imoves Primary Active School

Creating an Active School

A guide to help teachers' get their children moving, learning and enjoying everyday.



Creating a Positive Mindset
Active Learning
Structured Active Play
High Quality PE
Before & After School Clubs

5 Areas to help build a truly Active School

Are you a primary teacher or head teacher who is keen to get their children more active throughout the school day? Perhaps you're not aware of the benefits you'll see in your class or school? Or maybe you're not entirely sure how to incorporate more activity into the day?

5 Areas to deliver a truly active school

- Create a positive active mindset
- Active Learning
- Structured Active Play
- High Quality PE
- Before and After School Clubs

Many teachers we've worked with feel that they lack the skills, the confidence, and above all, the time to figure out how to get their children more active throughout the day without losing valuable learning time. This guide will help you to understand the real benefits of more activity, how you can roll it out in your class or school, as well as some easy examples you can start using from today.

What exactly are the benefits?

Evidence shows us that regular activity is the magic formula for whole school improvement. Regular daily activity can have a HUGELY positive impact on children's learning and academic achievement, as well as on their social and emotion wellness, in addition to all the physical health benefits.



Did you know that just 30 minutes of activity every day can have a major impact on a child's life and whole school improvement?



In 2017, a meta study of 10,000 children across 11 countries showed that the best results are gained when combining high quality PE with Active Learning throughout the day. It showed that attainment could be boosted by an additional year! That focus and behaviour improved by an additional 15 minutes per class, and that children were happier and healthier, overall.
(Ref: Alvarez-Bueno, Celia; Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha et al, Pediatrics, 2017)

Another study over two years investigated the effects of physically active lessons on academic achievement of children. After the study, children experienced greater learning gains in mathematics and spelling — equating to four months!
(Ref: Mullender-Wijnsma MJ, Hartman E, de Greeff JW, et al. Pediatrics, 2016)

That's like a child spending an extra year at primary school and is essentially seven years for the price of six! Who doesn't want that?



So, would you like to provide your children with the opportunity to perform to a higher level, academically? How about a classroom where the children are even more focused and better behaved for longer? And, what about creating a learning environment where children love coming to your lessons, and feel healthier and happier whilst they're at school?

Imagine that your entire school uses and benefits from Active Learning tools and envisage the improvements that it's bringing to not only your individual children, but to the wider culture of learning, and your reputation as an innovative, results-driven school.

Here are 5 areas of a truly active school

Start by reviewing these five areas of your school. We believe there are five areas every school should focus on, to help them become truly active and to achieve all those benefits outlined above.

1. Mindset
Do the children, parents and colleagues believe that activity is a central value of the school?

2. Active learning
How often are non-PE lessons active? Is it the norm?

3. Structured active play
Are ALL the children active at breaktimes or lunchtimes? Do supervisory staff see it as part of their role to support activity?

4. High quality PE
Is PE an after-thought or a key part of the child's weekly lessons?

5. Active clubs and travel
What activities happen before and after school? Are parents encouraged to walk children to school? Are after-school clubs active?

Now you have an idea of when the children are being active across the school day, you can rate your school or class using our useful RAG traffic light system to see where your strengths are, and where there may be room for improvement. Using the diagram below, rate your class or school by labelling each area Red, Amber or Green in accordance with where you feel your school is currently at.

Red = Needs Attention **Amber** = Emerging **Green** = Established



Once you have established where you may be strong and what areas need development, you can begin by pulling together a plan of action for each area.

Below you'll find a handy tool to see where you can review the level of activity in your class or school.

		EY	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Monday	Before school							
	Morning lessons							
	Break times							
	Afternoon lessons							
	After school							
Tuesday	Before school							
	Morning lessons							
	Break times							
	Afternoon lessons							
	After school							
Wednesday	Before school							
	Morning lessons							
	Break times							
	Afternoon lessons							
	After school							
Thursday	Before school							
	Morning lessons							
	Break times							
	Afternoon lessons							
	After school							
Friday	Before school							
	Morning lessons							
	Break times							
	Afternoon lessons							
	After school							

Now, let's look at how to tackle each area in bite-size chunks.

1. How to create a positive active mindset

Whether you want to get your own class more active, or you're looking for something across the whole school, having the right mindset will support you to create a long-lasting habit, so it isn't just a passing fad.

This is the most important point. If you, or anyone in the school, doesn't believe that activity is a mainstay of the school ethos, then improvements will, at best, be sporadic. Creating a change in the mindset or ethos in your school may seem daunting, but it can be done easily! Simply get the right people on board to support you in the quest, help enlighten others to the massive benefits, and take your time in making it a habit.

Your Active Schools Team - **Who should be involved?**

Getting the right team on board is critical to the success of your Active Schools Programme – it's important for everyone to know their responsibility in driving forward the programme and influencing changes across the whole team. From experience, we find the following structure works well for schools:

Team Motivator - **Our suggestion: The Headteacher or Deputy Head**

This is the person who will fully support the programme, motivate, and drive the whole team – this is a top-down approach where activity is a key driver for whole school improvement.

GA's - "Get Active" Agent - **Our suggestion: Senior Leadership Team Member / PE Lead**

This person needs to be able to influence and drive change across the school. With the support from the headteacher, they need to be a well-respected member of staff who can lead others and inspire positive change at all levels.

The Ambassadors - **Our suggestion: Keen and enthusiastic teachers, ready for change!**

These are essentially your guinea pigs – they will get your Active Schools Programme off the ground with their classes and share their experiences, results, and tips with the rest of the teaching staff.

Teachers

When you are ready to roll out the programme across the whole school, you can then use your Active Schools Team to fully embed the programme amongst your teachers, teaching assistants and lunchtime support staff.

Children

Last but by no means least - get the children involved! Create an activity forum where every child can input their ideas, what they love about it, and any suggestions for the programme. This creates buy-in from the children themselves, so they enjoy what they're doing and become an advocate for activity – **remember it's huge fun!!!**



A 4-Step Process

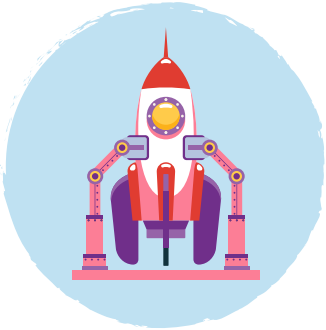
Creating a habit takes time, so we wouldn't encourage you to run before you can walk! Doing too much at once can be counterproductive, and your teachers and you can often be left feeling overwhelmed by the changes.

We believe in a 4-step process which takes place over a full academic year (remember, Rome wasn't built in a day, so while you will see immediate benefits, long-term habit change is a steady process).

Step 1: Ignition

This is the planning phase for the Team Motivator and the GA's to carry out an Activity Audit with each class. Why not set up an 'Active Kids Forum' with the children so they can input their thoughts too! This is the time when colleagues start to learn the benefits of an activity for not just their pupils, but themselves too.

Hint: Use your ambassadors to build success stories now!



Step 2: Blast Off

This is the launch phase for the whole class or school. All members of the team should be involved - your Team Motivator or GA's could deliver a lesson about activity to their class. Use the Active Kids Forum to get feedback and input from the children.

Hint: Start small! just use simple activities to get the children active - it's easier to form a new habit where something is happening every day.



Step 3: Flight

This is the actioning phase - activity should be becoming a habit now. And even the children may start to remind teachers about it! Provide regular slots at staff meetings to discuss any challenges and successes and ensure that you all support each other throughout the process.

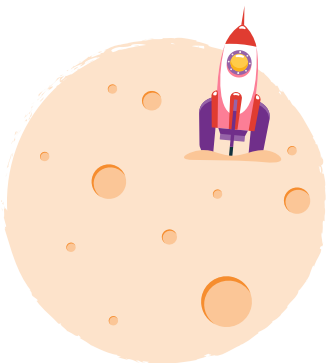
We'd recommend PE is on the timetable EVERY week, and a variety of activities happening across the day including breaks, lunchtimes and lessons.



Step 4: Touchdown

So, how did it all go? Hopefully activity is a core value within the scool, teachers are more confident in helping their pupils to become more active in the classroom, outside and if appropriate, inside the halls.

Hint: Keep building success stories to remind everybody of the benefits the activity will bring.



Here's an Active Schools Assembly to try...

Organise an Active Schools Assembly, 10 minutes at most, outlining what being an active school will entail. Explain the reasons to be active every day, including improvements in physical strength, feeling happier and becoming more emotionally resilient. It'll also positively affect their brain power and improve their focus and memory, making it so much easier to learn and retain new information.

Include an activity for two minutes to get their heart rates up, encourage them to get up and moving, and above all, to have fun whilst learning. Then ask them, how do you feel after being active for two minutes? Do you feel more awake? Do you feel in a better mood?

Finish by setting expectations, for example:

1. Their classrooms may be re-organised to create more space.

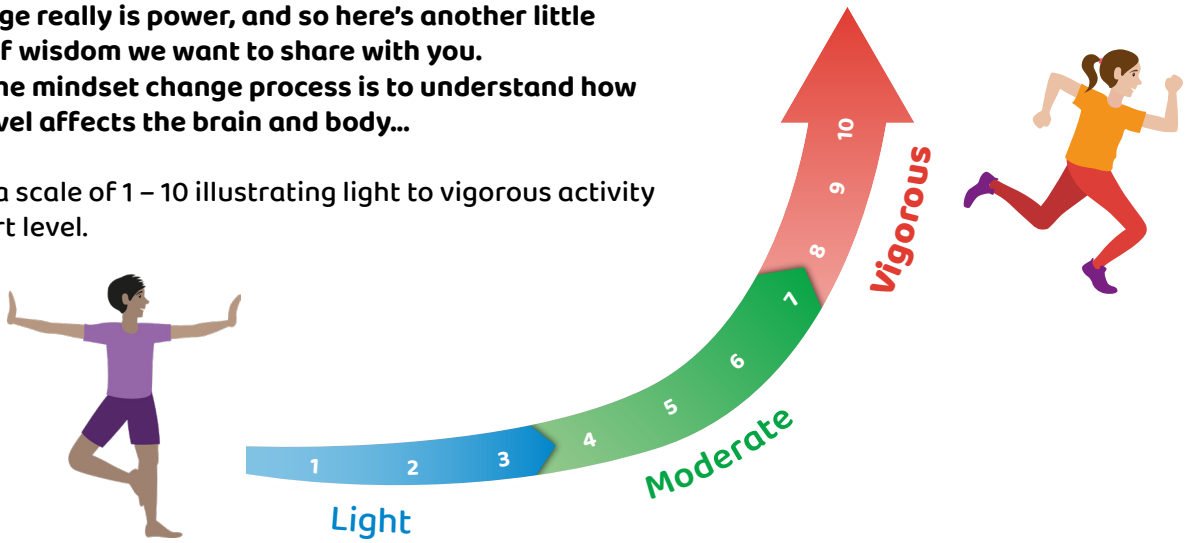
2. Learning will include more movement, and active blasts may be introduced to refresh their mind and body.

3. Structured active playtimes may be introduced, where children can have a say in what activities are provided in the playground.

4. Get feedback on their views and ideas on becoming an active school. Use their enthusiasm as part of the influencing force to affect long term, positive change

Knowledge really is power, and so here's another little nugget of wisdom we want to share with you.
Part of the mindset change process is to understand how effort level affects the brain and body...

Imagine a scale of 1 – 10 illustrating light to vigorous activity and effort level.



Effort level 1 – 3

Improves focus, attention, and mood as well as increasing blood flow to the brain which will reduce brain fog and improve concentration.

Effort level 4 – 10

- Improves focus, attention, mood, and brain fog
- Stimulates Brain Derived Neurotropic Factor (BDNF)
- Burns more calories from fat
- Improves cardio fitness
- Improves strength and muscular endurance

Every session doesn't need to be all out sweaty — in fact, there are numerous benefits to all levels of activity.

If you're wondering what BDNF (Brain Derived Neurotropic Factor) is, it's a protein released into the brain during exercise that causes braincells to sprout the structural branches required for learning. BDNF has been likened to fertiliser for the brain.

Learn more about this from a brilliant book called Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain by Ratey, John J. (2013)

Two lighter types of activities include Pilates and Yoga, which (and among many others) offer a wide range of benefits, as well as requiring a more focused, relaxed, and thoughtful mindset. Anything that gets children away from sitting for long periods is a good thing, and below we've detailed even more ideas to help get your head around what's possible in your own classroom.

Light activity ideas (1 – 3)

- Slow movement (such as walking) around the room
- Standing when problem solving
- Stretching, bending, and twisting

Moderate activity ideas (4 – 7)

- Brisk movements around the room with intermittent bending and stretching
- Repeated bending and stretching, like standing up and sitting down
- Classroom dance or fitness activities behind their chairs

Vigorous activity ideas (8 - 10)

- High impact, on-the-spot activities like jumping, high knee switches and star jumps
- Circuit training
- Total body blast using the chair and space around the chairs



2. Active Learning

When children are sedentary for too long, they lose focus and can start to become agitated. Regular bursts of activity in class, ideally linked to their learning topics, will help their brain refocus, reduce brain fog, and improve their mood and behaviour. A recent study done by Sheffield Hallam University (UK) in local schools on active learning showed that a physically active lesson completely closed the gap between the most and least physically active child, not just in a lesson, but across a whole school day.

(for a summary of this study, as published in PE Matters, click here)

There are three areas of active learning I would like to share with you:

1. Active Blasts

2. Active Learning Outcomes

3. Line Activities

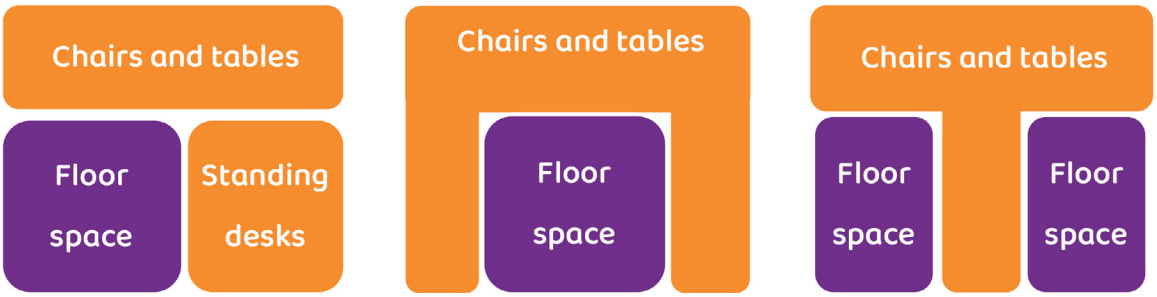


Get Prepared!

Start by de-cluttering your classroom space and creating room to be more active around the tables and chairs.

Below is an examples of how teachers are arranging their classrooms for to create active learning spaces.





Active Blasts

These are a great way to get Short quick bursts of activity into the school day. These are the easiest way to get the children active as well and you'll see increased focus from the children after one of these. Use a short movie on your interactive whiteboard to get 2 –10 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity behind their chairs in class to introduce the idea of being active in the classroom. Lead the activity yourself or try some of the video-based resources that are available with a free imoves account - these are super easy to facilitate without fuss, prep, or cost.

Active Learning

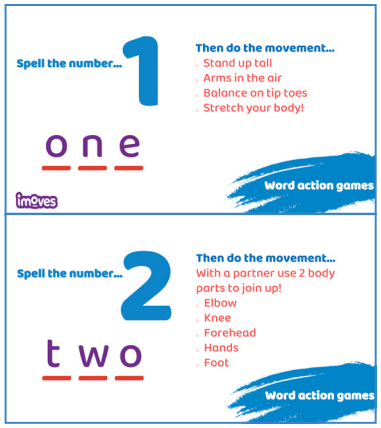
Once your active blasts have been introduced effectively, you can introduce active learning as part of your ongoing lessons. Gradually build up the amount of active learning you do in the classroom over your first 4—6 weeks, as this will help to build up your confidence and let children adapt to new teaching methods.

We've labelled some teaching concepts for you to try:

Choose Between

This is where the children answer a question using a movement, for example — jumping up if the answer is true or crouching down if the answer is false.





Word Action Games

These work well in literacy, especially to dramatize stories or poems. Or, they could be used for something more specific, for example, teaching children about using formal and informal speech, the teacher could read out a word and the children should either MARCH on the spot and salute if they think the word is typical of FORMAL speech, or FREESTYLE dance for words typical of INFORMAL speech.

Top and Tail

This is when a learning outcome always begins and ends with a short dance or set of moves.

This can be done effectively with timetables and fractions, for example, children do a short two to three-minute dance to warm up their brains and body, ready to solve maths problems. Then the same dance is repeated at the end as a celebration of learning.

So simple, yet so effective. Movie based plug-and-play activities work incredibly well by enabling children to follow along.



Circuits

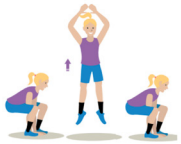
Use a set of 10 or 12 cards, placed around the classroom, where each one has a problem to be solved in Literacy, Maths or Science. Children in small groups spend a short time at each circuit card before they must move on. One, two or three minutes per station work well, depending on the types of problem they are solving. This works brilliantly where children have to punctuate sentences correctly on each card, and then do an action relating to the sentence they have just punctuated.

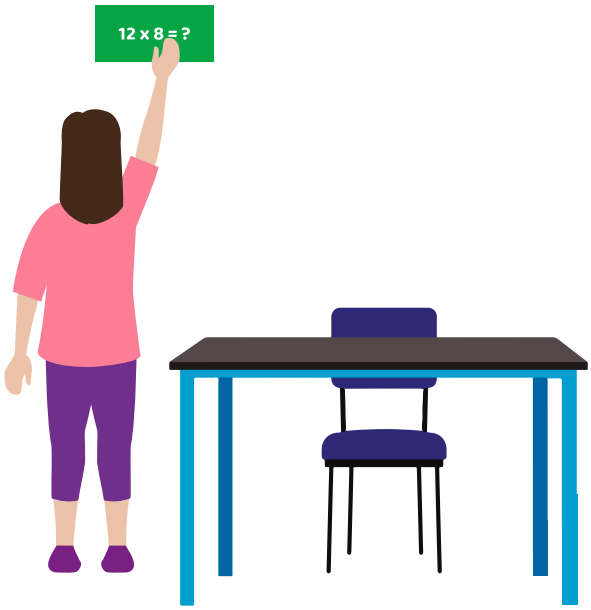
Apostrophe circuit card 1

1. Punctuate this sentence on your worksheet...
-The postmens bags are full of letters-

2. Do at least 10 power squats.

Squat low enough to look through a letterbox!





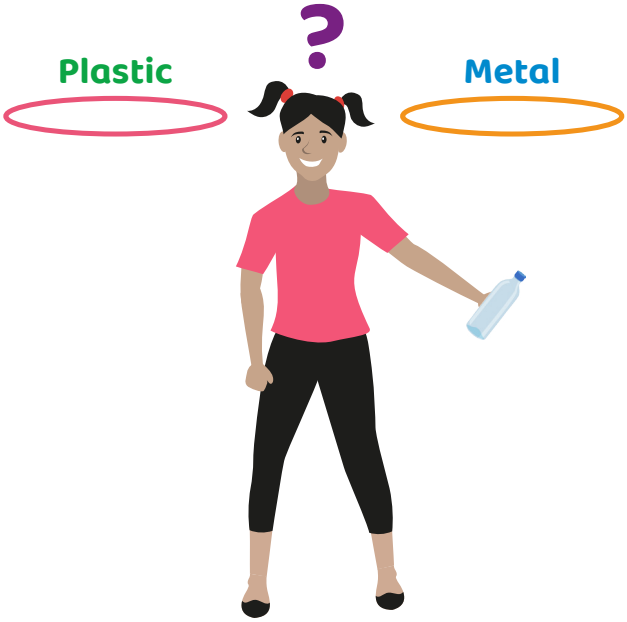
Data Collection Circuit

Another easy concept, using simple data flash cards. Stick a selection of your data cards all over the classroom using various heights and harder to reach (but still safe!) places, for example, the underside of tables or on top of shelves. They should not be hidden, but they should be placed so that the children must do lots of bending, stretching, crawling to see them. Children move around collecting data and solving maths or literacy problems as they go.

Team games

They can work in classrooms, however the more space the better for this teaching style. If you were asked to create an active game for your year group around a learning outcome you were preparing to teach next lesson or term, the chances are, you'd be able to come up with something amazing.

In one of our recent Active School workshops, a teacher came up with a brilliant idea for a science learning outcome around everyday materials. The concept was a relay race with children in teams of five. One team member collected one object per round from the centre of the room, and decided if it was made of plastic, glass, metal, or wood, then deposit said object in the correct hoop.



Hot Tip: You could start adding movement into sedentary lessons with one of the easiest concepts — and in our opinion, it's Choose Between (as detailed above).

Children love learning actively as it's fun, it helps their brains to absorb more information, AND it improves mood, focus and behaviour. Get them moving as regular as possible and NORMALISE ACTIVITY in the classroom in just two weeks!

When you have ignited the "Active Community" in your school, it's time to convince others of your success and gather evidence of how children are responding to the changes. For example, are children more focused on tasks after activity? Are they happier and in a brighter mood? Are they better behaved in class?

We can bet you a large glass of Pinot that they'll be all the above and then some. This kind of evidence based in YOUR school, impacting on YOUR children, will resonate so much more to YOUR teaching staff as you will have overcome most of their barriers, changed their perception (mindset) from "this is too difficult" to "I can do this too" — ultimately making it easier for them to take the next steps

Line activities

The next layer to consider is to introduce corridor and active line activity. We ask our children to stand in lines and wait quietly, but why not use this time to cram in an energising, refocusing activity like this.

Sing to the melody of The Grand Old Duke of York:

Oh we're marching in a line - (March on the spot)

Yes we're waiting to move - (March on the spot knees higher)

We can touch our toes - (Touch your toes)

We can touch the sky - (Stand on tiptoes with arms up high)

We can do a funky groove! - (Do a funky groovy move!)



Repeat as many times as you like!

By this point you may be thinking that I've completely lost the plot OR that you think this approach could really work for you. If it's the latter, read on, as there's lots more 'bonkers' stuff where that came from!

This idea, which we believe is being used in an academy chain in Birmingham (UK), is one that we love. This Head Teacher is responsible for encouraging pupils to run, jump and sidestep down the corridors. Each corridor in school has its own type of activity children should try to perform when moving down them. And guess what, he's created a happy, healthy environment where children learn and want to be part of.



Another teacher in Sheffield (UK), started their active school journey with NO CHAIRS Tuesday! He reported that his pupils were in shock for the first 20 minutes, then had a wonderful day working without their chairs.

Please take inspiration from this "out of the box" thinking, even if the activities described may not work in your school or classroom, you'll be able to adapt them and tweak as you want and help introduce new initiatives that excite and motivate the children to learn actively.

3. Active Structured Play

Some children use breaktimes to sit and chat with their friends, or to play on their phone. There's absolutely nothing wrong with this, however if they have just sat for 90 minutes in a sedentary classroom it can be detrimental to their health, mood, and their learning for the rest of the day.

Breaktimes should give all children an opportunity to move in their own way, either in sports, games, or something more creative such as Scrapstore or Playpods, which provide schools with a store of scrap materials such as cardboard tubes, tyres, lengths of material, netting, ropes, crates — perfect for children to build, move, learn and play.

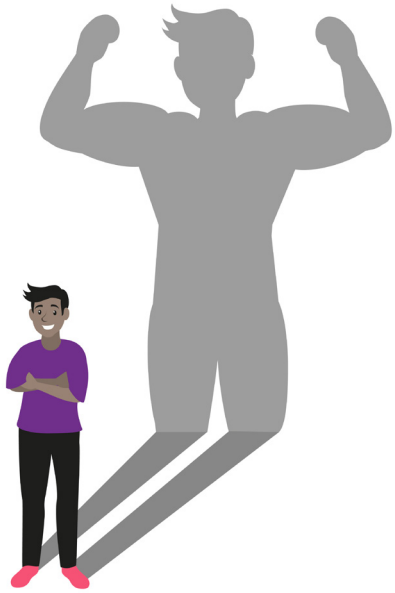
Set your playground up in ZONES, such as a Ball Sports zone, Dance zone, or Circuits zone. If possible, create a running track around the edge. This doesn't mean an expensive playground makeover; you could even use cones or sticky floor markers to create the different zones. This will also give you flexibility to change the zones depending on the children's preferences.

Here's how some schools have used ZONES to get sedentary children moving more during breaktimes:



Set up a children's forum or ideas box for children to suggest different zone areas - this will get the children to buy in to the idea of structured active play zones at the start of the process.

Finally, use the talent in school by upskilling and empowering the breaktime supervisors to facilitate activity in each zone. Facilitation is the KEY word, it's not about being active themselves (as this could be a barrier for them), it's about them being confident to set up and monitor these activities.



4. High Quality PE at least two hours per week

High Quality PE should mean that ALL children are able to develop their physical literacy, muscular strength and endurance, cardiovascular fitness, and social wellness in a variety of different disciplines. During a typical PE lesson children can achieve between seven and 12 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity during a 40 minute PE lesson — not as much as we would expect, mainly due to children being sat down or waiting in lines for long periods of time waiting to use equipment.

So how do we keep our children active throughout the PE lesson ensuring activity levels are maximised and contribute to long-term health?

For quality and consistency, upskilling the workforce in school is the most effective option. By enabling teaching staff and TA's to facilitate high quality PE lessons across dance, gymnastics, games, and athletics, will mean that children get a consistently good quality of teaching all year. Bringing in outside help to deliver the schools PE programme, for example a professional sports coaching company, could deskill the teaching staff, creating a barrier to teaching activity at all.

We have personally witnessed some terrible PE lessons delivered by VERY inexperienced coaches, sent in by a coaching company who were not as inspirational or active as the coaching companies would have schools believe. Our advice; use good quality PE resources and HIGHLY RECOMMENDED training providers to support teachers to teach activity with confidence — it will save the school oodles of cash, plus the teachers will have more confidence teaching actively in the classroom too — **WIN-WIN!**

PE also helps whole school improvement. Did you know that the most active schools, which includes having activity-based PE lessons, see an additional year of academic progress across a child's time at primary school? So, don't fear PE, embrace it, and jump in with both feet!

We believe in Four Guiding Principles that shape how you plan and deliver any type of PE lesson:

1. START SIMPLE

Start with the basic skills that the children need for the particular sport, game or discipline.

2. PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Give the children lots of opportunities to practice the basic skills in lots of different ways.

3. SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

When introducing the actual game play have lots of small mini games going on to allow the children lots of time to practice in a game situation, reduce waiting times and give everyone a chance to shine.

4. And finally, ...FUN, FUN, FUN!

Make sure each lesson is a fun and positive experience for everyone – teacher included!

Using these Guiding Principles will ensure that you don't get swept away by the lure of a full team game before the children can perform the basic skills and will eliminate a lot of the negative experiences that children (and adults!) have in PE.



5. Extra-curricular Clubs

Before and after school clubs are sure way of cramming even more activity into a child's day. If the activities provided are fun, high quality and inspirational, children will be there with bells on.

Here are some Out of the Box ideas working in schools today:

Wheelie Clubs:

Children bring along their scooters, bikes, and skateboards. A large space is set up with small ramps and cones to negotiate around. Banging beats is optional but does create a fun high energy atmosphere which motivates a child to move more.

Themed Pilates for Children

Pilates massively improves children's core strength, balance, and motor skills. The great benefit of Pilates for children is that it's totally inclusive without any spiritual or religious connotations, and it's fun and non-competitive. Our founder started teaching Pilates to adults about 10 years ago and it's dynamic yet very calming, so has often adapted Pilates moves and themed the session to appeal to children between 5—11 years. And then started to work with other Primary teachers (non-Pilates specialists) to help them facilitate a Pilates session with the help of some supporting resources.

"Mash-ups" like SoccerJam (football skills to music)

Mash up style classes can be brilliant fun and inspire children to try activities under a different guise. Take SoccerJam as an example. We have used football or combat style moves to funky back beats to help boys (9 and upwards especially) to enjoy a dance session and encourage them to want to do more.

Circuit or Bootcamp Sessions

Children love a high energy style class. Circuit and bootcamp activities can give children that moderate to vigorous workout they require for fitness and health, and they can be facilitated easily by a non-specialist with good supporting resources. When we're creating resources for schools, we always choose simple effective moves that any teacher will feel happy to oversee and give correct directional coaching without having to model — if they don't want to.



Here are a few examples of Bootcamp Circuit cards we've created to illustrate the type of content you will need to include if you want to deliver something like this in your school.

1. Clearly state the name of the exercise on each card.
2. Use clear pictures of what the exercise looks like.
3. Include one or two simple coaching points to help children achieve safe and effective execution of the exercise. Try not to make the cards too busy with detailed explanations

The ratio of work to rest should be around one minute per station with 30 seconds rest to move stations. Children should work in pairs to motivate one another and move in a clockwork direction around the circuit.

Teaching tips | As the facilitator, you will be managing the timings of the circuit, motivating, and coaching the pupils to do the best they can on each station, and of course praising good performance and effort levels when you see it. We use music in our bootcamp sessions as it can help to motivate children to work harder, but it's totally up to you.

A final thought from Imogen...

Remember Rome wasn't built in a day, and so making changes in any organisation can take time. Work towards becoming an active school over a two or even three-year period and set out a clear plan of where you are and where you want to be at the end of your quest. I work with a school in Sheffield which has made activity their priority over the past seven years, and they've moved from being a school which required improvements, to an outstanding school! They started their quest by having a full day CPD with ALL staff and brainstorming the heck out of how they can achieve their goal of becoming the happiest, healthiest school in Britain. They focused on the talent they had in the room, who felt comfortable driving certain activities forward, and gave staff ownership of their own ideas.

So go forth brave active school warrior, and achieve your quest in bitesize chunks.

Let me know if this report was useful, or if there are any other activities of your own that you would like me to share with my network of like-minded teachers – it's always great to inspire each other!

If you would like any more support or information please email me - imogen@imoves.com

Best wishes,

Imogen

