

A black and white photograph of children running on a track, with a green banner in the top left corner.

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**EXECUTIVE  
SUMMARY**  
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**DESIGNED TO MOVE**

# **ACTIVE SCHOOLS**

A Guide for UK Head Teachers





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# ACTIVE CHILDREN DO BETTER

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ACTIVE CHILDREN DO BETTER IN EVERY POSSIBLE WAY. THEY PERFORM BETTER IN SCHOOL AND ARE BETTER BEHAVED. PHYSICAL ACTIVITY CAN INCREASE ATTENDANCE RATES AND LEVELS OF CONCENTRATION.

HOWEVER, TODAY'S GENERATION OF CHILDREN IS THE LEAST ACTIVE IN HISTORY. WITH EACH PASSING YEAR, THEY ENGAGE LESS IN ACTIVE PLAY AND SPORT AND HAVE FEWER OPPORTUNITIES FOR QUALITY PHYSICAL EDUCATION. THE COST OF PHYSICAL INACTIVITY IS HIGH, AND CHILDREN BEGIN PAYING THE PRICE AS EARLY AS PRIMARY SCHOOL.

CREATING AN ACTIVE SCHOOL IS AN INVESTMENT IN OUR CHILDREN. BY PROVIDING CHILDREN WITH FUN OPTIONS FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE SCHOOL DAY WE ENSURE THAT THEY ARE SET UP FOR SUCCESS, BOTH NOW AND IN THE FUTURE.

LEADERS OF ACTIVE SCHOOLS ALREADY KNOW THIS IS POSSIBLE. SCHOOLS AROUND THE WORLD—REGARDLESS OF AVAILABLE TIME, SPACE OR MONEY—ARE BECOMING ACTIVE SCHOOLS. THIS EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF *DESIGNED TO MOVE: ACTIVE SCHOOLS* SHOWS WHY THIS MATTERS AND HOW YOU CAN JOIN THEM.

The full report—*Designed to Move: Active Schools* including tools, resources and citations—is available at [designedtomove.org/resources](https://designedtomove.org/resources).

# ACTIVE CHILDREN DO BETTER IN SCHOOL

Hundreds of studies from around the world point to the same conclusion<sup>1</sup>: Regular physical activity throughout the day can lead to better behaviour, attendance, and academic performance. This is true both in the short term (that is, immediately after physical activity has taken place) and the long term.

## ACTIVE CHILDREN ARE BETTER PREPARED TO LEARN

Active children's brains work better. Physical activity increases blood flow to the brain, which can enhance cognition, concentration and memory.

## ACTIVE CHILDREN DO BETTER ACADEMICALLY

Physical activity at school is positively associated with improved educational achievement and academic performance. That includes improvements in core subjects such as maths and literacy.

## ACTIVE CHILDREN ARE HAPPIER & HAVE STRONGER SCHOOL CONNECTIONS

Physical activity has been shown to be a great antidote to depression. Activity boosts self-esteem and enhances friendships. Students who participate in school sports clubs feel a stronger connection to their school and are often happier when they are there.

fig 1

## ACTIVE CHILDREN HAVE BETTER ATTENTION, BEHAVIOUR AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE



### BRAINS WORK BETTER

LEARN BETTER AND FASTER  
ACQUIRE, PROCESS AND RETAIN NEW INFORMATION BETTER  
PLAN AND ORGANIZE WORK BETTER  
BETTER PROBLEM-SOLVING AND TIME MANAGEMENT



### STRONGER SCHOOL CONNECTIONS

IMPROVED SENSE OF BELONGING  
HAPPIER AT SCHOOL  
BETTER ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION  
IMPROVED ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOUR AT SCHOOL



**BETTER GRADES**  
IMPROVED MATHEMATICS AND READING SCORES  
ENHANCED THINKING SKILLS



**HAPPIER STUDENTS**  
MORE MOTIVATED  
HIGHER SELF-ESTEEM  
MORE CONFIDENT  
BETTER BEHAVED IN CLASS



20-MINUTE BURSTS OF EXERCISE INCREASE BRAIN PROCESSES AND ENHANCE COGNITIVE CONTROL FOR UP TO ONE HOUR AFTER.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>1</sup>A leading academic expert was commissioned to pull together the evidence base in support of Active Schools. This work was then validated by more than 40 experts. For more information, please see the full document *Designed to Move: Active Schools*.

# ACTIVE SCHOOLS DO BETTER AS A WHOLE

When all children have the opportunity to be physically active, the school as a whole is better off. Taken together, the gains made by active pupils benefit the broader school environment. In addition, many of the specific areas on which schools are assessed also significantly improve when a school is more active.

## PHYSICALLY ACTIVE CLASSROOMS ARE EASIER TO MANAGE

When children get moving, whole classrooms are better off. For example, physical activity can be a great tool to address behavioural issues in the classroom. Short bursts of movement are associated with improved concentration, and activity breaks result in improved attention, less time spent off-task and better behaviour overall.

## ACTIVE SCHOOLS MAY HAVE HIGHER ATTENDANCE AND COMPLETION RATES

Physically active children are often less likely to opt out of schooling. One study showed that children who participate in sports were twice as likely to attend school. Another study of at-risk pupils found that attendance problems improved once they joined a physical activity programme. Involvement in extracurricular activity is also associated with lower dropout rates.

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IMPROVES OVERALL SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

Increased physical activity is associated with improved academic performance and higher standardized test scores. Increasing physical activity does not harm academic performance. In fact, research shows that the opposite is true.

fig 2

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY POSITIVELY BENEFITS THE WHOLE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT



### SCHOOLS PERFORM BETTER

HIGHER SCORES ON STANDARDIZED TESTS  
HIGHER LEVELS OF PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENT



### STUDENTS SHOW UP TO SCHOOL, AND STAY

IMPROVED ATTENDANCE  
LESS SCHOOL DROPOUT LATER ON



### TEACHERS FOCUS ON TEACHING

IMPROVED STUDENT BEHAVIOUR  
FEWER DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS  
BETTER CONCENTRATION



### STAFF, PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES ARE HAPPIER

HAPPIER CHILDREN AND BETTER GRADES,  
BEHAVIOUR AND OUTCOMES LEAD TO A  
MORE SATISFIED SCHOOL COMMUNITY

# ACTIVE SCHOOLS

## DO THREE THINGS WELL FOR ALL CHILDREN

There are numerous resources, documented standards, guidelines and accepted best practices that define the requirements for an active school. Please see the “Tools & Resources” section of the full document *Designed to Move: Active Schools* for more information. Broadly speaking, there is consensus that an active school does the following three things really well for all children:

### **INSPIRES 60 MINUTES OR MORE OF DAILY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

Children move before, during and after school—to and from school, in classrooms and corridors, in the gym, and on the playground. Bursts of 10+ minutes count toward the target.

### **DELIVERS HIGH-QUALITY PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

Children are taught regular physical education that is high-quality, inclusive, focused on physical literacy and likely to give them a positive experience.

### **CREATES A CULTURE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR ALL**

Children are surrounded by leaders, parents, staff and a community who support and invest in physical activity and sport as a way for children to succeed.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR TRACKING PROGRESS

School leaders will need to take a variety of actions on the path to creating an active school. The pages that follow outline some of the most common recommendations from experts in the field. These recommendations, which are suitable for use in any country, are organized here by relative importance and planning/resources required. For example, providing opportunities for children to be active is considered an essential standard, and investing in teachers’ professional development is considered a best practice. The recommendations are grouped into the following sequential categories:

### **THE ESSENTIALS**

The minimum standards that schools should seek to achieve first. This includes basic rights of movement as well as actions that are legally required in many places.

### **IMPROVEMENTS**

How to take an active school to the next level—solutions that require time and coordination to implement.

### **BEST PRACTICE**

Longer-term strategies that require resources and planning.

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# INSPIRES 60 MINUTES OR MORE OF DAILY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

## THE ESSENTIALS

- Every student has the chance to move for 60 minutes/day or more
- Adults encourage children who aren't moving to be active during break times, sports or physical education (PE) classes
- Children are having fun while they are moving and being active

## IMPROVEMENTS

- Children are allowed to use school facilities before and after school, and during lunch and break times
- Children have input in the activities they participate in, even outside of break times
- Options for movement are culturally and age-appropriate
- The school has a physical activity strategy

## BEST PRACTICE

- Teachers feel confident leading pupils through physical activity breaks in the classroom
- Children have a chance to be active during classroom lessons

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# DELIVERS HIGH-QUALITY PHYSICAL EDUCATION

## THE ESSENTIALS

- All students receive at least 120 minutes of PE per week (sometimes this means using space creatively)<sup>2</sup>
- Classroom teachers and PE staff are trained to deliver a high-quality experience
- All children find PE fun, and the experience is engaging, relevant and meaningful
- PE curriculum is well planned, broad and balanced, and includes a range of activities likely to appeal to young people

## IMPROVEMENTS

- Lessons are inclusive for all, and children who are injured or unable to physically participate are actively involved
- PE maximizes physically active time, and children are active for at least 50 per cent of the lesson

## BEST PRACTICE

- The school invests in the professional development of teachers responsible for teaching PE
- Students receive progress reports that illustrate their achievements and opportunities to improve
- PE promotes physical literacy, and all students acquire the motivation, confidence and physical competence to engage regularly in physical activity

<sup>2</sup> Many leading organizations recommend a minimum of 120 or 150 minutes of PE per week.



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# CREATES A CULTURE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR ALL

## THE ESSENTIALS

- Teachers speak positively about physical activity
- Physical activity is never used — or withheld — as punishment
- The school promotes and supports options for active transport to and from school

## IMPROVEMENTS

- Schools provide fun opportunities for the whole school to come together for physical activity
- Children are encouraged to set and work towards achieving realistic physical activity targets
- Teachers, staff and school leaders celebrate all children's participation

## BEST PRACTICE

- Children understand how and why physical activity is good for them
- Children see the adults around them being physically active
- Participation in physical activity is included in students' reports





# HOW TO BECOME AN ACTIVE SCHOOL

Creating an active school is not without challenges. Time, space and money are three of the most common barriers, and schools vary in their access to resources. Fortunately, schools around the world—even those without PE teachers or sport fields—are finding ways to build physical activity into the school culture. *Designed to Move: Active Schools* ([designedtomove.org/resources](http://designedtomove.org/resources)) offers a three-phase approach to getting it done.

## PHASE 1: MAKE THE CASE & GET OTHERS ON BOARD

Changemakers agree that getting others on board is a critical component of creating an active school. In the school context, transformative change will occur when:

- Leaders enable it
- Teachers deliver it
- Parents demand it
- Children want it

## PHASE 2: INSPIRE & LEAD A NEW VISION

This is about figuring out where you are now, so you can begin to create change. To get started, check out the quiz in Chapter 3, “How to Become an Active School,” in *Designed to Move: Active Schools*.

## PHASE 3: DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT

There are small things you can do today that will have a big impact on school outcomes. *Designed to Move: Active Schools* offers simple, effective strategies that other schools around the world have used to get children active throughout the school day. In fact, these ideas are so powerful that we have included them here.

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# TOP 10 QUICK WINS SCHOOLS CAN IMPLEMENT TODAY

## 01 GIVE CHILDREN BREAKS

When children get physical activity breaks, they're better able to learn for 30-60 minutes following the activity. Building activity breaks into lesson time, using movement to help teach academic concepts, and rewarding children with extra physical activity time are great ways to get started.

## 02 GET THEIR HEART RATES UP

Cardio fitness is a critical factor when it comes to academic performance. Use activities like star jumps, jogging on the spot, or skipping that get children breathing hard as often as possible. The better the fitness level, the better the performance in school.

## 03 ENCOURAGE BASIC MOVEMENT SKILLS

Movements like walking, running, jumping, throwing, catching and skipping are the building blocks of a child's physical, cognitive and social development. For more information on how to build these skills, see the sample activities in *Designed to Move: Active Schools*.

## 04 ENCOURAGE FREE PLAY DURING BREAK TIMES

Children have a natural instinct for play that helps them develop fundamental movement skills. Let them play according to their own rules and preferences.

## 05 MAKE SURE EVERYONE IS INCLUDED

Notice which children aren't moving during free play or group activities. They might need a little encouragement, or someone to show them an alternative activity they can do.

## 06 MIX IT UP

Give children choices and a chance to experience variety in physical activity options. This increases movement skills and decreases boredom.

## 07 CELEBRATE GREAT COACHING & TEACHING

For children to get the most out of physical activity, they need grown-ups to create a positive, fun, inspiring environment.

## 08 MAKE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY A PRIORITY FOR STAFF

Providing positive experiences in physical activity, PE, physically active play and sports is a powerful driver of a student's overall development. Discuss it in staff meetings and allow for more physical activity to be a part of your school day.

## 09 CHALLENGE MISPERCEPTIONS

Increasing the amount of physical activity does not lower academic achievement.

Motionless children are not better behaved children. Active classrooms contribute to better performance in maths and literacy, and improved behaviour overall.

There is no evidence that increasing PE time has a negative effect on educational attainment.

## 10 LEAD BY EXAMPLE

Show them how it's done: Take every opportunity to get up and move with children.









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# LESSONS FROM HEAD TEACHERS AROUND THE WORLD

*Designed to Move: Active Schools* includes stories from active schools around the world. The following examples show some of the innovative solutions head teachers have put into practice to get their whole school moving.

## SCHEDULE ACTIVITY WHEN IT HELPS CHILDREN MOST

Since physical activity helps children concentrate better, schedule it before their more challenging classes.

## INCLUDE THE WHOLE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Schedule time for activity with families, and invite parents to join in for all-school activity events, classroom breaks and after-school programmes.

## MAKE OLDER CHILDREN ROLE MODELS

Engage older children in designing and leading sessions for the younger ones.

## BE CREATIVE WITH AVAILABLE SPACE

If you don't have much space, challenge children to solve the problem, as another educational opportunity and engage them to design their ideal play space.

## ENGAGE SPECIALISTS TO BUILD CLASSROOM TEACHERS' SKILLS

If you have a PE coordinator or specialist, build in time for classroom teachers to co-teach PE so they learn the principles and build skills to take back to class.

## PRIORITIZE ACTIVITIES THAT ENGAGE THE MOST CHILDREN

When space is limited, choose activities that everyone will participate in. Limit games that take up a significant amount of playing space and have the tendency to exclude some children.

## SHARE RESOURCES

Engage other schools to share resources like space, equipment and instructors. Work with community clubs, programmes and local businesses to access outside resources such as community pools, parks or skating clubs.

## ENCOURAGE ACTIVE TRANSPORT TO AND FROM SCHOOL

Include policies that encourage children to safely walk or cycle to school.

## GIVE TEACHERS A ROAD MAP

Encourage PE teachers to work with classroom teachers to integrate activity into lesson plans; implement a 'movement of the week'—an activity that teachers learn to use in the classroom.

## CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT THAT MAKES IT FUN

Foster an environment that allows children and teachers to modify rules, space and equipment to suit children's physical and developmental needs.

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# THERE'S PLENTY MORE WHERE THIS CAME FROM

*Designed to Move: Active Schools* is a blueprint designed to help school leaders create their own active schools, wherever in the world they may be. Here's what you'll find:

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## THE CASE FOR ACTIVE SCHOOLS

A summary of the most compelling research showing how physical activity in the school setting can improve student outcomes, classroom management and overall school performance.

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## WHAT IS AN ACTIVE SCHOOL?

An explanation of the vision for an active school and the things active schools do really well.

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## HOW TO BECOME AN ACTIVE SCHOOL

A framework and tools for school leaders to get others on board, assess where they are and take action. This includes informative documents on:

- Top 10 Quick Wins Schools Can Implement Today
  - What Should Children Be Able to Do by the First Day of School?
  - Primary School: Preparing Children for a Lifetime of Movement
  - Designing for Early Positive Experiences
  - Active Classrooms: Physical Space Optimized for Physical Movement
  - Age-Appropriate Movement
  - Teaching Children to Move with Confidence and Competence—Pointers for Teachers
  - Adapting Activities to Maximize Participation
  - Sample Activities
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## STORIES & ADVICE FROM SCHOOL LEADERS

Inspiring stories of active schools around the world.

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## TOOLS & RESOURCES

A library of expert-endorsed, globally relevant tools to help you create an active school.

Download the full document at [designedtomove.org/resources](https://designedtomove.org/resources)

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# KEY UK CONTRIBUTORS

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*Designed to Move: Active Schools* reflects the insights and contributions of multiple individuals and organizations from around the world. For a full list of contributors, please visit [designedtomove.org/resources](http://designedtomove.org/resources). Special thanks to the following UK supporters who helped localize this version.

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