

CHAPTER 1.5: PUTTING SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY BACK INTO EDUCATION

After years of decline, it is time to once again make sport and physical education a priority in our education system. Teachers need better training and schools need better facilities.

Throughout the work of the Panel, the need to reunite sport and the education system emerged as one of the strongest consistent themes. A number of sports organisations advised the Panel that there is great scope for the re-invigoration of sport and physical education in the school system, but the significant changes in families and their competing time commitments must be taken into account when taking this step.

Ultimately the Panel believes that in order for children and young adults to be interested in playing sport and staying physically active, activities must be fun, enjoyable and accessible. They should be appropriate for age, gender and skill levels and relevant to development needs.

Physical education in schools plays a central role in breaking down barriers to participation in sport. It provides significant health and social benefits. It was concerning to learn from experts Australia-wide that the education system no longer reliably provides the platform upon which much of the nation's sporting activity is based. It no longer consistently carries out the vital role of introducing children to physical activity and organised sport.

The delivery of physical education and organised sport should be reinstated as a key component of the school curriculum across the country. Australian governments should make sport in schools an ongoing priority and agree that physical education must be delivered by each school as if it were a separate key learning area in the national curriculum.

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) should consider promoting health, physical education and organised sport as a key learning area in the second phase of the review of the new national curriculum, to be developed in 2011 and implemented in 2012.

As a condition of current Australian Government education funding, physical education has been required for a minimum of two hours per week in primary and secondary schools. However, there was no measurement of delivery nor was it mandatory. State and territory governments and non-government education authorities were expected to monitor progress. It is understood that under

the National Education Agreement (NEA) 2009, this requirement no longer applies. In reality, participation in sport and physical activity is usually left to the discretion of individual schools and teachers to implement.

There is compelling evidence of the critical role physical education and sport play in developing a child's intellectual, social, emotional, physical and linguistic skills. Active play is important for physical development of gross-motor skills and is a means of gaining strength, agility and co-ordination. Children who learn hand eye co-ordination from an early age are more inclined to participate in sporting activities as they get older.

As a child moves from early development into the formal education system, this exposure to sport and physical activity becomes even more crucial. A significant amount of international research also indicates that physical activity improves academic outcomes, self-esteem, mental health and creates a sense of inclusion.

In its recently released (June 30, 2009) report 'Australia: The healthiest country by 2020', the National Preventative Health Taskforce (the Taskforce) argued for 'adequate time for sport and recreation within school time', as a way of improving the nation's health. It called for further training and support for teachers to teach physical education and sports and 'to motivate and inspire children to engage in physical activity'. The Panel supports this recommendation of the Taskforce.

Submissions to the Panel highlighted the fact that greater emphasis needs to be placed on the delivery of sport and physical education as part of teacher training programs (particularly in primary schools) and that greater effort should be made to have trained physical education teachers placed in all secondary schools.

Teachers play a critical role in developing the attitudes and views of young Australians. This is particularly the case in the area of living healthy lives and participating in sport and physical activity.

The Panel received significant amounts of anecdotal evidence throughout the consultation process suggesting that the number of qualified physical education teachers in primary and secondary schools is declining and in many cases non-existent. This appears to be linked with a decline in emphasis placed on sport in teacher training courses.

A number of primary teaching degrees include a compulsory 'health' unit that may incorporate physical education (sometimes health and movement) but in some courses physical education is only offered as an optional or specialised unit. As a result, it is possible for a primary school teacher to have little exposure to physical education training.

Primary school teachers are already experiencing difficulties in overcoming a crowded curriculum and sport is often an easy target for removal as the educational outcomes are not as obvious.

Given the outdoor and physical nature of most sport, there are often preparation time pressures, shortage of equipment, or fears of accident and injury.

Current teacher training requirements need to be reviewed as a priority to consider the mandatory inclusion of basic physical education training.

One of the initiatives to receive much comment throughout the Panel's review is the Active After-school Communities (AASC) program, administered by the Australian Sports Commission (ASC). The feedback about this program was mixed. The ASC's own review was positive but many of the national sporting organisations (NSOs) were critical of the program. It is important to note that the Panel was not presented with reliable and measurable data about the success of the program. There was some suggestion the program could be more efficiently and effectively delivered with the greater involvement of appropriate NSOs and other experienced service providers.

The program should be funded for its current term and in the meantime the ASC should take on board the criticisms raised and review what should then happen. Should the program be continued, in keeping with its recommendations concerning the ASC, the Panel believes its delivery in future should be contracted out to appropriate service agencies in consultation with state, territory and local authorities. Appropriate measurements of success be established and made publicly available. The Panel believes the ASC should undertake the appropriate analysis of the program, advise on its future development and then design the most effective delivery mechanism to ensure greatest impact across the country.

Submissions to the Panel suggested that a link should be encouraged between designated sport and physical education teachers and relevant local sporting clubs to encourage children to move from physical activity into a more structured sport environment. This was reinforced by many NSOs and the Panel agrees this should be a priority.

Many argued that in addition to a greater emphasis on skills-based training for teachers, there is a need to recognise coaching and officiating courses as components towards high school certificates and university degrees. It was considered that this would help to legitimise sport and physical activity courses that are run by external stakeholders.

There is increasing pressure on sport and recreation facilities in Australia. The general issue is discussed elsewhere in this report. There was also general concern at the lack of development and maintenance of appropriate facilities in many schools to encourage physical activity.

In response to growing pressures on local community sporting and recreation facilities, the Panel consistently received submissions that there is a need for local sports organisations to have good access to local school facilities outside of school hours. Improved school facilities should be used

for out of school hours activities and the schools themselves would benefit with reduced costs and connection to the local community, among many other benefits.

The Australian Government should consider the repair, upgrade and development of sport and recreation facilities in schools as an integral part of both its 'education revolution' initiative and the school building component of the economic stimulus package. It is also an opportune time to ensure the appropriate link is drawn between the building of new school halls across the country and the needs of relevant indoor sports.

It is time for all governments to take action to facilitate greater access to school sporting facilities outside of school hours and that greater community access is provided to tertiary education and other institutional sporting facilities.

Recommendations:

- 5.1 The Australian Government and state and territory governments should make sport in schools an ongoing priority and should agree that physical education be a stand alone key learning area in the national curriculum.
- 5.2 Relevant Australian Government agencies, including the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority), should ensure that the national curriculum for sport and physical education be considered as soon as possible and no later than the second phase of the national curriculum, to be developed in 2011 and implemented in 2012.
- 5.3 The Australian Government should consider the repair, upgrade and development of sport and recreation facilities in schools as an integral part of its 'education revolution' initiative on the basis that public access to school sporting facilities is maximised.
- 5.4 The Australian Government and state and territory governments should take action to allow greater access to school (primary and secondary) sporting facilities outside of school hours.
- 5.5 Greater community access should be provided to tertiary education and other institutional sporting facilities.
- 5.6 The Active After-school Communities program should be reviewed and if continued beyond its currently funded term should be contracted out to other service providers at appropriate service standards.