

NAVIGATE WITH PHYSICAL ACTIVITY



The National Picture

It has been widely reported that young people have been negatively impacted by Covid-19, specifically the period of lockdown and absence from school.

Almost three quarters of teachers are reporting that young people are returning with low levels of physical fitness & almost half have noticed mental wellbeing issues (such as fear, anxiety and lack of confidence). (1)

During lockdown, at least one-third of young people have experienced an increase in mental health issues. More than one-third say they are more worried (38%), sadder (37%) or more stressed (34%), and 30% reported having more trouble sleeping. Boredom, worry & feeling trapped were the top three emotions experienced by young people. (2)

The majority of young people under 16 (93%) continued to stay active during lockdown but the amount of activity they did fell; the number of young people taking part in 60 minutes of activity every day dropped from 47% to 19%. 43% were doing less than half an hour of activity and a worryingly 7% were doing nothing. (3)

Navigate with Physical Activity is a locally developed programme by Imagine For Schools and Stride Active. It is an intervention designed to build emotional and educational resilience, to support young people to come to terms with life after lockdown. We know that physical activity can be used to improve mental wellbeing therefore we have tailored the programme to incorporate physical activity, to reinforce and enhance young people's understanding of emotional wellbeing.

The programme is delivered over 6 weeks and covers the following topics:

- Fear, anxiety and worry
- Dealing with emotions & feeling in control
- Balancing positive & negative emotions
- Embracing challenge
- Adapting to a new normal
- Returning to learning in a class

Stride Active staff have received training from Imagine For Schools to deliver this within schools across the county.

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Rationale - why schools chose to take part in the programme

“ Post covid we were really intent on being able to help the children with their wellbeing and whatever they had been feeling during lockdown and just helping them to deal with that and to be able to feel stable in the year to come which is why we decided to run the Navigate Programme.”

“ As soon as we saw the Navigate programme it looked like a fantastic option for us. Lockdown was a particularly challenging time for many children, as is adapting back to the 'new normal', so we felt it was vital that we gave them the tools they would need to help them do this.”

Impact

To measure the impact of this programme we asked the teachers to rate certain behaviours in the young people, before and after the programme using a scale of 1-5. Behaviours included:

- Anxiety: regular and obvious worry
- Classroom behaviour
- Willingness to engage
- Settled in to school
- Emotional intelligence: how aware are they of their emotions

We delivered Navigate with Physical Activity to 6 classes across 3 schools in the first half term of 2020-21; Kington, Eardisley and Withington.

In total 143 children took part in the programme:

Anxiety: 54% young people showed a decrease in anxiety

Behaviour: 32% showed an improvement in behaviour

Willingness to engage: 46% showed an improvement in willingness to engage

Settled in to school: 41% were more settled at school following the programme

Emotional Intelligence: 45% showed a better awareness of their emotions following the programme.

64% of young people that took part in the programme showed an improvement in 1 or more areas



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Class Teacher Feedback

Why do you think this was important for the young people in your class?

"So that they could explore their feelings in a different context. Having an activity stimulated conversation and removed some of the pressure of talking in front of a large group. Activities worked as a springboard to discuss more challenging and abstract concepts like fear and anxiety." (Withington year 5 & 6)

"Lockdown has left a lot of children isolated and hearing things about COVID that they do not fully understand. They have listened to parents and sibling anxieties, and not being allowed to do things have left them scared and worried about things they cannot fully comprehend. They also did not know what to expect coming back to school. I think talking about their emotions and hearing that others have felt the same is very important, especially learning different words for their emotions." (Withington year 3 & 4)

"The children are still quite new to this class (the year 3s) and so with 6 months away it is a settling in period still. Life in year 2 is different to year 3 and takes a while." (Eardisley year 3 & 4)

Has the programme made the young people more aware of their emotions?

"Yes, I do believe this has made the children more aware of their range of emotions, and it is amazing how children have shared their feelings with one another." (Withington year 5 & 6)

"Very much so, children in the class are now more open and discuss what is bothering them more readily. I feel the programme has helped them to understand what they are feeling and helped them to cope." (Withington year 3 & 4)

"Yes, it has been really good at them exploring their emotions and actually being able to understand when and why they might feel certain things and actually really concentrating on ones that are very unhelpful to them and when they might need to get help if they are feeling them." (Kington year 6)

"They are more able to discuss their feelings now and understand the feelings of others." (Eardisley year 1 & 2)



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We wanted to make the sessions more active, do you think the practical element of the sessions been effective?

"Practical sessions have been effective, most of our sessions have also been outside in the sun which also has supported positive mental wellbeing. Having the children move around has also helped us to increase the amount of structured physical activity that they are having each week. The children commented that would have liked even more!" (Withington year 5 & 6)

"Yes I do believe it is. Some children especially in my class would struggle if the sessions were more stagnant so the physical element has really helped them to engage." (Withington year 3&4)

"Yes, it has definitely made them more enjoyable, it's an afternoon, it's nice that they can get out and they've either been able to act them or there's been activities that have produced that feeling so they can start understanding about what we have been talking about." (Kington year 6)

"My class have really loved the active parts of the sessions and are beginning to link these well to their emotions and feelings." (Eardisley year 1 & 2)

What has been the highlight?

"Highlight has definitely been catching the eggs, when all the children thought they would be catching an egg, their fear was palpable and they were so worried and then there was that relief when they realised it was hard boiled. But actually for lots of them it made them realise that fear can sometimes actually have that exciting / adrenaline or we had lots of then very worried." (Kington year 6)



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Final thoughts from our Schools

"Parent feedback has been good and that their children like the Juniors and several parents have said that their children talk about the programme at home which is great and what we wanted. It has dovetailed in to our PE Recovery curriculum well and we are keen to continue with different children." (Eardisley)

"The Navigate programme was a huge success in our school, with the children looking forward to the sessions and learning lots about their emotions and different ways they can handle these. We would like to say a massive thank you to the team at Stride Active for coming up with such a well-designed programme to help our young people through what has been a challenging time." (Withington)

I also wanted to express my gratitude and admiration to Pete Knight who had a great rapport with my children. One of my more challenging children would not engage the first few weeks but in this last session you could see the relationship between him and Pete and was now fully involved and being sensible in lessons so thank you very much. He was also one of the children who would find it almost impossible to talk about his feelings at the start, but had opened up a little by the end sessions." (Withington)



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Stride Active reflections on delivery of the sessions

It was great to work with schools that embraced the Navigate work.

Staff were always welcoming, had organised equipment and resources as well as ensuring that the young people were ready to learn.

They were flexible with space enabling us to show videos in the classroom and complete the worksheets, as well as allocating practical space in the hall and playground.

The young people really seemed to embrace the challenges that the programme threw up, contributing well and increasingly became reflective and thoughtful about the material.

As we moved through the weeks it was clear that young people were exploring emotions and gaining greater appreciation for how, whilst we may find ourselves in the same situation as someone else, we may be experiencing different emotions to them. Students grew to understand that this was a situation we should feel comfortable with and that we won't always experience the same emotions as others, indeed, nor should we expect to. Some drew heavily on their experiences of lockdown, but some started to elude to other challenges that they were facing.

They created some lovely pieces of work, such as their Lockdown life pictures and Peak to Peak challenges.

The feedback from staff was always positive with comments also passed on from parents about how much their children were learning and enjoying the sessions.



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Development and Opportunities

Reflecting on the programme so far:

- Delivery has been really positive with schools and will continue in to the second half term (Eardisley and Goodrich*).
- Due to lockdown 2 this programme will continue to be relevant in the spring term and schools have already expressed an interest.
- This programme has aligned well with the recovery curriculum and supporting children to process what they have been through during the covid lockdown, helping them to explore and understand the emotions that they have been experiencing.
- Some schools have used their PE premium to support these sessions. This fits well under Indicator 2 'The profile of PE and sport is raised across the school as a tool for whole-school improvement' which is the indicator that we traditionally see less of a focus on. This programme uses physical activity as a vehicle to develop personal skills, behaviours and provides coping strategies that they can use across their school life.
- This programme also links in with the new PHSE curriculum guidance. Primary schools should focus on teaching the characteristics of good physical health and mental wellbeing. This includes giving pupils the language and knowledge to understand the normal range of emotions that everyone experiences, talk about it, and manage and deal those feelings and behaviours both physically and mentally in different situations.

The next phase is to look at how this programme can be used beyond covid. Following lockdown 2.0, there is still a need for a Covid-specific programme but we will begin working with Imagine For Schools to design a broader programme for post Covid as the feedback demonstrates that it was beneficial beyond Covid-19 and lockdown.

We also want to look at how we can support more schools using this programme and will be seeking external funding for a wider roll out.

* Goodrich postponed due to covid restrictions



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More Information

For more information about this programme, please contact Emma Gardner
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References

- 1, [Returning to school after COVID restrictions: The view from PE and school leads.](#)
Youth Sport Trust. September 2020
- 2, [Generation Lockdown report based on YouGov research Barnado's \(30/6/20\).](#)
- 3, [Children's experience of physical activity in lockdown](#)
Sport England. July 2020

