

Pupils to Parliament – Written evidence (NPS0070)

"GETTING CHILDREN TO DO SPORTS AND BE ACTIVE"

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INTRODUCTION

1. Pupils 2 Parliament is an established project gathering school pupils' views for submission to Parliamentary Select Committee inquiries, and to government and national body consultations. Pupils' views are collected and faithfully reported independently, neutrally and without bias. We have permission from the Clerks of both Houses of Parliament to use the term 'Parliament' in the title.
2. This submission gives the views of 159 school pupils, aged from 8 to 17, from five primary schools (Colley Lane primary academy, Halesowen, St George's CE academy, Clun, Knighton Church in Wales school and Presteigne primary school) and one secondary school (Bishop Hereford's Bluecoat School, Hereford).
3. We focused on Question 2 in the Call for Evidence, which asks how children and young people can be encouraged to take part in sport and recreation.
4. Under Covid restrictions, we surveyed pupils online, and they sent their responses individually and directly to Pupils 2 Parliament. 55 younger children were helped by their parent or carer to operate the computer and type in their answers. To keep the children's views separate from the adults', the adults were asked to give their own answers separately from their child's.
5. This submission, including quotations from pupils, may be freely quoted in relation to the National Plan.

Do children and young people agree with the idea of getting their age groups more involved in sports and activities?

6. We asked pupils to vote for or against the proposal that children should do more sports and exercise.
7. The majority of pupils voted that, yes, children should do more sport and exercise. Out of 146 voting on this, 73% voted in favour, with only 3% against, and 24% 'in the middle' on the question.

What sports and activity do children and young people already do?

8. We asked the pupils what sports and exercise they usually did, both normally and during the time of Covid lockdown.
9. The most frequent six forms of sport or exercise taken by the children and young people in normal times were: first, walking; second, cycling; third, running (including local walks, jogging, sprinting, long distance walks and cross country); fourth, football (both in teams and with friends or family); fifth, swimming; , and sixth, gymnastics.
10. During times of lockdown, such as the period in which our survey took place, the top six were, in order with the most frequent first: walking (this time including much more dog walking); cycling; running; Joe Wicks video exercise sessions; football; and games, playing or exercise in the garden. Many activities had changed during lockdown – football was often in the garden (and even “football with the dog”), running was often around the house and garden, and walks outdoors were often shorter (and even at night).
11. We also asked whether the pupils saw themselves as usually an active sort of person. Just over half (52% of the 155 who answered this question) rated themselves as usually an active sort of person, only 5% as not usually active, and 43% as ‘in the middle’ for activity.

What do children and young people like about doing sports and activity?

12. To encourage children and young people to do more sports and activity through the National Plan, we thought it important for the Committee to know what it is that is most attractive about these activities.
13. We asked pupils to choose the type of sport they liked best, out of 3 alternatives. 140 answered this question. Top came team games, liked best by 74% of the children and young people. Second, a long way after that, came sports you play against just one other person (liked best by 14%). Third was the type of sport you do on your own, which was liked best by 12% of the pupils.
14. Next, we asked them to tell us which of 6 things they like most about doing sports. The most liked part of doing sports was getting fresh air outdoors (68% liked this aspect of doing sports). Very closely behind this came learning how to get better at a sport (which 67% liked). Next, 60% said they liked doing sports because it made them feel happy. 57% liked sports because it makes them feel stronger and healthier. Next came enjoying doing an activity with other children or young people (55% liked this aspect of doing sports). In last place came liking winning in sports (which 45% liked).

15. From this question, we also learned that 4% of the children and young people didn't like doing sports at all.

The sports and exercise children and young people do best and enjoy the most

16. We asked each pupil to tell us the type of sport or exercise they were best at, and then the type of sport or exercise they enjoyed the most. We wanted to see how far they enjoyed what they did best, or enjoyed sports they were not necessarily good at.

17. The six sports and activities pupils told us they were best at were, in order with the most frequent 'best sport' first: football; running; swimming; then in equal fourth place, basketball and gymnastics; and finally, netball.

18. The sports and activities they enjoyed most were, again in order with the most enjoyed first: football; running; then swimming and gymnastics in equal fourth place; followed by cycling, and then netball.

19. These lists are very similar, but we then compared what sport each pupil said they were the best at with the one they said they enjoyed the most.

20. Doing this comparison for 151 pupils who had answered both questions, we discovered that 72% were best at and most enjoyed the same sport or activity. But 28% did not list the sport they were best at as one they enjoyed the most. The figures were similar for both primary and secondary aged pupils. One pupil wrote "I'm not really good at any sports" but "I enjoy swimming".

21. Clearly, although the majority enjoy the sports and activities they are best at doing, we cannot assume that children and young people necessarily most enjoy the sports they are best at. From these pupils, 28%, nearly three in ten, of children and young people do not most enjoy the sport they are best at, or are not best at doing the sport they most enjoy doing.

What sport or exercise would children and young people like to be able to do next?

22. To encourage children and young people to take part in more sports and activity, it is important for the National Plan to reflect what children and young people would like to do next, beyond what they already do.

23. We asked pupils to tell us which of four different types of sport or exercise they would like to try next. The top choice (from 42% of the 144 who answered) was a sport they would probably be good at, next (from 26%) came trying a sport they have not tried before. After this (from 18%)

came the sort of sport that is very good for their health, and lastly (from 14%) came a sport they can enjoy but aren't good at.

24. Looking at this finding alongside the finding that as many as 28% of the pupils did not most enjoy the sport they were best at, it seems clear that children and young people most want to do sports that they are both likely to be good at and to enjoy a lot.
25. We also asked pupils, without any suggestions, to tell us which specific new sport or activity they would like to try doing next. The most frequent six identified, in order with the most frequent first, were: basketball; then in equal second place, tennis and football; then boxing; and finally in equal sixth place, gymnastics and netball.
26. One pupil summed it up when they wrote that children and young people should be able to do "something they personally like and are able to perform well with their friends".

What would get more children and young people doing sports and activity?

27. We asked, without making any suggestions, what the pupils thought would make children and young people want to get more exercise.
28. By far the most frequent thing that would get more children and young people doing more sports and activity, was making it all more fun than it is.
29. Next, though a long way behind making sports and activity more fun, came giving children and young people rewards for doing sports or activities. These might be money, prizes, sweets, treats or other incentives.
30. The third most often suggested way of getting children and young people to do more sport and activity was to strengthen their awareness of the benefits of doing sports and physical activities for their own physical and mental health.
31. Finally, it was pointed out by many that smart phones, online gaming, social media and many technological devices divert people from doing sports and other activities. Some suggested that taking phones and devices away would probably lead to children and young people doing more sports and physical activity. But doing things like this were suggested nowhere near as strongly as making sports and activity themselves more fun. Other ideas included having more clubs and facilities without high prices, more equipment, advertising sports and activities, letting children try lots of different sports to find their favourite sport, and helping children to afford bikes.

What puts children and young people off doing sports and activities?

32. As well as asking what might make children and young people do more sports and activity, we thought it important also to ask what might put them off doing sports and activity.
33. Two factors tied in first place for putting children and young people off sports and activity. These were bad weather (cold, wet, hot, rain), and being distracted by phones and online games. Two more tied in second place; not being good at sports or activities (or being told you aren't by others, or teased for not being good at a sport or activity), and wanting to watch TV instead. The next most common factor was getting very tired (including pushing yourself so hard you get exhausted). Three more factors were tied in the next place; being bullied about and in sports and activities, not wanting to do things because you were being pressured to do them, and worrying about getting hurt or injured. Other factors included being made to do sports you don't like, and the attitudes and reactions of other players; "arguments", "other children being silly", "people being so confident they'll win they put you off".

Who should be given the most chance to play a sport?

34. The National Plan needs to set out how money and other resources could be used to develop sports and activity in the future. We asked the pupils which of four different types of participation in sport should be encouraged the most.
35. We asked about participation by people who are already good at a sport, by people who enjoy a sport but aren't good at it, by people who are just learning a new sport, or by people who are so good that they might one day play that sport for their country.
36. 142 pupils answered this question. Their choice for the group who should be given the most chance to play a sport was, by far, people who really enjoy that sport, even if they aren't good at it. 69% wanted this to be the priority for future sports resources. This was followed by people who are just beginning to learn the sport, supported by 19% of the pupils. Tied in lowest position, each supported as the priority by only 6% of the pupils, came people who really enjoy that sport even if they aren't good at it, and people who are so good that they might one day play that sport for their country.

Is there anything children and young people feel isn't safe about doing sports?

37. By far the pupils' most frequently identified safety concern was the risk of getting hurt or injured doing sports or physical activities. Some sports were seen as having specific risks of injury; rugby was sometimes quoted as a more dangerous game, contact sports generally carry risks, cycling on main roads could be dangerous, and climbing (both rock climbing and using climbing walls) had risks of falling.
38. The second most frequently identified safety worry was that of getting hit by the playing equipment used in particular sports – being hit by fast-moving balls in ball games, or by bats or hockey sticks.
39. Two safety risks tied for third place. One was tripping or falling, especially if playing on tarmac or concrete. The other, worryingly, was fighting breaking out between players or sports people. Other safety risks included pushing yourself too hard ("overdose of high intensity"), doing sports and activities in bad weather, not having the right equipment or instruction, and "children not listening to instructions".
40. Some saw risk as just a part of sports and activity: "all sports can result in injury but it shouldn't stop you", "you can get hurt, but that is part of the experience".

Children and young people's good experiences in sports and activities

41. The Committee is interested in hearing about good experiences and successes in sports and activities. We believe that what children and young people enjoy, how they have been helped, and what makes them feel proud, in sports and activity, are all important to thinking about the future of sports and activity for children and young people. Here are some of the children and young people's sports and activity experiences, in their own words:

"when I won second place at gymnastics"

"when I jumped 3ft on my pony, I was so proud"

"I feel like everyone can do this but I scored my first goal and was so SO happy"

"swimming made me proud as I know how to swim in an emergency"

"it does not matter what you do as long as you're having fun"

"when I came second in cross country when on the last one I did I came sixteenth"

"doing sports I feel strong and energised ready to continue in sports"

"when you get something right, when you finally accomplish something after ages"

"winning a cup in a cup final and scoring"

"when I came first in my dance solo and when my team came first in gymnastics"

"I have won many medals and badges and trophies, I feel happy winning these"

"I was really proud when I got voted supporters player of the year by all the parents in my football team, and when I was voted sports ambassador for the school"

"I got helped to get better at swimming"

"I walked up a hill for 2 hours and the view was amazing"

"being the only boy in year 4 to be in the cross country competition"

"I used to enjoy my swimming lessons till the lockdown happened, but now can't get back my motivation"

"I got a certificate from a horse riding club so I wanted to do more and more"

"I have enjoyed playing sports with my dad in the garden during lockdown"

"I felt scared to try a new activity, when I watched others I thought I would like to try"

"I'm a dancer and I feel proud when I remember a routine"

"I felt proud of winning, I get helped by my teachers and my friends"

"I was proud of myself when I learned to ride a bike without stabilisers in about an hour"

"when I play football it makes me really happy especially when I get to do it with my friends and be part of an amazing team"

"I feel happier and finally have something I am dedicated about"

"I like being outdoors in the woods and running around, I like sawing up branches, and making dens – I don't really like team games"

"I really like learning swimming – when I receive my certificate it makes me feel I have achieved something great!"

"I love the water and just the way I feel going through the water"

"I enjoy myself whilst also making friends and bonding with my team-mates"

"when you help your team it feels AMAZING"

"it made me proud when I scored my first try in Rugby"

"we had to run around the field to make money for CHARITY! And when you was running around people were standing at points randomly across the field cheering you on, which made me want to run extra laps around the field"

"doing sports was amazing because you get fit, you get to meet people, you get to really become more social, you get to engage in teamwork, you get to learn and have fun. Most importantly, knowing that you have worked hard to achieve a goal ... and knowing that you're worked very hard really helps because you receive self-esteem and you want to work harder. The most important thing is you learn how to push through, not give up and always hope for the best and be positive no matter what"

"after you have done any sport or activities you feel uplifted and happy, even if you haven't won".

42.I am grateful to the Heads of the six schools which took part in the consultation for this submission, to the members of staff of each school who facilitated their pupils taking part despite the challenges of school closure during lockdown, and above all to the children and young people themselves for their thinking and views on this important subject.

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