

Youth Sport Trust

Active Recovery Curriculum Case Study

Delivering a targeted physical activity intervention to develop
confidence and skills



St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Christchurch

July 2021

About *spear*

The Centre for Sport, Physical Education & Activity Research (*spear*) is located within the Faculty of Science, Engineering & Social Sciences at Canterbury Christ Church University. *spear* undertakes a range of evidence-led analyses, from critical commentaries and reflections on current policy and practice, to commissioned research, evaluation and consultancy.

The Centre's research is funded by a range of national and international funders such as the International Olympic Committee, World Health Organisation, Terre des Hommes, Department of Health, Department for Education, Youth Sport Trust, Chance to Shine, Premiership Rugby, Sport Birmingham, parkrun UK and Sport England. Recent work has focused on sport, physical activity, health and wellbeing in schools and communities.

Research conducted by *spear* helps guide and inform public policy by contributing to the wider evidence base used by policy makers, providing a rationale for government and commercial investment, and steering programme improvements that enhance the experience of practitioners and participants.

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Active Recovery Curriculum evaluation undertaken by *spear* and commissioned by Youth Sport Trust. Case study produced by *spear*.

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Context & Reasons for Engagement



St Joseph's Catholic Primary school is an urban one form entry school in Christchurch, Dorset. The school has a mixed demographic and a reputation of high achieving SATs scores. The school consider themselves to be sporty and recognise the wide-ranging benefits of being physically active and spending time outdoors. As such, re-gaining fitness levels and increasing engagement in physical activity is a top priority for the school.

After lockdown....

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There were gaps across the board, and we really noticed behaviour had gone downhill, we had a few really tough weeks from March 8th to the Easter holidays where we just had to go back to basics and again the sport helped with that so much as it teaches them different skills.

Headteacher

On return to school after lockdown...

When pupils returned to school in March 2021 there were gaps in many areas of pupil development, ranging from basic selfcare skills through to academic development. In the first weeks back at school, Headteacher, Mrs Elizabeth Rippon, reported a decline in pupil behaviour as pupils re-established structure and routine. Impaired social skills and an increase in pupils falling out with friends was also reported.

Many of St Joseph's pupils live in flats or do not have access to gardens. As such, time spent being active and outdoors at home was limited for many. During the final winter lockdown in particular many children were inside most of the time and had lost interest in going to parks or green spaces. Pupils report being excited to return to PE lessons and to have opportunities to be active once again, however, many children displayed clear reductions in fitness, and were less motivated than before.

Concerns about pupil mental health and wellbeing were also apparent, and this became a focal point of activities throughout the Summer term. St Josephs provided additional sessions with their 'Emotional Literacy Support Assistant'. To align with National School Sports Week, the school included non-traditional activities such as yoga and mindfulness practices, in a bid to introduce children to a holistic approach to overall wellbeing.

To build up fitness and other skills in children most affected by the lockdowns, St Josephs developed intervention sessions for PE, as they would for other core subjects such as literacy or Maths. Class teachers identified about 12 children from each class in years 1-5 who would most benefit from some additional outdoor weekly physical activity, and these children took part in REACTIVE-8 sessions, a programme designed and delivered by PE coordinator, Mr Nathan Rickard.



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We wanted to make sure our children are active after the lockdown, we're really into sports at school anyway but felt the children have had a lot of time inside and sports not just about fitness it's more than that, resilience, working as a team socially.

PE Coordinator

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As a school we are always trying to find ways of improving the whole child, we understand the benefit of physical activity on the children, and it helps them learn so by doing the REACTIVE-8 programme they are in a better frame of mind to learn in the classroom.

PE coordinator

Activities

One of the key elements of the Active Recovery Curriculum at St Josephes was REACTIVE-8, a specially designed physical activity intervention programme to help pupils regain fitness and enhance other development skills following COVID-19.

Sessions were attended during curriculum time on Thursday and Friday afternoons by the 12 children selected from each year group. The outdoor multi-sport sessions ran once a week on the hard play area throughout the spring and summer terms. Pupils

REACTIVE-8:

Resilience
Empathy
Agility
Co-ordination
Teamwork
Integrity
Versatility
Enjoyment

worked in pairs and one scored while the other did the activity, before they switched roles. This promoted communication, teamwork and empathy as they offered one another encouragement. Scores were recorded and they had an opportunity to improve upon previous scores each week.

To increase time spent outside, curriculum lessons such as maths, geography and literacy were also taken outside where possible. The school have an orienteering course on the grounds and some lessons used this for pupils to answer questions about a topic area at each checkpoint.

Despite not being able to offer an annual residential trip to older pupils, residual activity funding was used to take Year 5 and 6 pupils to local adventure centres to engage in a range of watersports and outdoor activities that many wouldn't otherwise have the chance to do.



Observations

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They enjoy doing it because it's a social thing, they're laughing, joking, and having fun which they haven't been able to do because they've been in isolation.

PE coordinator

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We've got an orienteering setup around here where we've done questions and answers relating to a subject, for example geography and asking about capitals.

PE coordinator

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I'm more active at school compared to when I was at home.

Year 2 pupil

“

Being active at school makes me feel more confident and helps me feel less nervous.

Year 3 pupil

“

I feel happy, confident, excited, because it's fun.

Year 3 pupil

Impact

St Joseph's pupils report really enjoying the additional opportunities to be active at school. Teachers report pupils asking if they can do more of the REACTIVE-8 programme, and pupils who were not involved have asked if they can be next term. St Joseph's plans to continue to incorporate REACTIVE-8 into their curriculum and will develop the programme to meet the changing needs of pupils and try to include more pupils.



Being outdoors

Spending more time outdoors has been very important to pupils, many of whom would choose to play outside regardless of the weather. Pupils recognise that getting fresh air is fun and makes them feel happier.



How do you feel about being active at school?

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I like doing sport. It makes me happy and tired.

Year 2 pupil

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Being outside is important because you're with friends and family and in nature.

Year 3 pupil

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I love doing outdoor things and being active is important.

Year 3 pupil

“

I'm happy because I'm active, it's important because you can get fit and healthy and don't have to stay inside.

Year 3 pupil

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Being active makes me feel happy and joyful and it makes me feel better if I'm upset or sad because it's fun.

Year 2 pupil

Academic development

A lot of academic progress has been made since pupils returned, and headteacher Mrs Elizabeth Rippon comments that the gap in learning is 'starting to close' and she feels positive about pupils' potential to achieve in the next academic year. Following REACTIVE-8 sessions, the shift in attitudes to learning and feedback from pupils has been extremely positive.

Confidence



Although the REACTIVE-8 programme focuses on a range of skills and abilities, the overall goal is to improve physical fitness for those who most needed it. The multi-sport focus of REACTIVE-8 and activities offered in off-site adventure facilities have helped to expand pupils comfort zones and increased their motivation to participate.

Headteacher, Elizabeth Rippon said: *“It has helped the children's confidence, we weren't expecting it to do that but it's helped their confidence and enthusiasm for sport. It's given them those skills to join in and social skills of being part of a team.”*

Healthy School Community

Not only are children more motivated to engage in physical activity in school, but PE coordinator Mr Nathan Rickard comments that the programme has *“encouraged children to practice physical activity at home”*. The wider school community have also benefited from St Joseph's Active Recovery Curriculum. Class teachers have benefitted from smaller class sizes while some pupils have been in REACTIVE-8 intervention sessions, and teacher have also found those pupils to be more focussed in lessons. Mrs Elizabeth Rippon says, *“I think if the children are benefiting then the teachers love it.”*



Top Tips

1) Teamwork opportunities

Give children opportunities to work with and support one another through physical activity. This helps to develop communication skills, empathy and to socialise through shared interests and experiences.



2) Offer non-traditional activities

Activities such as Yoga and Mindfulness encourage pupils to make connections between their physical and mental health and develop an understanding of the importance of both for overall wellbeing.

3) Get Outside

After long periods of time confined indoors, children really appreciate the opportunity to get fresh air and enjoy open spaces. Explore opportunities to deliver sections of lessons outside and increase children's activity levels.



Achievements

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Getting the students to socialise more and bond and come out of their shells a bit more. We let them get outside and play together and rediscover those friendships.

Challenges

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The biggest challenge when the children came back to school is them learning how to play together again, the socialisation. It was across the year groups, and we got little fall outs because they've been away from each other for so long.

PE Coordinator, Mr
Nathan Rickard