

Active Schools

Learning Note

Introduction

This short Learning Note sets out the lessons learned from experiences of Active Schools across Scotland, over the past ten years. It focuses on examples of what works, so that learning about successful approaches can be shared between Active Schools teams, deliverers and partners across Scotland.

This Learning Note is based on an evaluation of Active Schools in 2014, which involved consultation with Active Schools teams; pupils; teachers and wider stakeholders such as parents, clubs and other partners. The full evaluation report can be accessed here -

www.sportscotland.org.uk/activeschoolsevaluation

Key messages

- Over the past ten years, Active Schools has continued to deliver its core aim of introducing “more and better” opportunities for young people in sport. It has also offered leadership opportunities for young people, and others, and built strong links between schools and local clubs.
- The way in which Active Schools supported activities are coordinated, planned and delivered must suit the local context. The emphasis in each local authority area is different. In some areas, there is a strong focus on leadership; in others, a strong focus on engaging girls; creating pathways from schools to clubs; or building opportunities based on strong evidence and consultation.
- What works in one area may not work at all in another, and each local authority has different local priorities to consider within the context of national priorities. However, there are still opportunities to share experiences and learn lessons from what works in other places.
- There is a strong interest from Active Schools teams, and their partners, to continue to share examples of what works and what doesn't. This will help to build on the clear ethos of learning from past approaches, adapting, and strengthening future activities.

Planning activities and opportunities

Active Schools supported activity tends to work best when it is based on strong information about:

- **Demand** – What pupils, teachers and parents think is important in terms of activity and sport.
- **Uptake** – Understanding which groups of young people are most and least likely to take up opportunities, and why.
- **Strategic context** – What else is going on in terms of activity, sport and physical education across the local authority.
- **Supply of deliverers** – Understanding who is available to support Active Schools activity, and what their core skills are.
- **Club pathways** – Opportunities to create links to enthusiastic and accessible clubs, with capacity and interest in recruiting new, young members.

Most Active Schools teams constantly balance this information at school, cluster and local authority level.

Example

In one area, Active Schools Coordinators are invited to identify four priority sports for development within their cluster areas. These sports must be deliverable and have clear pathways to strong clubs or clubs capable of development. This approach involves prioritisation of key sports for each cluster, over a term or academic year, allowing pathways and links to clubs to develop. Other sports are also supported, but with less intensive focus.

Example

In a number of local authority areas, Active Schools teams are part of an integrated approach to sports and physical education. This means that all activities can be planned in a holistic way, with staff working together to develop strategies and plans for their local authority. This also means that partners can be involved in an integrated way.

Example

In some very rural areas activities and opportunities are strongly driven by local facilities and resources. For example, surfing is a core sport in Tiree, due to the natural environment and opportunities. Some of the remote island schools have very limited facilities, so Active Schools teams have introduced ways to use the natural environment – such as offering Nordic walking.

Successful activities and opportunities

The success of Active Schools supported activities and opportunities is highly dependent on the local context. However, some common messages around successful approaches have emerged.

Leadership activities have worked particularly well when:

- leaders have opportunities to deliver activities, building their own skills while inspiring others and extending the pool of Active Schools deliverers;
- leadership is linked to work experience or development of work skills;
- they are clearly linked to the Curriculum for Excellence;
- the links between the range of leadership programmes for school pupils are well thought through; and
- leaders are selected in a way which provides opportunities for all – not just the most talented or reliable pupils.

Efforts to introduce **a range of activities** have worked particularly well when:

- taster sessions are linked to further activity – like an after school club, and links to a community club;
- there is a focus on developing demand and pathways for one or two particular sports over a set time period – allowing a real focus;
- clubs have a direct presence in the school; and
- activities are planned jointly by Active Schools teams, teachers, clubs and other local partners.

National initiatives have worked best when they fit with the local context and priorities. Sometimes this means adapting them to fit with local needs, or integrating similar initiatives – like Young Ambassadors and Lead 2014.

Example

In one area, there has been a real increase in interest and demand for trampolining in recent years. The Active Schools team has found that many people like trampolining because it is an individual activity, rather than a team sport. The team has developed a great link with the local Trampoline Club and has set up a formal agreement between the club, schools and the Active Schools team. A key part of this is an agreement about maintaining the trampolines, which is costly and is shared between the partners.

Active Schools for everyone

Many Active Schools teams have found that activities and opportunities attract most easily those who are already sporty and active. Some have done a lot of work to attract those who would not normally get involved in sport to try out sport and physical activity.

Identifying under-represented groups

Local planning data has been a key source of information in identify who is and isn't taking part in Active Schools activities. This has worked best where:

- Active Schools teams sit down with teachers and explore the reasons why some pupils may not be participating;
- Active Schools teams, teachers and support staff work together to explore reasons for non-participation with pupils, and encourage people to take part on a personal and individual basis;
- Active Schools teams have access to the data schools hold about pupils – so they can identify non-participants easily;
- parents are encouraged to support their children to participate; and
- ASMO data is supplemented with surveys or discussion groups with pupils, exploring activity levels and reasons.

Example

In one area, the Active Schools team ran a number of discussion groups for pupils who were not engaged in Active Schools activity or who had low self-esteem. From this, they developed a number of tailored programmes, which have since delivered great results. They plan to continue with this targeted approach, rather than a blanket approach.

Example

In 2012/13, one Active Schools team surveyed all pupils in one year group across schools in their area. The aim was to understand which pupils didn't take part in any activity, and why. Those who were identified as not taking part in activities were personally invited to try an activity class. A number of pupils who would not normally engage in sport became involved as a result, which was a key achievement.

Example

In one area, the Active Schools team has worked very closely with Corporate Parenting, to identify young people at school who are in care. The Active Schools team cross checks these names with the names of pupils involved in Active Schools activity. They do this each year, to make sure that they can provide individual support to those in care who are not engaging.

Involving girls

There is clear evidence that girls only activities work. Approaches to involving girls should:

- **Be based strongly on consultation** – It is clear that an approach based on what girls want – and involving girls in the development and delivery of these activities – works particularly well.

Example

In one area, participation of girls has increased strongly as a result of working with girls and teachers to establish what interests girls. Activities such as body balance, yoga and Pilates fitness classes were high priorities.

- **Involve a range of activities** – Both team and individual sports appeal to different girls, and there is evidence of success in promoting team sports like netball as well as individual activities like Pilates and fitness classes.

Example

In one area with relatively high participation of girls in Active Schools activity, the Active Schools team has a partnership with the local netball club. There are primary and secondary leagues, clubs and festivals. There is a good connect between the leagues and local clubs, with a good flow of young people into clubs. It is felt that this approach works because of the interest in competitive sport, and a strong focus on a specific sport. There is also support through Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses on working with girls for coaches, support staff and teachers.

- **Include peer support** – Support and encouragement from other girls helps significantly, through building confidence to get involved and providing role models and inspiration.

Example

In a number of areas, the YDance national initiative has been very successful. This gives young people the opportunity to train as dance leaders. In many areas, young girls who have participated in this training have then gone on to set up a number of after school clubs. Older girls have often supported younger girls to become involved in dancing. Part of its success has been due to the funding for the training provided by YDance. It has also worked particularly well when the initiative fits strongly with what girls say they want.

Involving young people with additional support needs

Active Schools teams have used a wide range of approaches to ensure that young people with ASN can take part. This is easiest in ASN schools, where a targeted approach can be taken. In mainstream schools, there can be concerns about specifically targeting and singling out pupils with ASN – either through targeted support, information or activities.

Example

In one area, the Active Schools team brings together pupils with Additional Support Needs from mainstream schools across the local authority area. This covers the lunch break, and some curricular time. They run an activity block once a week for a set time period, and then run a festival at the end. The feedback for these activities has been very good, with participants and parents valuing the opportunities to take part in sport, and to socialise. Parents say that it makes a real difference to their children.

Example

In one area, the Active Schools team organised a disability talent day, with support from Scottish Disability Sport and the local college. This helped to identify people (of all ages) with talent, and to signpost them to places where they could get support to participate in mainstream clubs.

Active Schools teams have found it difficult to know whether young people with ASN who are in mainstream schools are taking part in activities. The most successful approach to measuring participation has been to include a question about Additional Support Needs in the parental consent form, so that teams can monitor what proportion of participants have ASN. This can be used to compare with local or national figures the number of young people with ASN (to identify participation levels) and can help to inform how activities develop at a local level.

Example

In one area, the Active Schools team works with the Disability Development Officer to identify the number of young people with Additional Support Needs at schools, at the beginning of each school year. The Active Schools team then develops tailored approaches for young people, particularly around curriculum festivals.

Linking schools and clubs

Active Schools has supported a wide range of positive links between schools and clubs. Links are most effective where:

- the club has a presence in the school over a reasonable time period – often around eight weeks or more – giving pupils the chance to get to know the club personnel;
- pupils receive support and encouragement to visit the club – through activities such as an organised visit or a schools event at the club;
- there is a long term pathway approach through primary and secondary school, through to the club – often requiring a clear focus on developing this pathway over a period of time, such as an academic year.

Example

In one area, there are ten formal partnerships between clubs and schools, each covering a different sport. Each Active Schools Coordinator has a lead role for one sport. The clubs generally run a block of activity in schools for six to eight weeks, ensuring that there is time to build relationships between clubs and schools. Often, clubs then host specific events only for young people from the school, so they feel more comfortable coming along to the club.

There are good examples of commercial clubs being encouraged to run free school based activities, with the aim of increasing membership in the longer term. There are also some examples of Active Schools teams working innovatively to address challenges around transport. For example, in one very remote rural area, some clubs are supported to run all their activities in schools, so that effectively the club becomes the after school club, making it easier for pupils to access club activities.

Active Schools teams have found links with clubs easiest where there has been good work locally to build club capacity and infrastructure. For example, one area benefited from long term support for two specialist clubs for people with Additional Support Needs, from the council and other partners.

Example

In one area, the Active Schools team wanted to provide a tangible legacy after the Commonwealth Games 2014. Before the 2013/14 school year, the Active Schools team reviewed all of the school-club pathways. Based on the evidence gathered, the team decided to work on developing bowling opportunities and pathways. This approach resulted in many local bowling clubs working in partnership with Active Schools, providing local schools with taster sessions. Junior attendance at bowling clubs had increased before the Commonwealth Games began, and was expected to increase further.

Recruiting and developing volunteers

Active Schools teams have used a wide range of strategies to recruit deliverers – with a strong focus on volunteers as core deliverers. The approach needs to fit with the local context. Approaches that have worked well include:

- **Working with further and higher education institutions** – Some Active Schools teams have worked to encourage (or require) students of sporting disciplines to volunteer with Active Schools as part of their qualification. In some areas, the input of students is significant – not only increasing capacity to deliver, but also building the skills of the future workforce.
- **Targeting new teachers** – Some areas have successfully targeted newly qualified or probationary teachers at the start of each term, to get them involved in Active Schools from an early stage.
- **Integrating volunteering into leadership** – In some areas, leadership opportunities for young people require them to undertake a certain amount of volunteering, in Active Schools and other initiatives.
- **Providing a volunteering pathway** – Some areas have encouraged volunteering by offering opportunities for skilled and qualified volunteers to become paid deliverers of Active Schools activity.
- **Coordinating volunteer recruitment** – Where Active Schools teams worked with other local partners to attract volunteers this helped to pool effort and raise awareness of volunteering across the area.
- **Recognising volunteer contribution** – A range of approaches were used to make sure volunteers felt valued. This included ongoing mentoring and support; volunteer reward schemes; and annual volunteering awards.

Example

In some areas, Active Schools teams have agreements with local further and higher education establishments. This can provide a high volume of volunteer deliverers. For example, in one area, over 500 students volunteer and support delivery of Active Schools.