

Fitmedia – Written evidence (NPS0039)

About Fitmedia

Fitmedia is a multi-award winning leading specialist physical assessment company which provides a range of health and fitness assessment systems for children, designed specifically for use by schools, local authorities and sporting organisations.

We have systems for children of all ages and abilities, from 6 to 18 years, to provide a complete overview of a child's physical movement skills, their levels of fitness and their own individual physical aptitudes. Our assessments can also help identify and highlight potential causes for concern, such as low levels of fitness or specific injuries or areas of weakness.

Our assessment systems are unique in that they are supported by scientific research data which allows us to see how well the children are doing based on their age and stage of development. In effect, they can be compared directly against what would be expected of a child their age and sex. As a result, the children are given a completely objective assessment of how they are progressing – and where and how to improve.

We also have resources to support Fundamental Movement skills for key stage 1 children, and offer a range of CPD sessions. We are also the only company to have tested many children in schools doing the Daily Mile using our system.

The document provides information on questions 2 and 6.

How can children and young people be encouraged to participate in sport and recreation both at school and outside school, and lead an active lifestyle? If possible, share examples of success stories and good practice, and challenges faced.

1. The importance of Physical Education in educating and developing children is well recognised. However, two additional aspects are often overlooked.
2. **Firstly**, childhood experiences in Physical Education (PE) and school sports can be a key determining feature in how people view sport and physical activity over their entire life. It can define how people active people are, not just in school but throughout their life¹. Good PE provision is therefore vital, both to encourage physical activity in children and as a means to ensure lifelong physical activity habits as adults².
3. In short, active children become active adults.

¹ See

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327118352_My_Best_Memory_Is_When_I_Was_Done_with_It_PE_Memories_Are_Associated_with_Adult_Sedentary_Behavior

² <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15514510/>

4. **Secondly**, for some children and young people (particularly girls), school PE is their only regular opportunity for physical activity and makes an important contribution to their overall activity levels. This is shown by the fact that there is a steeply decline in physical activity among young people as they move to university or college³.
5. Good experience in PE is therefore essential in ensuring children **start** and **sustain** active habits.
6. However, despite its recognized importance⁴, both in childhood and adulthood, the treatment of PE remains highly inconsistent. For example:
 - It is a mandated curriculum subject across the UK
 - In England, it forms part of the National Curriculum at Key Stages 1, 2, 3 and 4
 - It is often seen as potential solution for many of physical and emotional issues facing children, including rising obesity, increase in mental health issues, growing social isolation, reduced physical activity.
7. But at the same time:
 - There is no compulsory minimum for how much time should be spent on PE⁵
 - PE is not embedded into general teacher training programmes⁶
 - The broadness of the National Curriculum means that delivery is not standardised
 - Time spent in PE is actually declining – workforce data has shown that taught PE hours have declined from **333,800** in **2010** to **282,200** in **2017**⁷
 - Increased pressure on academic results has resulted to cuts in PE timetables.⁸
8. Most significantly, there is no consistent assessment in PE teaching.
9. For core academic subjects, formal assessments take place after each Key Stage⁹. However, assessment in PE is limited to attendance, attitude,

³ <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/12/111215232728.htm>

⁴ For example, UNESCO have stated: "Physical Education is the most effective means of providing all children and youth with the skills, attitudes, values, knowledge and understanding for lifelong participation in society" (The Declaration of Berlin 2013)

⁵ DfE guidance simply states " *It is up to schools to determine how much time is devoted to PE in the curriculum but departmental guidance recommends that they should provide pupils with a minimum of two hours curricular PE per week*"

⁶ Postgraduate entrance receive approximately 6-8 hours of PE in a year's worth of training – undergraduate trainees receive just 24 hours

⁷ <https://www.tes.com/news/pe-time-cut-more-almost-any-subject>

⁸ <https://theconversation.com/physical-education-is-just-as-important-as-any-other-school-subject-103187>

⁹ Eg Teacher assessments at the end of Early Years, Phonics Screening Check at the end of Year 1,

appearance (clothing) and participation. For example, "X enjoys PE and shows enthusiasm for games".

10. This means that:

- Children are not provided with a clear idea of what they need to learn and master
- Teachers do not know whether the children have learnt or mastered the fundamental movement skills needed for sports and games
- There is no clear evaluation of the impact or effectiveness of PE teaching
- Children often leave primary school without a good grounding in the skills they need to take part in sports and games
- At secondary school, children's basic fitness is overlooked and unassessed
- Children do not know where their skill sets are
- Teachers cannot identify children's weaknesses, identify areas for improvement or effectively target interventions.

11. But if PE is regarded as important as claimed (eg in providing solutions for a variety of objectives such as academic attainment, improving behaviour), it should be valued as such. If PE is to be treated on an equal basis with other subjects in the curriculum, it should be measured in the same way. Children's fitness and physical literacy should be consistently assessed and measured against National Standards, so that progress and development can be objectively evaluated.

12. This could be done at both primary and secondary school levels and would be straightforward to implement. More on this is provided below:

A) Assessment at primary school level

13. Nearly half of primary school pupils are now leaving school without basic movement skills¹⁰. This reflects an increasing decline in physical literacy.

14. But physical literacy is just as important as the ability to read and write. The skills inherent in physical literacy (such as running, jumping, throwing) significantly contribute to children's physical, cognitive and social development. They are the foundation for developing the advanced, autonomous movement patterns required for an active, healthy life. Without physical literacy, children's interest and ability to participate in physical activity is vastly reduced, whilst the failure to develop movement skills limits their essential mobility as they move into adulthood. Physical literacy also helps contribute significantly to

SATs, in Year 2 and Year 6

¹⁰ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/11693791/Nearly-half-of-children-leave-school-without-basic-movement-skills-study-says.html>

sporting prowess –cross-sectional evidence shows that proficiency in fundamental motor skills provides the foundation for the development of sport specific skills.

15. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, physical literacy can play an important role in long term health, with studies showing low level of motor proficiency in childhood is related to childhood obesity.

16. However, there are no minimum standards for physical literacy¹¹:

- The **National Curriculum** lays down guidelines for what children should be able to do by the end of Key Stage 1 and 2¹². However, these comprise broad descriptions of what the children should be able to do, but do not set out any criteria or standards by which to measure and assess ability.
- The **PE and Sports Premium for Primary Schools** does not lay down any specific criteria or guidance as to how the funding can be spent, merely stating that it must be used to *“develop or add to the PE, physical activity and sport that your school provides build capacity and capability within the school to ensure that improvements made now will benefit pupils joining the school in future years”*¹³.
- **Ofsted** now assess and report on how effectively the funding is being used to improve PE and sport provision. However, such assessment very general with no reference to specific standards or minimum criteria that must be met.¹⁴
- **The School Sports Survey** (which was abolished in 2010) measured only how much PE was being offered within curriculum time. It did not measure activity outside school and provided no data on health and fitness levels.

17. This is contrast to the rest of the core academic curriculum subjects, which are assessed in primary schools in Year 2 and Year 6 by means of the SATs.

¹¹ The only check made on children during their 13 years of compulsory PE is whether they can swim 25m in Year 6 and this is most often done merely by asking them. Despite having this single, very modest target for attainment, a recent survey found **45% of 7-11 year olds** can't swim 25m.

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-physical-education-programmes-of-study>

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/pe-and-sport-premium-for-primary-schools>

¹⁴ The guidance refers only to *“the impact the school has seen on pupils’ PE, physical activity, and sport participation and attainment”* The only specific standards or criteria which are referred to are that the schools must publish *“the percentage of pupils within the year 6 cohort in the 2020 to 2021 academic year who met the national curriculum requirement to: swim competently, confidently and proficiently over a distance of at least 25 metres; use a range of strokes effectively, for example, front crawl, backstroke and breaststroke; perform safe self-rescue in different water-based situations”* <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/pe-and-sport-premium-for-primary-schools#accountability>

18. The result of this is an increasing number of children are leaving school without understanding, or being able to achieve, basic movement skills. This has a significant impact:
 - It means they are ill prepared for the PE lessons they will get in secondary school, and cannot take advantage of the greater range of PE on offer
 - It results in them being less active, and therefore **less fit**
 - It means they are more likely to cease being physically active.
19. Minimum standards of physical literacy, covering Fundamental Movement Skills¹⁵ and physical capabilities could be put in place. These standards could be placed at Year 5 or the start of Year 6 (to coincide with SATs).
20. Such standards would:
 - Ensure that all children leave primary school fully able to achieve the basic skills required to take part in physical activity as they grow
 - Give all children a basic understanding of how their bodies work
 - Provide children with confidence in their physical abilities¹⁶
 - Help engage children at an early age with physical movement and aptitudes
 - Enable those who are struggling to be identified, so that specific programmes or interventions can be set up to aid them.

B) Assessment at secondary school level

21. Fitness is the most important independent measure of children's physical health.
22. But 20% of pupils starting secondary school are clinically unfit. Unable to sustain a running pace of 9.5 km/h (6 mph), it takes them more than 11 minutes to run/walk a mile. Comparisons with historical data from other countries show this generation is 90 seconds slower than their parents were at the same age. By school leaving age, that 20% has risen to 46%.
23. Children's cardiorespiratory fitness (endurance or stamina) has declined by about 10% in the past 10 years - even in areas which have escaped the obesity epidemic.

¹⁵ Locomotor Skills, Object Control, Body Control

¹⁶ Lack of confidence (personal self-efficacy) has been recognised as a key barrier to participation: https://www.physio-pedia.com/Barriers_to_Physical_Activity

24. Children have got bigger and heavier since 1990 (when modern measurements started) but they have also become weaker, with 1 in 5 unable to support their own bodyweight using their arms.
25. The drop off in fitness can be attributed to a variety of factors, including the natural tendency of children to be less active as they get older, particularly among girls – in their “Girls Active” report, the Youth Sport Trust highlighted that only 15% of girls aged 17-18 took part in at least three hours of PE and school sport each week, compared to 68% of girls aged 10-11¹⁷.
26. However, another key reason behind the drop off, which is often overlooked, is that there no minimum standards or agreed milestones for fitness in secondary school aged pupils. This leads to a number of problems:
 - Teachers and staff are not aware of how fit their students should be
 - Parents are unable to recognize if and when their children are falling behind or are not as healthy as they should be
 - Children are unaware of their own natural talents and physical aptitudes
 - The overall health and long term prospects for the children are damaged
 - Children measure their fitness and/or health using inaccurate criteria, such as weight.
27. There is a growing consensus among sports and health academics that some kind of national framework should be put in place, which sets out minimum standards of fitness for school leavers.
28. We would therefore recommend that assessments for fitness are put in place for secondary schools. These would use standardized and evidence based tests to assess fitness levels and physical aptitudes, which can be compared directly across age groups, areas and regions.
29. Such assessments would use BMI and/or weight only on an **optional basis**. This is because there is very little correlation between BMI and health problems in children (and the association is partly or totally attenuated if good measures of physical activity or fitness are taken account). Instead, it should use standardized fitness measures or objective evidence based tools, such as accelerometers, dynamometers or pedometers.
30. This is not a new concept. Other countries around the world implement fitness testing or frameworks in some form¹⁸. And health assessments have significant benefits:

¹⁷ <http://www.youthsporttrust.org/how-we-can-help/girls-active.aspx>

¹⁸ Countries including Canada, the USA and Australia have all employed routine assessment of fitness as a health surveillance tool.

- **They increase participation** - giving meaningful feedback and to individuals about their fitness is an effective tool to increase levels of physical activity and by association their fitness.
- **They improve fitness** – compulsory fitness testing for 10-15 year olds in the USA resulted in an 8% improvement in levels of fitness over three years. In Singapore, the National Physical Fitness Award requires that all children within Singapore's primary and secondary education system participate in NAPFA fitness testing each year, with significant impacts on students' fitness¹⁹.
- **They encourage effort** - because fitness test results are sensitive to even small changes in behaviour, fitness testing can directly show to individuals and participants how even tiny changes in lifestyle can have a positive impact on their health – and therefore encourage them to continue.
- **They highlight health risks** – fitness assessments can identify areas of weakness, injury risk and significantly low levels of fitness, allowing appropriate action to be taken and ensuring interventions are targeted where necessary.

31. The need for assessments for health has long been recognised in a number of sectors, including the health sector, the education sector and government. It is becoming increasingly in demand:

- **UKActive** has called for routine testing of children's fitness, in the same way as subjects like Maths and English, and called for schools to measure children's fitness in their "Generation Inactive" report
- The **Sports Think Tank Sector Survey** from 2015 showed that 61% of the sector believe that the government should record the fitness levels of children in schools
- The **Association for Physical Education** Health Position Paper in 2015 stated "if it is incorporated as just one component of a broad, balanced physical education curriculum which also includes monitoring of physical activity, then [fitness assessments] can potentially play a positive role in promoting healthy active lifestyles".
- **Sport England's** previous strategy called for better evaluation and data collection across the sport and physical activity sector
- Use of physical assessment as a tool to promote health promotion is well recognised. An example is **Liverpool's SportLinx Programme** which was delivered in partnership with Liverpool Moores University, the Schools Sports Partnership and Liverpool Primary Care Trust
- Health professionals are increasingly calling for more empirical data from the physical activity sector. For example, **Professor Yvonne Doyle, Public Health England Director for London**, emphasized the importance of proper data in bringing together the health and physical activity sector to work together.
- The report of **Chief Medical Officer for England in 2010** advocated comprehensive physical assessment in schools and recognised that the

¹⁹ The fitness of children in the UK has been shown to be declining rapidly – a fall of 8% over the decade from 1998-2008. Recent conference proceedings suggest this decline continued in children from the southeast of England from 2008 – 2014 despite proximity to the 2012 Olympics. These declines will have a significant impact on a growing problem of future ill-health and NHS burden.

monitoring of physical assessment in young people is recognised as an important component of public health surveillance

- A previous government strategy **“Be Active, Be Healthy”** emphasized the part that objective physical assessment could play in observing trends: by analysing data by region, school and age group, structured interventions could be appropriately targeted and educational curricula could be modified
- Over the past two years, many sport providers are recognising the need to have good and credible data to demonstrate improvement in participants, particularly those who are less ‘sporty’ and may have be at risk.

32. Fitness assessments could also help the wider health sector by contributing to the long term aims for the health system in the following areas:

- “Getting Serious About Prevention”²⁰** – fitness testing is an excellent prevention tool. By providing detailed information about fitness levels and health status, fitness testing enables early detection of potential health conditions and areas of risk (through identification of specific weaknesses or problems areas). It can then alert the individual to make changes to improve and prevent such conditions.
- “The Information Revolution”²¹** – fitness testing systems, combined with new technologies such as health trackers, mean that individuals can now access more relevant and detailed information about their health and fitness than at any time. In particular, it means that the average child or recreational participant can receive the same specific knowledge that has previously been only available to those in the elite/professional sector, and that this data can be used to complement the health services available.
- “Intelligent Transparency”²²**– Fitness testing provides clear and objective results about an individual health and fitness levels which can be used by children, parents and teachers. It therefore provides an ideal monitoring tool evaluate the impact of schools’ PE programmes, and interventions such as the PE and Sport Premium for Primary Schools.
- “Self-Directed Improvement”²³** – Fitness testing has been shown to motivate children to improve their fitness - for example, compulsory fitness testing for 10-15 year olds in the USA resulted in an 8% improvement in levels of fitness over three years. It does this through providing children with detailed information about their fitness levels and natural talents, showing them how they are doing in comparison to their peers and where they can improve. Natural competitiveness and a desire

²⁰ “NHS Five Year Forward View” (2014)

²¹ *Ibid*

²² <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/making-healthcare-more-human-centred-and-not-system-centred>

²³ *Ibid*

to do better means that most children will then try to get better scores, and thereby improve their fitness.

33. Fitness assessments would also:

- Help children understand the importance of fitness and the role of physical activity in health
- Ensure PE and PSHE teachers are all cognizant of the minimum health related fitness standards – and able, therefore, to identify any children below these
- Provide parents with information and context on how fit their children should be – and if they fall short
- Ensure that children leave school with a minimum level of fitness which can aid their long term health and fitness levels
- Provide schools and staff with an evidence based measures of the effectiveness of their PE programmes and interventions (such as the PE and Sport Premium for Primary Schools)
- Encourage children to continue in physical activity after leaving school, and thereby prevent the drop off in participation in school leavers²⁴
- Reduce the emphasis on weight/body size as a measure for health and physical fitness in children, which can be both damaging to self-esteem (particularly for girls) and inaccurate in health terms²⁵
- Be cost effective, through using existing technologies

Conclusions

At its foundation, Physical Education should:

1. Ensure children are **fit** and **physically literate** (as much as numerate and literate), by providing them with the tools to enable them to lead a healthy life
2. Address their **specific needs**
3. Enable them to reach their **full potential**.

But it is very difficult to do this without proper evaluation.

Our experience has shown that properly assessing children's progress in PE would:

- Ensure physical education is **effective**, by showing clearly what children have (and haven't) learnt

²⁴ <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/12/111215232728.htm>

²⁵ There are surprisingly few health risks associated with childhood obesity – all of which disappear when fitness and activity levels are taken into account. In fact it is [underweight](#), rather than overweight children who are at the highest risk of ill-health - weighing too little is far more damaging to the health of children than weighing too much. See eg <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-22479045>

- Make physical education **engaging**, by showing the children what they need to learn and why they need to learn it
- Make physical education should be **enjoyable**, by allowing the children to see what they are good at, how they can improve, and the rewards they get for those improvements.

How can racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and ableism in sport be tackled?

This paper discusses Racism in Sport

By SA Forster MA – Fitmedia Ltd

1. Racism can inflame a range of views and emotions, and can mean many things to different people, but there are clearly problems of Racism within the sports sector.
2. Racism in sport has been well documented; you don't have to dig deep to find reports, experiences and research relating to the issues. The obvious one is footballers and the lack of BAME managers and coaches²⁶, and perhaps the less discussed issue relating to 'insufficient BAME on NGB boards and senior positions'.
3. The not so obvious or subtle issues of racism is the type that doesn't allow BAME the same opportunities to progress into high ranking sport organisations positions such as CEO's in major Charities or Foundations etc.
4. Just take a look at who runs them and what they look like, and then take a look at the people employed at grass roots levels. Often at this level you will see plenty of diversity but it essentially diminishes when you get to Managerial and Director Level.²⁷
5. Undoubtedly BAME in the industry are as well qualified as their white counterparts and have the relevant experience and knowledge, but the opportunity to progress to senior level is far more difficult.
6. The question is why?
7. Here are few suggestions:
8. Perhaps there is a perceived view that if you are BAME you are less capable, don't have the right attitude, don't fit in, less qualified, and too much of risk.

²⁶ file:///C:/Downloads/2011_Bookmatter_SportAndChallengesToRacism.pdf

²⁷ <https://inews.co.uk/sport/abundance-elderly-white-men-power-not-exclusive-football-36676>

9. There may also be the presumption that BAME employees perform best at 'grassroots level' because they understand the issues of hard to reach communities, which could suggest all BAME's have the same experience as those who are hard to reach and therefore *cements* them at this level.
10. Not convinced? Take a look at the very senior roles in the industry and immediately you will notice they tend to look the same, male and white²⁸.
11. What does that say to a young qualified aspiring BAME or indeed anybody else?
12. All too often you see jobs adverts aimed at BAME staff at grassroots level and are generally lower paid roles. The notion is that they are more likely to work better with the cohort, then why not relate the same ideology to Senior Level too given many BAME's have the knowledge and qualifications.
13. So what prevents progression into Management in the Sector?
14. Let's look at Senior Managers, then look at the Middle Managers, more often than not they mirror the Senior Managers, which could mean there is an ingrained selective basis to certain types of people²⁹.
15. So what have we got?
16. More of the same, same attitudes, lack of diversity, similar belief sets and no inclusivity. The glass ceiling in the industry couldn't be more apparent.
17. What we have is an ingrained, systemic template, built over the years of how charities and foundations should be run and developed, and who best should run and manage them. Could this be institutional racism?
18. The reoccurring core group who always seems to need support are BAME's and other hard to reach communities, who are often perceived to be largely incapable of managing themselves out of poor health and range of other issues. Again racism could be at play here, reinforcing stereotypes and segmenting groups in this way does nothing to engender positivity with the decision makers of sports organisations when recruiting if BAME's are forever portrayed in the same way.
19. It is damaging and perpetuates the belief that BAME's are not highly educated and intelligent people.
20. The issue of racism in the industry is not new, recent moves by Sport England insisted that all NGB's must have inclusivity, and there was a rush of NGB's recruiting for BAME's to join their boards, so what does that mean longer term?³⁰

²⁸ <https://www.thersa.org/blog/2019/11/bame-leadership-diversity>

²⁹ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_HSZ4tKE6kyscBGI5yg5FTiQMXqKeTmz/view

³⁰ https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/styles/max_width_1266px/public/jp-for-leadership-diversity-story_0.jpg?ca59RKun_35zWZsAHxwwIrgRwqA9PgOj

21. Will they be able to influence decision makers, are they decision makers, will they have a role in changing attitudes and perceptions, will they be able to bring personal experiences to the table without feeling 'uneasy' about sharing.

22. Having inclusivity is not simply about having a BAME on a board or on a Senior Management team, it's about understanding why it's important and ensuring that it's in the heart of any organisation.

23. Recommendations

- Have open dialogue about racism and listen to valid recommendations and implement them
- Ensure equal opportunities is front and centre of all policies and adhered to
- Have regular discussions around racism and eradicate negative stereotyping and language should it appear
- Take a good hard look at your organisation and assess if you are perpetuating racial stereotypes in how and who you recruit
- Evaluate how you manage racism in your organisation and how effective it is
- Who is deemed more valuable in your organisation and are they rewarded differently
- Take a look at Senior Managers; if they do not reflect the communities they serve, why not?
- Ensure nepotisms are not reflected in recruitment processes, this can have a devastating effect on BAME's progressing and entering the sector in a similar way to Racism.

27 January 2021