

News story: Government and top sports bodies to help children play more sport

Education Secretary Damian Hinds has called on the country's leading sporting organisations to work in partnership with the Government to improve school sport and ensure all children have the opportunity to take part in competitive sport and increase their activity levels.

At a summit of top sporting organisations including the Premier League, the Rugby Football Union and England Hockey, Mr Hinds and the Sports Minister Mims Davies asked the country's biggest sporting institutions to advise the Government, ahead of the School Sport Action Plan next year, on how to help children to harness the benefits of sport. These include greater self-belief, working towards long-term goals and recovering from setbacks – alongside well-documented benefits to their physical and mental wellbeing.

The Education Secretary set out his ambition for every child to have the opportunity to take part in competitive sport, discussing with the summit's attendees how to work with schools and other sports bodies to achieve this aim. The Sports Minister underlined this message, and set out the importance of fun and enjoyment in getting children active and developing a lifelong habit of participation.

The Government's School Sport Action Plan will ensure that all children have access to quality, protected PE and sport sessions during the school week and opportunities to be physically active throughout the school day. It will set out an ambition for all pupils to have access to a wide range of sports and physical activities, with a focus on health, wellbeing and character. It will also promote a joined-up approach to physical activity, supporting schools through the local community and encouraging families to get active together.

Addressing today's summit, education secretary Damian Hinds said:

Education is not just about the taking and passing of exams, important though these are. We want all young people to leave formal education as happy, confident and well-rounded individuals. It is clear that exercise and organised sport in particular can play a huge part in children's personal resilience and emotional wellbeing.

Sporting bodies are offering a huge number of programmes and we want to work together to improve the co-ordination of these so they are easier for schools and teachers to use.

If opportunities are limited, there is a risk that children will give up – literally at the first hurdle – if they don't find a sport they enjoy; or else they'll think it's just not for them. A clear message I have taken is the role the education system can play in giving guidance to schools on what good school sport looks like, therefore enabling sports clubs and foundations to flourish.

The Action Plan will build on the recent publication of data from the Active Lives Children's survey, which found that one-third (33%) of children and young people do less than 30 minutes of activity per day.

It also highlighted disparities in activity levels between boys and girls, as well as children of different socio-economic backgrounds and some BAME groups. A key aim for the plan will be to engage the least active groups, ensuring that all children have equal opportunities and encouragement to develop an active lifestyle.

Sports Minister Mims Davies said:

Sport has the power to boost physical and mental wellbeing, while teaching important life skills. We are committed to building on the fantastic range of programmes already provided by the governing bodies here today to reach even more young people.

Our upcoming School Sport and Physical Activity Action Plan will give all children access to quality PE, sport sessions and clubs, in school, after school and during weekends and holidays. We know that fun and enjoyment are the key to children building a positive relationship with sport and physical activity. I look forward to working with schools, the sport sector, parents and local communities to ensure that the next generation have the best opportunities to be active and live healthy lives.

Public Health Minister Steve Brine said:

Exercise brings enormous health and wellbeing benefits and I do not underestimate the value of ensuring children are encouraged to live active lives. We want all children to have access to quality school sport and physical activity that caters to all levels, so even the least active children have the opportunity to get moving, and live healthy lives.

That's why as part of our plans to reduce child obesity we have encouraged every primary school in the country to offer an active mile initiative.

Sports governing bodies at the meeting welcomed the cross-government commitment to getting more children involved.

Wayne Morris, Director of Corporate Social Responsibility and Community Engagement at Premiership Rugby, said:

Through our community work in schools, we use rugby to teach children how the values of the game, such as discipline, respect, teamwork and sportsmanship can be transferred to their own lives, whether that be achieving at school, at work or in relationships. Sport is a powerful medium to teach children about life.

Jane Nickerson, CEO of Swim England, said:

Swimming is a great way to engage children and young people in sport while also developing an essential life skill. We welcome this move to get more children involved in sport and physical activity and look forward to supporting government on this initiative.