriculum (to provide a gateway to extra-curricular participation);
  - Monitoring impacts to provide evidence of impact to inform future spending decisions.
- Risks identified to the sustainability of these impacts included:
  - The loss of some provision if funding ends (e.g. fewer inter-school competitions if transport cannot be funded);
  - Limits to long-term impacts if secondary provision is poor in the local area;

- The potential for staff-turnover in smaller schools to limit the long-term benefits of investing in staff CPD.

## **Future spending plans**

- Fifty-six per cent of all schools reported that they had planned how to spend next year's funding (2015/16).
- Of the schools that had made future spending plans, the focus for the premium funds was on up-skilling existing teachers (68%), buying new equipment (63%) and providing more extra-curricular activities (62%).

## Conclusions

Schools welcomed the introduction of the PE and sport premium, reporting that the funds made available across 2013/14 and 2014/15 had increased the school focus on curricular and extra-curricular provision and had provided new opportunities to increase the quality of PE and sport provision in primary schools.

The premium has enabled schools to enhance both the quality and range of PE teaching and sports provision. As a result of this investment, schools reported a range of positive impacts on pupils including increased pupil engagement and participation in PE and sports as well as impacts on social and inter-personal skills, behaviour, and PE skills and fitness. Schools also perceived positive impacts on the skills and confidence of teachers to deliver PE.

The findings of this study have also highlighted challenges for the future of PE and sport in primary schools. To sustain the impact of the premium, schools have used it to invest in training for existing staff. However, a question remains over how to maintain this investment in CPD for new teachers entering the profession, once premium funding ends. Schools also raised issues related to sourcing good quality provision in their local area, and may need further support to robustly assess the quality of the provision available. The survey also found that monitoring and evaluation of the premium was not consistent and schools may require further advice and guidance to support them to first assess impacts and then put in place strategies for continuing quality improvement.



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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at:

[Rachel.Barker@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Rachel.Barker@education.gsi.gov.uk) or [www.education.gov.uk/contactus](http://www.education.gov.uk/contactus)

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