



By **Mike Diaper**, OBE,
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SUPPORTING CHILDREN TO BE ACTIVE

Mike joined Sport England in November 2006 from central government where he worked across the Departments for Education and Skills and for Culture, Media and Sport, leading the PE, School Sport and Club Links strategy. During his time at Sport England he has created and led a wide range of highly successful programmes and initiatives. He was awarded an OBE in the 2007 Queen's Birthday Honours for services to school sport.

Sport England is a public body and uses its insight, skills and resources to help people get active and play sport. It invests up to £300 million National Lottery and Government money each year.

It wants everyone in England, regardless of age, background, or level of ability, to feel able to engage in sport and physical activity. That's why a lot of its work is specifically focused on helping people who do no, or very little, physical activity and groups who are typically less active - like women, disabled people and people on lower incomes.

During the Coronavirus pandemic, it has been working closely with government to support the safe return of sport and the reopening of sporting and leisure facilities for public use, and conducting research into how the pandemic has affected the nation's relationship with activity. Mike Diaper, shares how the pandemic has affected the activity levels of children and young people and what is being done to help them get active, and more generally, bring back grassroots sport.

Children by nature want to be active. We see them running around and playing like bundles of energy from the moment they've started walking. Yet our research shows that as they grow up, their activity levels decline even speeding up when they reach their teens. Sport England works alongside government and partners within the sport and physical activity sector and beyond to ensure that youngsters have the opportunity to enjoy being active and hopefully develop good habits for a lifetime.

There is widespread recognition that physical activity is hugely beneficial for young people's physical and mental wellbeing. We know from our research that active children are happier, more resilient and more trusting of others¹. Physically active children are more likely to see improved performance in school too – with teachers saying it has positive benefits on their behaviour, attendance and academic results².

¹ Active Lives Children's survey December 2018

² Secondary School Teacher training survey 2020

Last year, before the Covid-19 pandemic hit, Sport England's research showed that 46.8% (3.3 million) of children in England were meeting CMO guidelines of an average of 60 minutes of physical activity a day, across the week. Up 3.6% on the previous year.

There were also notable inequalities similar to adult activity levels. Girls, youngsters from Black, Asian and Ethnic minority communities and those from lower income families were all less likely to be active than their peers.

When England first went into lockdown there were far fewer opportunities to use facilities and play formal sport, and the number of children getting active dropped significantly.

Our research conducted by ChildWise during lockdown surprisingly showed girls (16%) were more likely than boys (11%) to say they were being more active than usual, despite all the restrictions in place, and also more likely to say they were enjoying being physically active more than usual (16% girls vs 10% of boys), suggesting that the freedom to choose which type of activity they wanted to do had a positive impact.

The findings also reinforced how parents and carers can play a positive role in getting children active.

In 2019, we teamed up with Disney to create dance-along workouts for mums and their kids to get active together. The partnership was with our women's campaign This Girl Can, which was launched in 2015 and has helped over 3.9 million more women and girls to get active.

The Covid-19 pandemic has presented us with never seen before challenges with a third of children telling us that the absence of school during the height of the pandemic had a major impact on their ability to be active.

Research also showed that teen girls, Black, Asian and poorer children rely more than others on 'at school' provision to be physically active. Schools play a vital role in supporting children - especially those that need most help - to take part in sport and physical activity.

In September the reopening of schools provided an important moment to help the nation's children to increase how much sport and physical activity they are doing.



We've invested into school settings, working with government on the School Sport and Activity Action plan³, and the PE and Sport Premium, and supporting teachers to promote physical activity in schools, introducing programmes like the Daily Mile, or delivering PE sessions that children want and enjoy.

Some £13.5m has gone into a secondary teacher training programme, offering professional development opportunities to staff in over 2,000 schools across England. The aim is to help put pupil's needs and enjoyment at the heart of PE and school sport. We also invest around £26million into what we call Satellite Clubs, which engage children and young people in sport outside the school day, and invest another £16million to put on a nationwide School Games competition for schools.

In December 2018 we launched a world-leading piece of research, the Active Lives Children and Young People Attitudes Survey, which is the largest survey of its kind. It asked children about their attitudes towards sport and physical activity and the results prove for the first time that children's physical literacy impacts not only the amount of activity they do (twice as much), but also how much the benefit from this activity.

Physical literacy means that children have a positive attitude towards five elements of taking part in sport and physical activity: enjoyment, confidence, competence (how easy they find it), understanding (that it is beneficial) and knowledge (knowing how to get involved and improve).

Crucially, we found that enjoyment is the biggest driver of activity levels.

During the pandemic, the UK government prioritised exercise as an essential activity for our health. Working alongside of them, Sport England launched the Join the Movement campaign that inspired people to be active, complimented by a website packed with a wide-range of home workout content for all ages and abilities that could be done with little equipment or in a small environment. Research showed that the number of people doing home workouts increased during lockdown, with walking and running two of the other most popular activities.

As lockdown eased, Sport England worked alongside of government to support the sport and physical activity sector to open safely. We compiled advice and guidance on how they could introduce Covid-19 hygiene measures and sports then submitted their own procedures to government to be signed off as 'Covid-secure'. This gave the public confidence to know that the opportunities that were open were following social distancing guidelines. As lockdown measures continue to respond to changing infection rates, at both a national and local level, we are continuing our Join the Movement campaign, and also working with Local Authorities to help them promote physical activity to support the public's mental and physical health. Like many countries though, England's sport and physical activity sector has been hit hard by the pandemic with many struggling financially. Alongside of government, we have launched numerous support packages, and at the time of writing, have supported the sector with over £220 million to get it back on its feet.

We know that many people do have a desire to be active, and the pandemic has given people a newfound appreciation of how it benefits their wellbeing. As restrictions change and evolve in the coming months, it is important that are able to offer people choice so they can find something they enjoy in a safe environment.



³ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/848082/School_sport_and_activity_action_plan.pdf

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