

Developing the four capacities through physical education: focusing on successful learners in primary schools

Introduction

Following on from the *Improving Scottish Education* (ISE) report, published in February 2006, a sample of primary schools across Scottish education authorities was involved in a task to evaluate attainment in social subjects, physical education and modern European languages. Inspections took place between May 2006 and June 2007. The sample classes included pupils at the early, middle and upper stages of each school. Schools reported that they had benefited from the constructive oral feedback and pointers for improvement during the visits.

The visits took place when primary school staff were giving increased consideration to the principles of *Curriculum for Excellence*. By stimulating debate about attainment and learning and teaching, the visits and this report aim to challenge those involved in teaching physical education in Scotland to review the extent to which current practice is successfully promoting the four capacities in young learners.

Information gathered from the sample schools has been collated and presented in brief reports on the HMIE Good Practice website as part of the broader set of *Improving Scottish Education* related data. The outcomes will inform national developments. The main findings of each of the three reports should be used by staff in schools and local authorities to bring about improvement in practice.

In June 2003, the then Scottish Executive published the report *Let's Make Scotland More Active* produced by the Physical Activity Task Force. One of the recommendations was 'a review of the status and content of the physical education curriculum and the resources available for its delivery'. Subsequently, the Physical Education Review Group was formed and published a report in 2004 outlining a number of issues including the need to:

- increase participation in physical education;
- improve the curriculum; and
- provide more support for teachers, particularly in primary schools.

This task focused on the quality of primary pupils' learning and attainment in physical education. Inspectors observed lessons taught by class teachers and a range of specialist physical education teachers in order to establish pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding in this area of the curriculum. Teachers' plans were examined. Inspectors also discussed learning and teaching approaches in physical education with pupils and teachers.

Most lessons took place in school halls or gymnasiums. Only a few lessons were observed outdoors. Across the country, schools with the support of education authorities, have begun to increase the time allocated to developing a high quality programme for physical education. Visiting specialists are increasingly used to

Developing the four capacities through physical education: focusing on successful learners in primary schools

support class teachers' non-class contact time. The provision of visiting specialists differs significantly across education authorities. Almost all schools had a space designated for the subject. In a few schools, pupils had to walk a short distance to a village hall. Overall, pupils' changing facilities for physical education were too limited with a consequence that pupils had to change in classrooms and in toilets. In many schools, the gymnasium also served as a dining area. Most had access to tarmac playgrounds and grass playing fields. Only a few schools had high quality outdoor facilities.

Physical Education and Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)

How can physical education help to develop successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors? Teachers and specialist staff in primary schools are increasingly recognising the potential of CfE to improve learners' achievement. The range of experiences offered within a quality programme offer a strong platform to build on. In the schools visited for this report, almost all pupils enjoyed physical education, were confident in using their skills and identified physical education as one of their favourite features of school life. High quality physical education often encouraged pupils to become effective contributors, individually and in groups, to develop knowledge, understanding and skills across a range of physical education, sport and health-enhancing experiences. More than that, it developed in pupils the desire and commitment to continue to enjoy, improve and achieve in line with their own personal capacities throughout their lifetime and to show responsibility, in collaborating, competing and respecting the achievements of their classmates.

Physical activity coordinators were having a positive impact on pupils' engagement and levels of physical activity in primary schools. While recognising that the subject contributes in many ways to holistic achievement, this report explores some of the more specific contributions which physical education can make in the context of the four capacities. There is a particular focus on the extent to which pupils are becoming successful learners in the context of physical education in primary schools.

Attainment in physical education: what do we do well presently to develop successful learners?

As successful learners, children and young people need to develop the capacity to learn both independently and as part of small teams and groups. This is central to the teaching approaches in physical education in effective primary schools. Learners are often successful and make good progress when physical education programmes are well balanced and varied. Successful learners often have a range of highly developed skills which they are able to apply in different contexts. It is important to remember that some young people leave primary school with the capacity to perform at a high level. Many will have taken part in activities both in school, out-of-school and in local clubs.

Most lessons observed were either games or gymnastics. Pupils' attainment in these areas had many strengths.

Developing the four capacities through physical education: focusing on successful learners in primary schools

- Almost all pupils listened well to teachers' instructions and carried out tasks in physical education with enthusiasm.
- Almost all observed safe practices in the gymnasium, were considerate of others and understood the need for rules. Most pupils worked well in teams and enjoyed competition. Most were learning good manners and showed sensitivity in winning and losing. All of these skills fostered their development as effective contributors and responsible citizens.
- Most pupils contributed well in pairs and groups.
- In the majority of physical education lessons, pupils were actively involved for most of the time.
- Almost all pupils were acquiring a good range of games skills. They used these skills regularly in a range of team activities and often practised them further during outdoor play and physical activity.
- Most pupils demonstrated appropriate skills in indoor and outdoor team games.
- Across all stages, pupils demonstrated a good range of ball skills. These had been developed through regular experiences using a range of sizes of balls to develop skills in throwing, catching and kicking.
- Most pupils could perform basic gymnastic skills, particularly when supported by a specialist physical education teacher.

A quality physical education programme should include balanced coverage of games and sports, gymnastics and dance as well as individual activities such as athletics, orienteering, fitness and swimming. Most school programmes of study in the sample of schools, ensured that pupils achieved basic skills in individual physical activities. These included fitness, athletics and swimming.

- Most pupils learned an appropriate range of athletics skills, usually during the summer term.
- Almost all pupils had the opportunity to learn to swim, or improve their swimming skills during swimming lessons provided by the local authority. This was most often at the P6 stage. A few schools retained records of pupils' achievements from these lessons.
- A few pupils at the upper stages had well developed skills in orienteering.
- Almost all pupils had a very good awareness of how to keep fit and healthy and could talk about the benefits of regular exercise.
- They participated well in fitness activities and often recorded improvements in their achievements.
- Pupils had fewer opportunities to develop skills in badminton, tennis or table tennis on a regular basis.

There were other important features of programmes which featured regularly and supported pupils' acquisition of relevant skills and confidence in physical education.

- In a growing number of schools, appropriate attention was given to assisting pupils with additional support needs. This included daily activities to improve individual pupils' fine motor skills/coordination. A few pupils, particularly at the upper primary stages, were self-conscious or lacked confidence in physical education.

Developing the four capacities through physical education: focusing on successful learners in primary schools

- Most schools offered pupils the opportunity of a residential outdoor education experience.
- Most schools provided senior pupils with a range of active after-school clubs.

These experiences also provided important opportunities for pupils to develop as:

- confident individuals through working well independently and as part of a team;
- effective contributors through engaging positively in enjoyable and challenging experiences in a variety of contexts including the outdoors; and
- responsible citizens through contributing to the sporting, social and cultural life of the school.

Aesthetic activities involving movement and dance were of variable quality and there were some weaknesses in pupils' attainment in this aspect of physical education. Many pupils who may not have strengths in the games setting can become skilful performers in movement and dance. It is important, therefore, that pupils have the opportunity to develop their confidence and skills in these areas as part of a balanced and varied programme. When inspectors did observe dance in the schools visited, most pupils demonstrated good knowledge and skills in Scottish country dancing.

Key strengths in physical education included the following:

- pupils' attainment in games skills and their application to indoor and outdoor team games;
- the quality of performance in Scottish country dancing;
- pupils' positive attitudes and willingness to learn and improve in physical education and physical activity;
- the contribution of specialist teachers to improving pupils' attainment in the subject;
- pupils' responsible attitudes to safe practice and consideration of others;
- pupils' understanding of how to keep fit and healthy and the effects of physical activity and exercise on their body and lifestyle;
- pupils' ability to cope with winning and losing in competitive situations; and
- pupils' positive participation with others in pairs, group and class activities.

Aspects for improvement

- The breadth of the physical education curriculum. Too many class teachers focused on games skills at the expense of other aspects of the subject. Most programmes of study identified a broad range of learning activities but these were not always fully implemented across all stages.
- Many teachers did not plan effectively for differentiation. Most lessons were whole class activities which did not always meet individual learning needs. Higher achieving pupils were too often insufficiently challenged. Pupils with difficulties in their learning were not helped to achieve success by breaking down tasks, slowing down the speed of the activity, adapting equipment or the level and choice of task.

Developing the four capacities through physical education: focusing on successful learners in primary schools

- Most schools did not yet provide all pupils with sufficient time each week for high quality experiences.
- Changing time continued to reduce the actual lesson time for active learning and teaching.
- Lessons often started with separate warm-up activities which took up too much lesson time and were not related to the activity that followed.
- There was insufficient use of outdoors and outdoor education.
- Partnership working. Improved liaison between visiting specialist teachers and class teachers is key to ensuring continuity and progression in pupils' learning.
- There was insufficient use of ICT – including, for example, digital photographs and video work - to observe, analyse and improve the performance of pupils in physical education.
- Only a few schools encouraged pupils to engage in 'active homework' activities.

Two hours of quality physical education

As part of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), schools are expected to continue to work towards providing 2 hours good quality physical education for each child every week. This commitment is reflected in Health and Wellbeing: planning for experiences and outcomes, and Building the Curriculum 3: A framework for learning and teaching. It is worth noting the newer emphasis on a range of entitlements.

The Concordat with local government means that authorities and schools will decide the best way of achieving the experiences and outcomes in a way that meets local needs and circumstances. HMIE will report on achievement of experiences and outcomes as part of the inspection process.

Curriculum for Excellence: draft experiences and outcomes for Health and Wellbeing for All

As noted above, physical education sits within Health and Wellbeing in the CfE framework. The draft experiences and outcomes for *Health and Wellbeing for All* are available on the LTS website. Teachers are provided with questions for reflection and response as well as feedback questions which will help the curriculum writers in refining the outcomes and experiences. An introductory paper summarises what every practitioner needs to know about these experiences and outcomes and has been published at the same time as the health promotion guidance for the Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) Scotland) Act, 2007. Together, these documents describe the expectations upon individuals, schools and local authorities for promoting the health and wellbeing of children and young people.