

7 Years Not Entirely Wasted.

There has been so much chatter, especially in the EduTwitter echo chamber recently, about how the 7 years and £1.3b of the PE and School Sport premium (PESSP) has been wasted. I disagree. Whilst I recognise that there have undoubtedly been opportunities missed, I want to present a more positive take on the long-term legacy this important funding will have.

When the PESSP was introduced in 2012 as an Olympic legacy it had a grand aim; to create a generation of fitter, stronger, healthier children. An admirable target.

The problem was that the guidance for how schools should use that funding was late, six months late in fact, and when it came it was far too vague. Gone were the School Sports Partnerships with the experienced PDM's who had the ear of head teachers and who advised schools. Instead came full autonomy with the money and the responsibility for due diligence, supplier vetting, budget management and investigating the best resources all landed on the desks of very busy head teachers. It was a lot of money for each school to deal with at £8000 and £5 per pupil (it doubled to £16k and £10 per pupil in 2017) and they had other priorities and an already tough job under a government still pushing a harsh austerity programme in all other areas of school life. They were faced with difficult staff reductions and many tough decisions about how to manage costs, not least how to introduce free school meals for all key stage 1 children (in this 2013 policy the cost of the food was covered, but the logistics, equipment and staff weren't). Faced with these incredibly tough decisions and with £11000 of PESS premium burning a hole in their pockets most initially did one of two things. The majority chose to spend a large part of the money with external companies, outsourcing a subject their teachers were unconfident and unmotivated to deliver to external coaches. Others, under great pressure, used the money to plug holes in other parts of their budgets.

The first group, the ones who brought in external coaches saw a real uplift in the enjoyment of children in PE lessons and a weight lifted from the shoulders of their teachers who, let's be entirely honest, often dreaded delivering the subject. By working with coaches, children's relationship with PE generally improved (enthusiastic delivery does this) and schools felt this was PE 'covered' – mainly so that they could then concentrate on what they saw as more important – the numeracy and literacy sticks with which they are constantly beaten. Over this same period a major caveat to school performance, the statistical neighbour comparisons, were taken out of the equation so it became even tougher for schools as no consideration was given to their intake; they were fighting their demographics to aspire to new and ever harder national floor targets and it's these areas that schools are judged on, not on PE, so knowing that you didn't have to worry about PE was a blessing.

Over the life of the PESS premium there has been growing pressure from organisations like the Association of PE (AfPE) and The Youth Sports Trust (YST) to make sure that generalist class teachers were gaining CPD experience by working alongside the coaches, conscious of what happens if money is withdrawn, but in reality it was in the early days that once a class teacher saw the coach could control the group they quickly found other priorities and drifted out of PE lessons altogether. 'I've just got to do this bit of marking... Do you mind if I take a

couple of readers out...I've just got to catch up with...' No one can or should blame them for this when it's put into context.

OFSTED inspectors (fleetingly) saw coaches delivering PE lessons and paid no attention to the noise that teachers should be delivering PE and nor did they scrutinise what schools were using the funding for – they don't have the time or capacity to do so. As the only organisation with any real authority over schools, if OFSTED didn't see it as important why would a school?

Teachers with coaches quickly saw that they weren't needed and many said PE simply wasn't up their street. In 2017 I spoke to a lecturer from a leading university who had a real insight and told me that if you took a PE lesson with a class of Primary pupils in the last 30 years and separated them into highly engaged, moderately engaged and less engaged, the children that would go onto become Primary teachers were far more likely to come from the less engaged group. It's anecdotal and unresearched but, having spent the last 12 years in hundreds of staff rooms, I would struggle to disagree. People who did not enjoy their own experience of PE can find it really hard to help others enjoy PE – It's a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Personally I think a lot of the money has been wasted on trying to train established teachers who didn't want to be trained when it should have focussed on major changes to Initial Teacher Training at Universities from the start – Thankfully we've seen a real step change over the past couple of years though and this has really started to take off, led by the strong advocate lecturers on PGCE courses, many of whom were part of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on a Fit and Healthy Childhood which recommend exactly this in their report of 2018, which caused a new flush of optimism within the sector. As a result we're now seeing more and more Primary PCGE with PE specialism courses delivered by our universities (meaning those children from our 'more engaged in PE' group are now more likely to become primary school teachers) and we're seeing PE and physically active learning given far more time and importance in generalist primary PGCE's. I've seen fantastic examples of this first-hand at the Carnegie School of Education at Leeds Beckett University with trainee teachers telling me that they had been dreading PE but were now looking forward to delivering it thanks to their course tutors.

I'm hopeful that we are changing the priority teachers place on PE and physical activity before they even become teachers. We're definitely changing the intake thanks to the PE specialism and that's clearly a sustainable approach – if the school leaders of the future have a better relationship with physical activity and they see it's power they can and will pass this on to their own staff and pupils. It's a long game, but a smart one.

That's for the future. Let's get back to the situation evolving in schools over the last 7 years of the PESS premium and the reasons I consider it a success.

To justify their existence many of the coaching companies working in schools (mine included) quickly got better. As commercial organisations they obviously wanted to deliver a great service to keep their new clients happy, so better lesson planning developed into full curriculums built with deep PE subject knowledge, the coaches became better vetted and better qualified and good CPD within the coaching sector became largely the norm. This has

driven the quality of the subject up significantly and has seen close attention given to developing the fine, gross motor and important soft skills people need for life. Better at catching than you were? You'll have better pen control. Better at Communicating than you were? You'll be better equipped to deliver feedback at work. Better at balancing? You're less likely to sustain injuries. This level of detail in a previously badly neglected subject area is something I think the coaching industry can be very proud of.

Because these coaches aren't teachers they are able to connect with children on a different level, they brought a fresh enthusiasm without the baggage of the rest of the week – and here's the important part: if you ask children who have had coaches in their schools what they think of PE now I strongly believe that you'll see a massive uplift in the numbers of those saying they enjoy PE compared to before the PESS premium. I know at least one school who give extra PE lesson as a class treat because they know how much all the kids look forward to it. That same school also puts on extra PE in SATS week, because it knows how important physical activity is to academic performance.

Over the last 7 years the fact is that coaches have become part of the fabric of many primary schools and have played a huge role in improving this generations relationship with being active. They have facilitated many thousands of hours of positive physical activity through breakfast, lunch and after school clubs; led on projects like Change4Life; driven children to improve their personal best; taken teams to competitions; signposted them into elite coaching pathways and introduced them to local clubs, creating amazing memories for millions of children in the process. In my opinion that volume and quality of physical activity opportunities cannot be offered by overworked generalist teachers without a radical shake up of staff recruitment and deployment in schools and it would be awful if that was lost.

Of course, I do understand the sustainability argument, but if the funding stopped tomorrow, as well as reflecting on what we could have done better we should take stock of what has been achieved.

7 years of children have had great experiences and have had at least 1 positive physical active role model in their lives. More children than ever don't hate PE. There is still an obesity crisis and loving PE does not equate to stopping that bus hurtling over the cliff edge – that's a far wider societal problem, but it does apply the handbrake a little and give us a better chance of establishing positive lifelong habits. If more pupils remember PE with fondness and see it as a lesson they looked forward to then maybe we'll see an impact in 30 years. It's simply got to give us more fertile ground than yet another generation of kids who say they 'hated PE'.

If the funding was to stop – and I think a change to a broader Wellbeing fund is more likely than a total halt - I really believe schools should continue to work with PE coaches; giving every child 1 hour with a coach (as PPA time) and 1 hour with a class teacher (who will hopefully be the new type of teacher coming out of better PGCE courses).

It gives the children all the benefits and de-skills no-one. It allows the school to have a wide range of out of hours provision that teachers can't deliver and gives the school a strong, professional voice to steer physical activity alongside the schools PE lead.

Most of all it continues to give children a positive role model, the power of which cannot be underestimated.

So let's not be down. We've made real strides. Let's reflect, celebrate what we do and continue to shout about our brilliant subject and the power it can have.

We've created a Best Practice model for Primary school PE. [Click here to read more about it](#) and get in touch if you would like a discussion about how to make a lasting impact.