

Chris Vine – Written evidence (NPS0099)

Introduction:

My name is Chris Vine, my company is C & SV consultants, I am a full-time tennis/squash coach and a sports consultant. I have extensive experience (42 years) in leisure management/coaching/sports development - having worked in some coaching/management/organisational capacity in pretty much every type of leisure and sports facility you could come across. I have also worked in and with primary and secondary schools and for 18 months as a School Games Organiser until I realised it would never work without a great deal of fundamental educational policy and strategy change.

My reason for submitting evidence is that I am very passionate about the benefits (physical and life) of a lifetime in and enjoyment of sports of all types. I play racket sports to a good level, but love watching all sports. Right now, sport in this country is at a crucial stage as we emerge from the awful physical and psychological effects of the virus. I feel that now is the right time for essential and fundamental change in the perception and profile of sport and recreation in this country. The virus has shown us one thing (amongst many) that fitter people have been able to shake this disease off to higher degree than those of a sedentary lifestyle and with obesity issues with the corresponding greater strain on the heart and aerobic system.

Now we need to consider solving some of the decades of (proper!) under investment in sport in the UK. Sport is not an ideal and just for those who will always find it, it should be for everyone and the sporting habit needs to be created MUCH EARLIER in a person's life – from reception/year one at school. It should be a priority afforded the same societal value as being able to read and write!

Call for Evidence – Sport and Recreation

Question 1:

At the moment in North Essex we (Tendring/Colchester) are involved with the Local Delivery Pilot Schemes co-ordinated in liaison with Active Essex. This seems to be working really well in terms of a focused effort to reduce inactivity across all spectrums. Funding is easily accessible for the right projects and addresses specific physical activity issues (i.e., lack of enough opportunities in deprived areas) – this in my opinion is the ideal way forward – it MUST however involve local schools (primary and Secondary) to a greater extent. There are significant problems currently in schools however!

Question 2:

This is currently a huge issue, there is nowhere near enough appropriate physical activity in schools especially primary schools. Teachers (in primaries) are reluctant to teach sport/physical activity, have limited knowledge of the subject and in my experience want to avoid it altogether. Before Covid hit, I worked at the Tiptree Heath primary school in Essex and taught Fundamental Movement Skills (ABC's)

and multi racket skills one day a week in curriculum delivery sessions to all ages from year 1-6 – this gave all of the children an opportunity to try to gain, and be taught, basic movement skills, plus they had the chance to acquire a degree of racket and ball skills much earlier on than they would have done had I not been there. Often the first time a child experiences the full game of Tennis/Badminton it is at year 7 in Secondary school of which 75% of them would have no ability to make any kind of purposeful contact with racket/ball/shuttle! a typical scenario in a secondary school tennis lesson at year 7 is 3 courts of absolute carnage – balls flying everywhere, lots of complete misses and the “sporty” kids making it work on one court down at the end! – with the supervising teacher looking at their watch wondering how much more time are they going to have to put up with it!

My point is, and I know this to be true (it certainly was/is in North Essex) where I live (and I used to work as the Tendring School Games Organiser) – only 25% of the 46 primary schools in my catchment attended the school games comps that I organised (in all sports) and invariably the teams from those schools were almost always the same kids turning up to play whatever sport it was. I tried as hard as I could to encourage the other primary schools to participate but despite many emails/telephone calls/visits, attending local sports co-ordinators meetings, the barriers were often too difficult to overcome as follows:

- We can't get cover so the teacher bringing the kids can't come out of school – so many last-minute cancellations or simply just didn't turn up.
- We don't have any sporty kids! – unbelievable but given as an excuse.
- We can't afford the transport.
- Headteacher didn't like sport – so never bothered to put teams in
- Sports co-ordinator at the school had none or extremely limited knowledge of sport at all – so didn't bother to enter teams because the kids never got the chance to practice before the comp.
- No response at all from the specified contact at the school – so many times!
- School only played football or a range of limited sports.
- “my kids” are not good enough to enter the comp so we won't be sending a team as they'll get thrashed!
- Schools not having any PE Co-ordinator at all or they were often frequently changing.
- No priority at all given to physical activities at school.

Unless there is a major change in Society/government/school heads/teacher's perception of the importance of physical activity, sport and recreation, and it moves up a few places from rock bottom in the priority list, this will never change. Kids cannot possibly gain any kind of enjoyment from sporting activities if they are never taught how to hit a ball/shuttle etc, how to catch and throw successfully, how to run efficiently and learn movement and co-ordination skills that they thought they were incapable of because they failed the first time they tried! – the key is to teach them all these things much EARLIER – from year one and either employ specialists (minimum of one in each school) or force/upskill primary teachers to teach PE properly. This isn't just employing a young person with limited sporting knowledge or just one sport (commonly currently football!) it should be an

experienced coach with a full range of how to teach the fundamental skills of pretty much all sports and physical activity including dance/gym/movement etc.

One more major barrier exists – and I experienced this so many times! – this is the school receptionist/office manager or finance manager who (especially if they didn't like sport themselves) would not pass on any information to the Head or relevant contact – often the information would never get past the first person, one lady (manager) boasted about this at a meeting I attended as the SGO, and said "I saw an email from the local rugby club and thought I don't like rugby so I just deleted it"... They would often make the decision about whether to pass on anything to do with sport and would in pretty much ALL circumstances never let you speak to the Headteacher on the phone & certainly not the first time you called.

In secondary schools – I have worked in and with these as well, there also major issues as follows:

PE teachers who are often specialists themselves (mostly football/rugby/hockey/netball) are often biased towards their chosen sport and the overwhelming majority do not have any kind of idea as to how to teach (or fault diagnose) racket sports – they are reluctant to teach Tennis/badminton/squash if they have courts as they do not know how to (teach) with a class of 30 effectively and the equipment is often at best threadbare due to buying the cheapest ones possible, but they seem to find the money when it comes to footballs etc!

I sat in at least 5 secondary school Heads of PE meetings during my time as an SGO and I lost count of the times they said the word can't at any suggestion of any other sport competitions than the traditional ones. One school in North Essex had squash courts – which were never used for squash – everything else but – dance/storage/table tennis/detention area etc etc!! only because the staff openly admitted they had no idea how to teach it, had no equipment and no interest – so they said from the kids! – which by the way was not true!

At these meetings, the excuses for non-participation in School games events were similar to the primary ones as follows:

- We don't have the time to take kids out of school for comps
- We don't have the transport.... (amazing considering how many minibuses they had!)
- We don't get paid for after school activities or to attend matches.
- We don't know or have any kids who play racket sports.
- We don't play or teach this sport at our school...

The Solution:

Firstly, ensure that all primary schoolchildren in every school, regardless of natural ability level age gender ethnic group, disability or culture are properly taught the fundamental movement skills – Agility, balance and co-ordination and achieve a degree (for them individually) of competence to allow them to participate in and enjoy physical activity from a much earlier age – ideally from year one!

Secondly, give children again from year one, the chance to acquire, develop (and be taught) a basic level of racket skills – not all kids like to play in a team or want to be the next Lionel Messi! – this is crucial if they are to just enjoy playing a sport of some description which (for them) will encourage the development and love of a physical habit activity (or activities) for life.

Thirdly, if the school does not have a PE specialist on their staff which is often the case let the external coaching specialists in! – obviously, they will need to have the relevant competencies, but this will need to be made compulsory – the Head teacher/Office manager/Head receptionist should not be making arbitrary decisions about whether their children are given the chance to develop a love, or experience of, all types of physical activity.

Fourthly, if we are to use the School Games competitions network effectively then the SGO's jobs should be made full-time in all areas! – and given the suitable level of authority to compel schools to participate in the competitions that they organise (across a wide range) and in addition ensure that as many children as possible are given a chance to be part of a school "team" – at the moment in all honesty its lip service at best!! Simply not bothering should not be acceptable for any school.

Fifth – Expand the remit of secondary school PE teachers to include all sports not just their specialist sports – if they lack knowledge then appropriate compulsory training is the answer. Also pay them for attending after school matches/competitions – if we want to restore the levels of previously experienced physical activities in younger people at a younger age, they will need a competitive framework (at all levels) in which to do so!

Finally ensure that the schools (Primary and Secondary) children's physical activity development plans are integrated into the Local delivery plans of physical activity (i.e., linked to local sports club providers, community groups/coaches etc) – there should be much greater local co-ordination with everyone who has a vested interest in sport and physical activity (and of course an appropriate level of funding!)

Just as a personal final point, ensure that all passionate and capable local sports coaches are paid properly and fully valued/appreciated for the time, expertise, and effort that they give. I appreciate there are voluntary coaches but if you want a degree of excellence then paying for it, to ensure accountability, quality, and consistency, is worth the investment. Coaches in the UK, like they do in the USA, should have a much higher status in society – they are often just as well qualified and experienced as those in well paid jobs (solicitors, lawyers, etc etc) but crucially currently paid a fraction of the salary! The current perception is as my dad said "when are you going to get a proper job!"

Chris Vine – Managing Director C & SV Consultants Ltd

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