

Leeds Children and Young People's Physical Activity Needs Assessment Executive Summary

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The Children and Young People's Physical Activity Needs Assessment provides in-depth analysis of local needs and explores inequalities around children's physical activity in Leeds. The report looks at evidence based approaches to increasing children's physical activity and makes recommendations to inform a range of citywide strategies and action plans.

Report structure

The needs assessment reports on children from birth to age 5 and 5 – 18 year olds separately and for each age range draws together information from a variety of local and national sources. The needs assessment also reports the findings of consultations with children and young people and local stakeholders in Leeds in order to give an overview of the issues affecting children's physical activity and how these may be addressed.

Background

Physical inactivity is a major public health issue, which contributes to 1 in 10 early deaths equal to smoking. It is the fourth largest contributory factor to disease and disability in the UK contributing to Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, cancer and depression.

Physical activity is essential to maintaining mental and physical health in children and young people and physical activity behaviours are often established in childhood. Being active from the earliest months is critical for children's cognitive and physical development, and can establish positive patterns for the future.

Evidence shows:

- Physical activity in children is crucial in reducing the effects of risk factors for disease; including avoiding raised blood pressure, avoiding weight gain and achieving high peak bone mass.
- Physical activity can improve emotional wellbeing, educational attainment and increase self-esteem and confidence in children.

The Chief Medical Officer recommendation on minimum physical activity levels to benefit health for children under 5 years is at least 3 hours a day. For school age children it is at least 60 minutes a day of moderate to vigorous physical activity. Children of all ages should also minimise the amount of time spent being sedentary (sitting).

Early Years (Under 5s)

Key findings on early years physical activity

There is no local data available on physical activity levels of children under 5 years however wider evidence suggests that most under 5's are not physically active enough to meet the recommended levels to benefit their health.

- The EYFS data on physical development shows that Leeds follows similar trends to the national picture with children doing better in physical development than areas of learning such as literacy and mathematics. Though EYFS scores are slightly lower locally than nationally physical development is the area of learning where Leeds levels are closest to national levels.
- Children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds have lower levels of physical development than other children and are on average slightly below the EYFS expected level of development for their age. Boys also perform below the expected level and lower than girls on average though this may be due to girl's fine motor skills development rather than gross motor skills.
- NCMP provides robust data, which shows 8.8% of Reception children in Leeds, are obese and 21.6% are overweight or obese. Obesity rates show a slight downward trend year on year since 2008/9.

Evidence shows that free play in early childhood is vital for developmental movement and an experience through which children learn social, conceptual and creative skills. Structured physical activity also benefits young children developing fundamental movement skills and physical literacy. Leeds has a good range of evidence based early years physical activity initiatives covering these domains however they do not reach all early years settings. More can also be done to raise awareness of the benefits of physical activity with the early years workforce as well as parents and families.

Children and young people (5 – 18 years)

Key findings on children and young people's physical activity levels

Physical activity levels are challenging to measure and no standardised measures are used nationally. The Leeds My Health My School survey provides a relatively robust measure of children's self-report of physical activity. This survey includes the key domains of sports, active recreation, play and active travel (walking) as well as sedentary behaviour.

- 54.5% of children and young people in Leeds report doing at least 7 hours a week of physical activity; which is roughly equivalent of the recommended 1 hour a day.
 - 60.2% of primary school age children and 46.9% of secondary school age children achieve the recommended levels
 - Only 39.5% of secondary school age girls achieve this compared to 53.8% of boys.
 - Fewer children from deprived Leeds (53.8%) achieve the recommendation compared to those from non-deprived Leeds (64%) at primary school age but no significant difference is found at secondary school age.
 - Between children of different ethnicities there are no statistically significant differences except for Asian girl's (41.2%) whose levels are significantly lower than any other ethnic group.
- Over a third of secondary school age children and approximately 1 in 5 primary school age children spend more than 4 hours watching TV or on screens.

- Boys spend more time on screens than girls at primary school age and children from deprived Leeds spend more time on screens than children from non-deprived Leeds.
- 55% of children in Leeds walk to school and there has been an increase of 7% in children walking to school since 2006/7. Cycling to school still remains well below the national average of 4% at 0.6%.
- Physical inactivity is a key contributor to child obesity levels and NCMP data for Leeds shows 19.3% children in Year 6 are obese and 33% overweight or obese.
- MHMS data shows a positive relationship between physical activity and emotional wellbeing particularly in secondary school age young people.

Key findings on children and young people's physical activity behaviours

- Two thirds of children report doing less than 2 hours a week of physical activity in school lesson time. Secondary school levels are lower than primary and otherwise levels are similar for all children
- Over half of all children report doing less than 2 hours a week of physical activity in school but not in lesson time. Inequalities in gender, socio-economic or ethnic groups are seen with boys more active than girls, Asian girls the least active and children from more disadvantaged areas less active than other children.
- Physical activity outside of school is therefore crucial for children to achieve physical activity levels to benefit their health and the greatest inequalities are seen here. The following percentages of children report doing less than 2 hours of physical activity outside of school:
 - 31% of secondary school and 26% of primary school age children
 - 46.4% of secondary school age girls and 23% of boys
 - 34.2% of primary school age children from deprived Leeds and 23% of children from non-deprived Leeds
 - 49.4% of girls of Asian ethnic origin compared to 29.9% white girls and 25.8% of Asian boys of all ages
- Participation levels in sports/dance clubs and swimming are lower for children from deprived Leeds than from non-deprived Leeds. There is little difference across ethnic groups except for Asian girls whose participation is significantly lower than all other groups.
- Approximately two thirds of children report visiting a park in the last 4 weeks and there is little difference in park usage between children from different socio-economic or ethnic groups.
- Data on children with complex needs is lacking. A survey of children who are looked after showed the most popular type of activity was sports. Local data shows 1% of children attending council leisure centres have a disability and swimming, gymnastics and gym were the most popular activities.

Evidence shows that multicomponent approaches to children's physical activity are most effective particularly those involving a whole school approach with wider community and family involvement. They should provide opportunities for active recreation, play and active travel as well as minimising sedentary behaviour. Creating environments that support physical activity is important alongside varied physical activity programmes. Social marketing and health education that raises awareness of the importance of being active and builds motivation is also effective.

Leeds has a wide range of physical activity opportunities for children and young people delivered through a mixed economy of private, public and voluntary provision. Mapping of publicly funded physical activity opportunities showed provision across all domains of children's physical activity including sports, active recreation, play and active travel with many effective programmes in place and some that are models of good practice nationally. Mapping results suggest that a significant amount of this provision is targeted at areas of deprivation which have lower physical activity levels

and higher obesity rates and this is essential to maintain so as not to increase inequalities further. The report is unable to assess if the level of provision available meets the physical activity needs of the population of children in Leeds but given the levels of inactivity identified it is likely that increasing provision, scaling up of promising initiatives and improving engagement in existing services are necessary.

Recommendations

The recommendations below have been informed by national evidence, NICE guidelines, findings from local data plus wide consultation with stakeholders and children and young people. These recommendations should be considered within the context of the wider Healthy Living Health Needs Assessment and the need to take forward holistic healthy living interventions for families addressing a range of health behaviours.

- Influence and encourage strategic partners to prioritise children's physical activity particularly partners in city planning, transport and education.
- Increase awareness amongst key providers of sports, dance, play and active recreation of the relatively low levels of physical activity among children and young people overall, highlighting those specific groups of children who are least physically active. Support providers to consult children and better tailor their provision to these groups.
- Reduce inequalities in opportunities for physical activity for inactive children from disadvantaged communities or groups through targeted active recreation programmes.
- Raise awareness of the importance of children's physical activity and the risks of sedentary behaviour, particularly excessive TV and screen time, with wider partners, children and families.
- Agree key messages on children's physical activity with partners, linking with national social marketing campaigns, and communicate these effectively to strategic leaders, workforce and families.
- Influence partners to take a multicomponent approach to increasing children and families' physical activity; which involves addressing all aspects of physical activity including environmental factors.
- Encourage head teachers and early years leadership to increase children's physical activity levels through whole school/settings approaches, by raising awareness of the benefits of physical activity to attainment and wellbeing.
- Promote the importance of and provide training opportunities to ensure that the children's workforce has the knowledge, skills and confidence to promote physical activity and deliver effective physical activity interventions.
- Support the development of parks to further facilitate active play and recreation for children and families particularly in disadvantaged areas of Leeds.
- Promote local transport and school travel plans in alignment with other local authority plans, especially in areas with high local casualty levels.