

## 1. Background

- 1.1 Physical activity remains one of Scotland's major public health issues.<sup>1</sup>
- 1.2 One third of Scottish children are failing to meet the World Health Organisation's target of at least one hour of moderate activity on most days of the week.<sup>1</sup>
- 1.3 The main strategy for promoting physical activity in Scottish young people is the Active Schools Programme and a commitment to 2 hours of PE per week. These approaches have a strong emphasis on formal sport and supervised physical activity. [The Active Schools website states that the programme aim is to '**deliver** physical activity and sport before, during and after school and in the wider community.'<sup>2</sup>]

## 2. The importance of school grounds

- 2.1 The recent LMSMA review concluded the best way to get the nation active was neither through formal sport or 'delivery' of supervised physical activity but rather '*The creation and provision of environments that encourage and support physical activity offer the greatest potential to get the nation active.*'
- 2.2 The recent Scottish Government Early Years Framework supports this view and states that developing play spaces to promote activity should be a priority.
- 2.3 'Equally Well' concurs that '*Physical environments that promote healthy lifestyles for children, including opportunities for play and physical activity .... should be a priority for local authorities and other public services.*'
- 2.4 Children spend up to an hour per day in their school grounds.
- 2.5 Researchers have found that children are active in school break times – expending around two thirds of the energy of a formal PE class<sup>3</sup>. Researchers looking at PE lessons concluded that '*children were moderately or vigorously active for approximately 18 percent of the time available*<sup>4</sup>
- 2.6 Despite this comparatively high level of physical activity in break times, researchers have found that there is potential to increase it significantly as, on average, children are only physically active for around 50% of their break times<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Five Year Review of 'Let's Make Scotland More Active' - A strategy for physical Activity

<sup>2</sup> Active Schools website

<sup>3</sup> 'Increasing Children's volume of physical activity through walk and Play' Macket & Paskins, 2004. Contribution to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and Department of Health Consultation on 'Choosing Health, Choosing Activity: A Consultation on How to Increase Physical Activity', Spring 2004.

<sup>4</sup> 'Observation of children's physical activity levels in primary school: Is the school an ideal setting for meeting government activity targets?' in *European Physical Education Review* 2007; 13; 25 Waring, M et al

<sup>5</sup> Increasing children's physical activity levels during recess periods in elementary schools: the effects of providing game equipment, Verstraete, SJ et al.. [European Journal of Public Health](#), Volume 16, Number 4, August 2006 , pp. 415-419(5)

- 2.7 It is clear that there is significant potential to improve levels of physical activity in break time through transforming playgrounds into *'environments that encourage and support physical activity'*.
- 2.8 A summary of some of the different ways that schools can do this is given at the end of this brief. Many of these interventions lead to physical activity without the need for staff supervision, representing a cost effective approach.
- 2.9 Our surveys of schools who have improved their grounds found that levels of healthy active play increased in 85% of cases.

### **3. Current support for school grounds improvements**

- 3.1 Although key Scottish Government policy documents [Equally Well, the LMSMA review and the Early Years Framework] highlight the need to develop environments that promote physical activity, this is not matched by any specific programme or funding to encourage schools to develop the fabric of their grounds to promote physical activity.
- 3.2 We are not aware of any Local Authority in Scotland that has a proactive programme to improve the quality of its grounds to encourage unsupervised physical activity.
- 3.3 The majority of Scotland's newly built schools do little to promote physical activity in break time. Research carried out as part of last year's Audit Scotland review of new schools concluded that *'Often there is very little space that could be described as a playground, nowhere to sit and no demarcation between space for cars and for people. Not many secondary school pupils felt they had access to a real playground.'*<sup>6</sup>
- 3.4 Where schools have developed their spaces for physical activity, this has most commonly been initiated by parents and paid for with funds raised by parents.
- 3.5 This means that the poorest quality playgrounds are generally in areas of low socio economic status where activity levels are lower and communities already suffer from health inequalities.
- 3.6 A recent GfL survey found that over 50% of primary schools had no features in their grounds to encourage balancing, scrambling or climbing and 30% didn't have a good range of playground marking to encourage games
- 3.7 The significant potential to improve physical activity through better use of break times will not be realised under current initiatives. Inequalities in provision between poorer and wealthier areas will be maintained.

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<sup>6</sup> [www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/central/2007/nr\\_080320\\_school\\_estate\\_focus\\_group.pdf](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/central/2007/nr_080320_school_estate_focus_group.pdf)

## **4. Realising the potential**

- 4.1 Grounds for Learning is the Scottish charity for school grounds. We support schools and early years settings to create fun and inspiring outdoor spaces for health, learning, play, sustainability, sociability and fun.
- 4.2 We would welcome opportunities to discuss with Local Authorities how we could support them to develop their grounds into environments that encourage physical activity.

# Encouraging informal physical activity in school grounds

**Grounds for Learning** is the Scottish school grounds charity, supporting schools and early years settings to create fun and inspiring outdoor spaces for health, learning, sustainability and positive behaviour. Grounds are well understood as important spaces for supervised sports provision. But they also have huge potential for the promotion of informal physical activity – potential that is often overlooked. **In a survey of schools that had improved their grounds, 85% reported an improvement in healthy, active play.**

This advice note outlines some simple, effective [and often low cost] ways of helping to promote physical activity during non-class time.



## traversing walls

These are exciting and safe climbing walls where children's feet are never higher than 40cm above the ground. Foot and hand holds are fixed directly onto existing walls, either by a specialist company or in house using kit materials to keep costs down. Traversing walls are extremely popular with pupils and develop co-ordination, agility and upper body strength.

## orienteeering or activity trails

Orienteering trails can be set around school grounds for use in break times. To add to the challenge some schools set a range of curriculum-based questions at the control points. For younger children the same idea can be adapted into a treasure hunt format or an activity trail [such as a maths or science trail] with various stage-specific questions and challenges.

## temporary play equipment

Having access to simple play equipment [balls, hoops, skipping ropes etc.] in break time is an effective way of promoting activity. Ideally this equipment should be located close to exits so that it is readily accessible to pupils.



## trim trails

These consist of a number of challenges that help to develop balance, agility, confidence and upper body strength. The most common features include wobble boards, stepping stones, balance beams, monkey bars, ladders, chin up bars and jumps. Trails can often be located around the periphery of grounds to avoid taking up too much space and can also be extended over time as funds permit. Low level trails generally don't require any special safety surfacing.



## playground markings

These are hugely significant, especially in the primary sector, yet easily overlooked. There are the old favourites [like hopscotch], 'board games' like snakes and ladders or draughts, counting snakes or centipedes, mazes and labyrinths, footprint activity trails, targets, river crossing games ... the list is as long as your imagination. Why not involve pupils in designing markings and then trialling different options using chalk? For a useful guide to markings for activity visit:

[www.healthschool.org.uk/pdf/healthpromoting\\_playground.pdf](http://www.healthschool.org.uk/pdf/healthpromoting_playground.pdf)



## goals, targets, hoops

You don't need a lot of space to encourage pupils to hone their sports skills. Goals, stumps or targets on a wall and netball / basketball hoops are inexpensive and effective ways of promoting activity.

## natural features and varied topography

Large boulders and tree trunks or logs can be seats, scrambling zones, jumps or balancing beams. Slopes and mounds help to develop balance and co-ordination.

## tunnels and tyres

A mound can be readily combined with a large diameter section of pipe to create a tunnel. Tyres can be used imaginatively in lots of ways – rolling, jumping or balancing.



## shelter and clothing

How often does a bit of wet weather condemn children to inactive indoor breaks? Highland council have bought wet weather clothing for all preschool children as part of their 'rain starts play' project. Storage for wet weather clothing, spare clothes and a bit of shelter can turn rainy days into active fun times.

## colour and murals



Colourful murals and markings can help to stimulate imaginative play and active lifestyles.

### playground activity supervisors

This role commonly falls to staff but older pupils can be trained to act as playground supervisors and games organisers using temporary equipment and helping to promote inclusive and active play.



### growing

School gardens are great for learning about food, plants and wildlife – but they're also a useful way of promoting activity. Digging, weeding, planting and watering can be a part of break time or an after-school club - at early years, primary or secondary level. There is scope for almost any school to get involved in active growing – from a few simple containers, through larger planters to a fully developed school garden.



### grounds improvements

Involving pupils in the transformation of their outdoor spaces keeps them active and gives them a greater sense of ownership and pride.

### zoning

Not everyone wants to be active all the time. It is helpful to create a number of different zones to enable different types of activity [as well as quiet and rest] to be accommodated with minimal conflict.

### active travel

It's amazing how many schools still don't have proper cycle storage / parking facilities. For more on safe and healthy travel to schools visit <http://www.saferoutestoschools.org.uk/>



### dance, acting and role play

Some schools create simple stages using decking, with or without a painted backdrop and find pupils performing dances or songs in their break times. Dressing up boxes can help to encourage imagination and acting for younger children.



### active play in early years

Think about balance [a chalk line or uneven surfaces], coordination [throwing, climbing, hammering], sense of space [tunnels, tyres, steps] strength [jump off points, wheeled vehicles, things to fill and carry and push and pull], agility [stepping stones & balancing], and flexibility [crawling tunnels, traversing walls etc.].

### litter patrols

Keep your grounds tidy and your pupils active at the same time!

### how we can help

- **Training** – our CPD accredited training can help you improve your outdoor spaces and use them more effectively for learning, activity, emotional well-being and fun.
- **Membership** – gives you advice by phone and email and access to our comprehensive library of online resources
- **Advisory visits** – we can visit your school to give you practical advice on developing your grounds. We can tie this in with a workshop for your eco-committee or a twilight session with your staff.
- **Free termly newsletter** – ideas and news free to your inbox every term.

