



## Physical education, school sport and physical activity

### Girls Active case study

#### Background of school

The Heathland School is an outstanding, co-educational, community comprehensive school for 11-18 year olds in the London Borough of Hounslow. It is a larger-than-average-sized school where the proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is much higher than the national average. The largest groups are of Indian or Pakistani origin with around 20 per cent of students being of Somali origin. A large proportion of students are Muslim and the number of students who speak English as an additional language is higher than the national average. The Heathland School specialises in maths and science.

#### Background of girls' participation in PE, physical activity and sport

As the school provides free after-school sports clubs, students in years 7 and 8 were keen attendees as they have usually had to pay for extra-curricular opportunities in their primary schools. However, from the end of year 8 onwards, girls' participation dropped rapidly, with only those who were members of the school teams continuing to participate in extra-curricular sessions.

Through involvement in parents' evenings, the PE staff were aware that, generally, parents did not see physical activity as being important for their daughters. They tended to underestimate how much activity the girls should be doing in terms of the benefits to their health and prioritised attendance at clubs for academic subjects rather than for sport and physical activity. This was exacerbated for Muslim girls where there were additional cultural expectations in terms of their dress and leisure time. Generally, parents too were less active than they should be.

#### What were the intended outcomes of the intervention?

The school wanted to raise parents' awareness of the need for young people to lead active lifestyles and create greater family support for girls to be active. It also wanted to offer a greater range of activities to encourage girls to participate beyond curriculum PE. As dads, rather than mums, tend to be the main influencers and decision-makers in the students' homes, the school recognised the need to engage the adult males in the household.

#### What took place and who was involved?

The PE department implemented the Girls Active pre-intervention survey during PE lessons. While one teacher supported students to complete the online questionnaire, another teacher played some of the videos shown at the Girls Active teacher-training and opened up discussions

with the girls. This highlighted the fact that some of the girls' perceptions of PE and school sport differed from staff assumptions and provided the department with a real insight into the girls' views. From this, it also became clear that lack of family encouragement and, in particular, lack of dads' understanding were major barriers to girls' participation in extra-curricular clubs. To tackle this, the department decided to set up a *Dads and Daughters* event.

Meanwhile, the school had recruited 20 girls as Girls Active leaders. Initially these had been girls who already played sport but, over time, less active girls became involved and had greater influence over their peers. The Girls Active leaders endorsed the idea of the event, designed a *Dads and Daughters* leaflet, which included messages around healthy active lifestyles – including the impact of physical activity on attainment, and came up with the idea of talking to the dads and promoting positive messages at the event. In PE lessons, female students were issued with invitation letters to take home and dads replied direct to the PE department. In addition, through a teacher with a primary-outreach role, local primary schools were asked to promote the event to their pupils.

The event was held on a Wednesday evening in June in the school's sports hall. The activities were run informally, with dads and daughters visiting different stations in their own time, and included climbing (on the indoor wall), trampolining, badminton, table tennis and Just Dance – led by an onscreen resource. Girls Active leaders and PE staff chatted to the families as they participated, music was played and the event had a very relaxed, enjoyable atmosphere.

As well as the *Dads and Daughters* event, the school's consultation with the girls led to the establishment of new clubs and the offer of more fitness-related activities. A female PE teacher leads a 30-minute aerobics session at 8am on two mornings each week and this is very well attended by the girls. An after-school badminton club, run by an external coach, is very popular and enables the girls to play recreationally and competitively without joining a team. As an incentive, girls receive a raffle ticket every time they attend an extra-curricular sports club. These go into a draw, with the prize being an iPod that the girls can play during fitness sessions. (Next year the prize is likely to be a Fitbit.)

### **What impact did this have on pupils?**

Girls' participation in extra-curricular sport and physical activity has increased as a result of the new sessions. It is too early to judge the impact of the *Dads and Daughters* event but, as the feedback was so positive and the participants talked about "enjoying being healthy", the school intends to run it again next year.

### **What impact did this have on the PE department?**

Curriculum PE has not been an issue in the school but the girls' increased participation in extra-curricular activity has shown the benefits to the whole department of offering a wider menu of opportunities. The whole department is supportive of Girls Active and, in particular, recognises the value of having conversations with and listening to the girls.

## What impact did this have on the whole school?

Unfortunately, the *Dads and Daughters* event clashed with Eid (which could not have been predicted at the planning stage) so was less well attended than had been hoped for. However, the families who attended were very positive and many who were unable to attend stressed that they would have done so but for Eid. In particular, the dads commented on their increased understanding of the importance of physical activity to their daughters' health, wellbeing and educational achievement and began to recognise the need for the girls to be able to relax as well as study if they are to fulfil their academic potential. In addition, they said that they had enjoyed spending informal time with their daughters and recognised physical activity as being a way they could build positive relationships with the girls as often they get insufficient time with them at home.

## Key successes

- Using the Girls Active pre-intervention survey to kick-start a process rather than viewing it as an admin task that needed to be completed for a programme.
- Taking time, and involving sufficient staff, to have open and meaningful discussions with the girls. This includes actively listening to the girls instead of just responding to staff assumptions.
- Involving the girls in further developing the event, building on their ideas and enthusiasm.

Next time the school will:

- Run the event at a different time of the year, probably winter, to avoid any clashes with Ramadan or Eid.
- Enable the Girls Active leaders to promote the event to the primary pupils, through visiting and delivering assemblies, rather than relying on the primary staff to publicise it.
- Invite more staff, beyond the PE department, to join in the event as role models, bringing their dads and/or daughters too.

## Embedding and sustaining the intervention

For next academic year, the PE department plans to work more closely with PSHE and target the year 7 students, building the need for healthy active lifestyles into the regular tutor group sessions on personal, social and health education.