

Youth Sport Trust

## Active Recovery Curriculum Case Study

Restoring socialisation and readiness for learning with a reduced curriculum and increased PE focus



Holy Family Catholic School, Birmingham

June 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 evidenced 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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## Context & Reasons for Engagement



Holy Family Catholic school is a small one form entry primary school located in the Small Heath area of Birmingham. Pupils live within a few streets of the school in an urban location, with limited access to parks and outdoor green spaces. Within the community, social deprivation and obesity levels are higher than average.

The school itself has a small playground with some football goals and basketball nets and a trim trail around the edge. Physical activities also take place in the school hall; however, this multipurpose space also houses canteen tables, and is unsuitable for activities that involve big groups of pupils at the same time. The school usually make use of specialist PE teachers and sports coaches from a local secondary school to lead their PE curriculum, but opportunities outside of this have been previously limited.

## On return to school after lockdown...

When pupils returned to school on the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021, following a year of intermittent lockdowns, NQT, Year 3 class teacher and newly appointed PE coordinator Drew Hill, reported pupils were somewhat 'disengaged and preoccupied'. Elements of their learning, including handwriting and concentration had suffered and certain areas were highlighted as a focal point in the school's short-term return strategy. In the first four weeks back at school, much of the usual curriculum was put on hold in favour of a simplified approach which included English, Maths, RE and PE.



Pupils report feeling 'nervous' and 'shy' when they first returned, as well as excited to see and spend time with their friends. Physical activity levels during lockdown were low among pupils, with many reporting having done no physical activity while at home. Teachers also noted that pupils appeared unfit and easily tired while engaging in activities at this time.

During the lockdowns, PE activities were set for all pupils via Twitter every Friday and the school tried to encourage families to go outdoors and be active, however, engagement in these is unclear, and pupils report spending more time sitting down with their laptops and tablets. Teachers recall it being evident that 'some children hadn't run around for months.'

### After lockdown....

“

*I was most looking forward to PE and music.*

Year 2 pupil

“

*I wanted to be doing more sport at school compared to being at home.*

Year 5 pupil

“

*I felt happy to come back because I could get more education, because half the things I forgot.*

Year 3 pupil

“

*It was difficult during lockdown to be separated from family and friends.*

Year 5 pupil

“

*In PE lessons at home I did star jumps and exercise and stuff. But I was glad to come back to school because you can't really do it properly at home.*

Year 5 pupil

“

*I was feeling shy, because I hadn't really seen my classmates in so long.*

Year 3 pupil

## Activities



In addition to encouraging playground activity, PE was incorporated into every school day to ensure pupils were as active as possible. Key Stage 1 pupils completed new videos from a paid subscription service 'Jump Start Jonny' each morning. Key stage 2 pupils had 15 minute 'after-break' activity sessions every day when they would play fast paced team games to get their heart rates up. A timetable was also organised to allow one class at a time to go onto the playground and run a mile throughout the day. To effectively deliver their Active Recovery Curriculum with limited indoor and outdoor activity spaces, Holy Family have successfully overcome a range of timetabling issues coupled with COVID restrictions on equipment and capacity. Additional barriers such as the weather, and swimming pool closures have forced them to be adaptable and imaginative in order to prioritise time spent being active

Since returning to a full curriculum after Easter, Holy Family continue to prioritise sporting events and opportunities to engage in outdoor teaching and learning. Examples include curriculum lessons, such as teaching maths outside, and non-curriculum events such as sessions delivered by Warwickshire cricket club and weekly visits from a theatre company teaching alternative skills such as wilderness activities and tug of war. Mr Hill said:

*"Students have been quite taken aback by the new activities. I don't think they realised how important it is to try new things. They were a bit shy and didn't really know what to do but now they are in the full swing of things it's probably the highlight of their week".*



### Extracurricular

In recognition of a sustained period of inactivity and an overall lack of local opportunities for pupils, Holy Family have extended their extracurricular



activity provision. All staff now have ownership of an activity each week and the school now offers over 10 clubs per week, compared to 3 offered pre-COVID. Around 70% of pupils are attending at least one club, with many attending 2 or 3, suggesting this additional provision is well received by pupils and their parents.

Which activities did you enjoy?

“

*We did the activities outside, and I prefer to be outside because there's more space so you can do more things.*

Year 2 pupil

“

*I enjoyed cricket the most. I like hitting the ball and running around.*

Year 3 pupil

“

*We got to do lots more fun things outside like tennis and basketball.*

Year 5 pupil

“

*I like playing football and making jokes.*

Year 5 pupil

“

*We did lots more extra play.*

Year 3 pupil

“

*It was more fun instead of staying at home. We got to see and do more stuff.*

Year 3 pupil





## Impact

Pupils reported 'PE' and 'playing with friends' as some of the key things they missed during lockdown. The school's approach to try and compensate for missed opportunities has distinct impacts on the children.

### Physical Wellbeing

Inactivity and obesity levels are high among pupils at Holy Family, however since returning to school, teachers report notable reductions in some pupil's weight and clear improvements in their fitness levels and stamina. Children have also become more aware of the importance of getting fresh air and being active for themselves.

### Motivation

The array of opportunities on offer has translated into enthusiasm and increased motivation for many '*All the children are buzzing, all the children want to be getting involved*' (Mr Hill). When pupils were interviewed following recent visits from external cricket and tennis providers, most of them cited these sports as their favourites.

There has also been increased interest in competition. Mr Hill notes during recreational playground activities '*you can see the competitiveness shining through*' and '*winning means a lot to them*'.

### Social Wellbeing

The importance of peer-to-peer social interaction has been appreciated more following the lockdowns; one teacher notes '*you could really see how much they value that and how much we all took it for granted and how much they had missed it*'. Many pupils have now increased in confidence after reporting feeling 'shy' and 'nervous' when they first returned. Pupils interviewed recognise the value of friendships and spending time with peers and are 'excited' to be outside and playing with friends.



## Achievements and Challenges

Teachers at Holy Family have worked cohesively to develop and deliver activities to best suit the needs of their pupils, while the headteacher has encouraged staff to '*look for opportunities to get more physical activity into the week*'. Engagement in an Active Recovery Curriculum has had a notable positive effect on staff, some of whom are getting involved and joining in with lessons and their afterschool clubs to give themselves an opportunity to be active in their day. Prior to COVID-19, all PE was delivered by external specialists, therefore staff are now more involved with teaching and planning for their classes in this subject due to the additional sessions.

### Impact: Pupil voice

“

*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

“

*Being outside makes me feel happy and being healthy is important. I missed it while we were away.*

Year 5 pupil

“

*It's important to be active to keep healthy.*

Year 3 pupil

“

*It's important to spend time with friends otherwise you have no social life.*

Year 5 pupil

“

*Being active is important, otherwise when you grow older you can't move around because you weren't active when you were younger.*

Year 5 pupil

“

*When you are outside you are getting more air and stuff. It feels more exciting.*

Year 3 pupil

## Top Tips

### 1) Invite the Experts

Look for local sports clubs, teams, dance troupes, theatre companies and other organisations to find unique and exciting experiences for pupils. Encourage pupils and staff to have a go at something they haven't done before.



### Teacher perceptions of impact

“

*We now offer extracurricular activities every day...cricket, tennis, hockey...we're going to keep that going for September. They are a lot more tailored, and the turn outs are much better.*

“

*Students have been quite taken aback by the new activities. I don't think they realised how important it is to try new things.*

“

*They can't wait to get outside and are loving being outside playing all kinds of games; Stuck in the mud...duck duck goose...going on the trim trail.*

“

*Children need a break in the day – give them a thought break. Even just a 5-minute game of stuck in the mud. They will sweat, have a drink of water, then their minds are much more focused.*

Drew Hill, PE Coordinator and Year 3 class teacher

### 2) Review Extracurricular Provision

Encourage staff to take on responsibility for a club or activity session afterschool on one day. Consult with pupils to find out what kinds of activities they would most like to attend. Ensure activities are well advertised so other staff, pupils and parents all know what is on offer.



### 3) Take a 'thought' break

Look at the weekly timetable and find an appropriate time to include a daily 10-15 minute pulse raiser. Breaking down physical activity into short and regular chunks is a great way to engage pupils who might be less interested in being active. Doing this everyday helps to normalise making time to be active, which may encourage young people to be active later in life. It also gives pupils a 'thought break', and helps them return to lessons refreshed and focused.

