

2.6: EDUCATION AND SPORT

Findings

38. Physical activity enhances academic and other educational outcomes.
39. There was no formal accountability and reporting to the Australian Government on the previous requirement to include two hours of physical activity per week in school hours as a condition of Australian Government education funding.
40. There are inadequate numbers of teachers trained to deliver physical education in our schools.
41. Local sporting organisations have difficulty in gaining access to school and other educational facilities.
42. The Active After-school Communities program needs to be reviewed by the Australian Sports Commission before a decision is made on its future.

The development of hand-eye co-ordination is a critical part of 'play' for a child and is fundamental to a child's intellectual, social, emotional, physical and linguistic development. Teaching a child to grab at objects and catch or throw a ball, for example, is an active form of learning that engages the senses, body and brain. Play immerses children in complex experiences. It enables them to be aware of how they are thinking and feeling, without pressuring them to achieve.

Parents can provide interesting and challenging spaces and activities for play. Creating an environment that promotes high-quality play will enhance learning and development.

Balls, skipping ropes and balancing bikes set the scene for active play for the toddler and beyond. Active play is particularly 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 the child moves from early development into the formal education system this exposure to sport and physical activity becomes more crucial. The irony is that there is a significant amount of international research currently available which indicates that physical activity actually improves academic outcomes and rather than being seen as an 'optional extra', physical activity should be seen as a driver of educational outcomes. Educational outcomes are not only academic outcomes but also include social outcomes such as self-esteem, mental health and social inclusion.

Physical education in schools is central to breaking down barriers to participation in sport as well as contributing to health and social inclusion. But the education system no longer uniformly provides the platform upon which much of the nation's sporting activity was based. It no longer carries out its historic role of introducing children to physical activity and organised sport and providing ways for migrant children to join in.

Greater effort needs to be made to ensure that physical activity is delivered in the school setting.

THE REQUIREMENT FOR PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

The Australian Government provides significant funding to the government and non-government education sectors. However, the administration and delivery of education in Australia is principally the responsibility of state and territory governments and non-government education authorities.

As a condition of Australian Government education funding, physical education had 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 and the *Schools Assistance Act 2008*, 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.

Some state and territory departments of education did advise the Panel that, in some instances, the minimum allocation of time dedicated to sport and physical education is, in fact, exceeded. The concern was raised that there was not enough consistency in the application of physical education in Australian schools. If the education system is going to play a role in the future of sport and preventative health then the national curriculum will need to be a driver in ensuring that physical activity is being delivered through all levels of school. It was clear from feedback from various sporting organisations and members of the public at the forums that they were unaware of the previous requirement for a minimum of two hours per week of physical activity. Where groups and individuals are aware, many feel the requirement was being neglected by a number of schools across the country.

THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

*The Schools Assistance Act 2004*⁷⁹ expired in December 2008 and was replaced by the NEA⁸⁰ and the *Schools Assistance Act 2008*.⁸¹ Under the NEA and 2008 Act, the focus moved away from the input controls which characterised previous funding agreements towards an emphasis on delivering high-quality outcomes. The agreements also articulate agreed policy and reform

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directions that will ensure that all Australian school students acquire the knowledge and skills to participate effectively in society and employment in a global economy.

Both the NEA and *Schools Assistance Act 2008* require state and territories and the non-government education authorities to implement a revised national curriculum by 31 January 2012.

There has been a long history of collaboration between the Australian and states and territory governments on the development of national frameworks for education in Australia. Since 1989 there have been three iterations (1) the Hobart Declaration (1989 to 1999), (2) the Adelaide Declaration (1999–2009) and (3) the current Melbourne Declaration (2009–2019). Each of these declarations aims to improve the quality of schooling nationally and enhance the educational outcomes for all young Australians.

The Melbourne Declaration sets goals that seek to ensure that all Australian school students gain the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively participate in society and employment and identifies health and physical education as a key learning area within the curriculum in the compulsory years of schooling. Generally the compulsory years of schooling are considered to be kindergarten to year 10, with slight variations existing between states and territories regarding the school leaving age and requirements of students who leave school after year 10.

The interim National Curriculum Board has identified in its *Shape of the National Curriculum: A Proposal for Discussion*, that the national curriculum, which it develops, will reflect the Melbourne Declaration. The Australian Government has committed that this national curriculum, initially in the key learning areas of English, mathematics, science and humanities and social sciences, will be developed by 2010 and implemented from 2011. The second phase of the national curriculum will be developed in the learning areas of the arts and languages and the third phase will include health and physical education and information, communications technology and design and technology.

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) has been established to provide advice to Ministers (the Ministerial Council on Education, Early Childhood, Development and Youth Affairs—MCEECDYA) on the newly established Australian Curriculum. ACARA outlined progress on the national curriculum to MCEECDYA in September 2009.⁸²

Schools are being asked to deliver results in an increasing number of key learning areas and sport and physical activity through structured education in the ‘in-school’ period is only one of those key learning areas. Whilst the Panel notes and appreciates the inclusion of health and physical education as one of the key learning areas under the current Melbourne Declaration, it is concerned with the

⁸² The Hon. Julia Gillard MP (Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations) and Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) communiqué, joint media release, Brisbane, 28 September 2009.

delay in development of a national curriculum in the field of health and physical education. The Panel is also concerned that physical education is not a separate key learning area.

Physical education in schools is central to breaking down barriers to participation in sport and physical activity which in turn impacts on the success of the Australian Government's preventative health and social inclusion agendas. Commentary provided at various forums suggests that the school environment already places less emphasis on sport and physical activity than it has done in the past. The clear linkage between positive health outcomes and physical activity is undeniable. There is also strong evidence that physical activity including sport is a significant contributor to education outcomes, both academic and life skill development.

There is a high risk that physical education will not be given appropriate priority while it is part of a broader key learning area. There is no guarantee that any physical education will be delivered in a particular school which only has an obligation to deliver it in a key learning area, that is, health and physical education. The outcome may very well be that the school's obligation to deliver on the health and physical education key learning outcome is done so by delivering on the health elements only (for example, personal hygiene) with no physical education being delivered.

QUALIFIED PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

One of the growing concerns in education systems throughout Australia is the decline in the number of trained teachers to deliver sport programs. Although there is limited data to suggest otherwise, the Panel received a lot 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 inconsistency in data could be due to teacher shortages often being 'hidden'. Teacher numbers can be hard to measure as school systems use a number of strategies to ensure classes are not left without a teacher such as employing less qualified teachers and reducing curriculum on offer.

Another growing concern in the education system is the decline in emphasis on sport in teacher training courses. A number of primary teaching degrees include a compulsory 'health' unit that may incorporate physical education (such as health and movement) but in some courses physical education is only offered as an optional or specialised unit. This means that it is possible for a primary school teacher to have little exposure to physical education training in attaining their qualification.

This lack of specialised physical education teachers in primary schools is a major inhibitor to student skills development and participation in physical activity generally. Primary school teachers are already experiencing difficulties in overcoming a 'crowded curriculum' and sport is often an easy target for removal from the curriculum as the educational outcomes are not as visible as say, for example, mathematics and English. Given the outdoor and physical nature of sport, there may

be a reluctance among teachers to deliver such activities as there is often time required to set up and pack up necessary equipment, and ensuring equipment is available and in a suitable condition.

CONDITION OF SCHOOL SPORTING FACILITIES

The drought is contributing to the deterioration of outdoor sport and recreation facilities across the country. The impact of the drought on our sporting fields is discussed in more detail in the section, Infrastructure. Just as the conditions of many local fields are declining from overuse and weather conditions, school ovals are also impacted. School ovals and sporting fields are showing clear signs of stress with many becoming unusable. A consequence of this type of damage to outdoor sporting facilities is that there is a greater risk of students' suffering from injuries such as sprained/twisted ankles and cuts.

Many schools have limited capacity to maintain outdoor facilities to a basic safety standard and as a result many of the facilities that do exist are simply not being used because it is unsafe to do so. School ovals and grassy play areas are an important part of the school infrastructure and should be considered within the framework of the Australian Government's 'education revolution'.

Teachers, like all members of the community, have always been conscious of the need to ensure a duty of care when delivering sporting programs. But there are greater legal risks and liability for accidents which are adding to the inclination to avoid physical pursuits at school.

ACCESS TO SCHOOL SPORTING FACILITIES

School facilities can be locked away from community use out of school hours. Whilst principles for the shared use of sport and recreation facilities have been endorsed and are encouraged by the Australian Government and state and territory ministers of sport and recreation and their departments, access to school facilities by local sporting clubs remains largely dependent on the attitude of the local school principals. The designs of new school facilities, given the current investment in school facilities, should take into account public use during non-school hours. This design would have to consider ways that do not compromise school security.

The 2006 *Opening the Gates* report, prepared by Sport and Recreation Tasmania (2006), presents information on approaches and policies within the sector that related to the current provision of and future planning for the shared use of education facilities which could help overcome this problem.⁸³ The report had identified a number of perceived barriers to achieving progress in this area but also highlighted a number of successes and practical applications of a collaborative approach between the sport and recreation sector, education departments and local governments.

⁸³ Sport and Recreation Tasmania, *Opening the Gates* report, 2006.

Importantly, the report acknowledged the progress made in a number of jurisdictions including the existence of strategic or policy documents in Queensland, Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia addressing the shared use issues. The report says the development of a national policy may be difficult given the legislative requirements within each state and territory and advocated a set of national guiding principles be established. These principles would confirm the commitment of the sports sector to the principle of appropriate planning, development and management of shared use facilities in collaboration with the education sector and local government. These national guiding principles were endorsed by the Australian Government and state and territory ministers for sport and recreation in November 2008. Sport and recreation ministers and their respective departments also agreed to encourage the promotion of these principles in each of their jurisdictions.

It is important that jurisdictions continue to explore strategies for developing better collaboration between the various education departments and sporting groups to ensure that facilities are available for the delivery of sporting programs and that sporting clubs have greater access to these facilities outside of school hours.

SPORT IN UNIVERSITIES

The drop-out rate in sport usually occurs in late teens and early adulthood as young Australians are placed under increasing pressure to continue their learning and, at the same time, are participating in part-time employment.

There are a high number (100,000)⁸⁴ of young Australians who participate in university sports and the Panel was encouraged that young Australians are keen to continue their participation in sport while undertaking tertiary studies. Competitions such as the University Games are seen as a way of continuing interest in sport. The importance of this type of activity cannot be undervalued. The Panel would also encourage consideration of an intercollegiate type program for sport similar to that which operates in the United States of America (USA) but acknowledges that such a program is expensive and there are an enormous number of logistical issues associated with the development and implementation of such a competition.

University sporting facilities are another mostly untapped sporting resource for local sporting organisations. The Panel was presented with a number of examples of where local sporting community groups have not been able to access university facilities (internal and external). Universities represent large sporting infrastructure as well as a target demographic in our local communities. It is important that every effort be made to improve the integration of tertiary institutions into local communities. Sport and sharing of resources is potentially a way of strengthening this integration.

⁸⁴ Australian University Sport, *Independent Sport Panel Submission*, 30 October 2008, pp. 3.

ACTIVE AFTER-SCHOOL COMMUNITIES PROGRAM

The Active After-school Communities (AASC) program provides primary school-aged children with access to quality, fun, safe, inclusive and structured physical activity in the after school timeslot of 3.00pm to 5.30pm. It is free of charge as part of the Australian Government's commitment to improving the physical activity levels, health and well being of Australian children. During term three of 2009, up to 150,000 children across 3,214 schools and Out of School Hours Care Services (OSHCS) participated in the AASC program. There is a waiting list for centres that wish to have the program but demand cannot be met under current resourcing.

The cornerstone of the AASC is the involvement of local communities in its delivery. All activities are supervised by people registered with the Australian Sports Commission (ASC), the body responsible for the administration of the program. Registration involves completion of a Community Coach Training Program (CCTP) and a working with children check. From the start of the program to term three of 2009 over 36,000 community personnel have been trained in the CCTP to deliver the AASC program. The figure includes more than 6,700 teachers and 4,400 OSHCS staff.

Evaluation of the program from 2005–07 suggests that the program is successful in achieving the immediate objective of getting children active. The AASC is also improving children's motor skills and attitudes of children to physical activity. These are both important factors in long term physical activity patterns.

In relation to capacity building, more than three quarters of centres reported that they had increased their capacity to deliver structured physical activity. Of the program deliverers from sporting clubs and physical activity organisations, 50 per cent reported an increase in the number of children attending and participating at their club or organisation.

There was much comment throughout the Panel's review regarding this program. While the ASC's feedback about this program was positive, feedback was generally mixed. Many of the national sporting organisations (NSOs) were critical of the program. Some stakeholders suggested the program was a duplicate of other programs already offered and was viewed as a replacement for sport in school.

A major criticism of the program from some sporting organisations was that it does not necessarily lead to an increase in participation at the organised sport level. 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. In the section, Roles and Responsibilities, the Panel discusses the desirability of the ASC to withdraw from service

delivery to avoid conflicts with its role as the strategy developer and standard setter in the sports participation space. That section also discusses the alignment of the roles and responsibilities of each tier of government in sports participation.