



# The Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study 2018

CSPPA 2018





## FOREWORD

We are pleased to have been involved with this innovative collaboration between Sport Ireland, Healthy Ireland and Sport Northern Ireland in commissioning the first all-island study into Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity (CSPPA).

The study provides a rich insight into the experiences of children and adolescents throughout Ireland around their participation in physical activity, sport and physical education. It is particularly beneficial in highlighting many similarities in the physical activity behaviours between children in the two jurisdictions as well as some notable differences. Having this information will allow us to share and exchange ideas on how and why such differences emerge and most importantly on what we can do to deal with the challenges that the report raises.

The report provides us with a mixture of positive findings as well as highlighting some significant challenges in the areas of physical activity, sport and physical education.

Levels of active and social participation in sport, in the school and in the community, are high although there are notable declines during the adolescent years among particular groups of children. In the Republic of Ireland, notable improvements were seen in active commuting to school since the previous study in 2010 although barriers exist here around the distance to travel to schools and the question of safety. Only a small minority of children are active enough to meet the physical activity guidelines of 60 minutes or more moderate to vigorous activity per day with delivery of Physical Education variable by level of schooling. Significant levels of sedentary behaviour were reported by children throughout the study.

For each of our organisations and for those with whom we collaborate, the results from this study will help to inform and shape policy initiatives in these areas as well as allowing us to establish baselines against which to assess future progress under these policies.

Over 6,600 students from 115 schools across the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland along with school principals and teachers from many of these schools gave generously of their time to facilitate the study and provide us with the information from which the current report is drawn. We are most appreciative of their contributions in this regard.

We also wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the CSPPA research team comprising researchers and students from University of Limerick, Dublin City University, University College Cork and Ulster University for their work in delivering this report.

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# THE CHILDREN'S SPORT PARTICIPATION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY STUDY 2018 (CSPPA 2018)

## FINAL REPORT

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## BACKGROUND

The Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study 2018 (CSPPA 2018) was a follow up to CSPPA 2010 looking at participation in sport, physical activity and Physical Education among children aged 10 to 18 on the island of Ireland. CSPPA 2018 was the first study to look at these issues in an all-island context. It was a multi-centre study, undertaken by the University of Limerick, Dublin City University, University College Cork and Ulster University. It was funded by Sport Ireland, Healthy Ireland and Sport Northern Ireland.

## POLICY CONTEXT

The importance of sport, physical activity and Physical Education is reflected by various public policies and strategies related to these domains which have been developed in the North and South. In the Republic of Ireland (ROI), these include the National Physical Activity Plan, the National Sports Policy, and numerous recent changes to the Physical Education curriculum e.g. the introduction of the Junior Cycle Wellbeing Curriculum, and the Leaving Certificate Physical Education (LCPE) as an examinable subject. In Northern Ireland, examples include A Fitter Future for All: Outcome Framework 2015-2019, the Healthy Child, Healthy Future: A Framework for the Universal Child Health Promotion Programme in Northern Ireland, and Changing Gear: A Bicycle Strategy for Northern Ireland.

## CSPPA 2018 AIMS

The aims of CSPPA 2018 were to:

- Comprehensively assess the participation levels of Irish and Northern Irish children in sport, physical activity and Physical Education.
- Provide quality data on current physical activity levels of children.
- Determine factors that enhance or inhibit participation levels of children in sport, physical activity and Physical Education.
- Explore the relationships between regular participation in physical activity and health for children.
- Provide a comparison, where possible, between CSPPA 2010 and CSPPA 2018.
- Provide policy insight on physical activity initiatives aimed at children.

## METHODS

CSPPA used a cross-sectional research design involving similar methods to those used in 2010, with some important changes:

- Questionnaires were completed using tablet / laptop technology rather than on paper.
- Disability status was assessed using the Child Functioning Module questionnaire.
- Family socioeconomic status was assessed using the Family Affluence Scale II, which stratifies individuals into low, medium or high family affluence.

For the Republic of Ireland, the 114 schools which participated in 2010 and were eligible were invited to participate. 74 of these agreed to take part, with 12 new schools being included for a total of 86 schools. This allowed 4,697 primary and post primary students to provide input. In Northern Ireland 29 schools and 1,954 primary and post primary students were involved. In total, 6,651 children aged 10 – 18 took part in the study. In addition, a small number of school administrators were interviewed about participation in sport in schools, school facilities and resources available for sport.

## KEY FINDINGS (REPUBLIC OF IRELAND)

### *National Physical Activity Guidelines*

- 13% of children met the National Physical Activity Guidelines of at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity every day (17% primary school pupils and 10% post primary school pupils). These figures are lower than the 19% and 12% recorded in primary and post primary schools respectively in 2010.
- While boys were more likely to meet the Guidelines than girls at all ages, the most significant change since 2010 was the decline in the proportion of primary school boys reporting meeting the Guidelines from 27% to 23%. However, this is still significantly more than the 13% of primary school girls who met the Guidelines. At post primary school 14% of boys and 7% of girls met the Guidelines.
- Higher levels of cardiorespiratory fitness were positively associated with the number of days on which the Guidelines were achieved. This is important as higher levels of cardiorespiratory fitness are associated with decreased cardiovascular risk factors as well as overall life satisfaction in children and adolescents.

### *Community Sport*

- 80% of primary and 58% of post primary school pupils reported participating in community sport at least once a week compared to 79% and 64% respectively in 2010.
- Since 2010, there has been a 7% increase in the proportion of primary school children playing community sport at least 4 times a week with similar increases occurring among boys and girls.
- At post primary level, 38% of pupils reported never participating in community sport, an increase of 4% on the 2010 figure. Non-participation among girls now stands at 45%.
- Gradients in active participation and sports club membership exist by gender, disability status, and socio-economic status. These gradients are strongest in the post primary school years.
- 75% of primary and 67% of post primary pupils reported belonging to at least one community sports club.

### *School Sport*

- 70% of primary and 63% of post primary school pupils reported participating in school sport at least once a week. This represented an increase of 7% for primary school pupils but a decrease of 10% for post primary school pupils since 2010.

- The numbers reporting never participating in school sport decreased by 4% at primary school level but increased by 14% at post primary school level since 2010.
- Traditional team games dominated school sport for boys and girls at both primary and post primary school levels.
- Teachers and sports coaches provide significant support to schools through their coaching efforts while there is a significant level of inter-school sports competition that takes place throughout the school system.

### *Combined Sport*

- Most primary school children are participating in organised sport at least once a week with over 90% of children reporting their involvement. More primary school children are now taking part in sport in a school or community setting than in 2010.
- While regular participation in sport, in the community and school, significantly increases the chances of children meeting the National Physical Activity Guidelines, it is the case that for the vast majority of children participation in sport on its own is insufficient for them to meet the National Physical Activity Guidelines.

### *Physical Education in Schools*

- 51% of primary school pupils reported receiving Physical Education classes at least twice a week in 2018 compared to 41% in 2010.
- 18% of primary pupils reported receiving 30 minutes or less of Physical Education per week in 2018 compared to 22% in 2010.
- 23% of post primary pupils reported meeting the Department of Education and Skills' (DES) Physical Education recommended minimum of 120 minutes per week in post primary. Compared to 2010, these figures represent an increase at post primary school level from 10%.
- Average weekly minutes of Physical Education increased at post primary school level from 77 minutes to 89 minutes since 2010.
- The games strand dominates what is on offer in primary and post primary Physical Education. Outdoor and adventure activities, aquatics and gymnastics are poorly represented.
- Boys were more likely to meet the Physical Education guidelines at post primary school level than girls.
- Perceived levels of swimming ability have declined since 2010, possibly associated with reduced access to the aquatics strand under the Physical Education curriculum.

### *Active Travel and Sedentary Behaviour*

- 4 in 10 pupils actively commute to school. In the case of primary school pupils, this represents a significant improvement on the 3 in 10 who did so in 2010.
- Average sedentary leisure time was 5.1 hours / day for primary school children and 6.6 hours / day for post primary children.
- 63% percent of primary and 42% of post primary pupils met the sedentary screen time guideline of no more than 120 minutes/day.

*Comparison between the Republic of Ireland (ROI) and Northern Ireland findings*

<b>Physical activity</b>	<b>ROI</b>	<b>NI</b>
Meeting the physical activity guidelines (%)	13	13
Primary school meeting the physical activity guidelines (%)	17	20
Post primary school meeting the physical activity guidelines (%)	10	11
<b>Physical Education</b>	<b>ROI</b>	<b>NI</b>
Primary children receiving 30 minutes or less of Physical Education per week (%)	18	19
Post primary school meeting the Physical Education guidelines (%)	23	40
Average minutes of weekly Physical Education for post primary schools (minutes)	89	122
<b>School sport</b>	<b>ROI</b>	<b>NI</b>
Primary school pupils participating in school sport at least once a week (%)	70	65
Post primary school pupils participating in school sport at least once a week (%)	63	58
<b>Community sport</b>	<b>ROI</b>	<b>NI</b>
Primary school participation in community sport at least once a week (%)	80	65
Post primary school participation in community sport at least once a week (%)	58	49
<b>Active travel</b>	<b>ROI</b>	<b>NI</b>
Primary school pupils engaging in active travel (%)	42	36
Post primary school pupils engaging in active travel (%)	40	18
<b>Sedentary behaviour</b>	<b>ROI</b>	<b>NI</b>
Primary school average daily sedentary leisure time (hours)	5	5
Post primary school average daily sedentary leisure time (hours)	7	7
Primary school meeting sedentary screen time guideline (%)	63	59
Post primary school meeting sedentary screen time guideline (%)	42	40

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To help keep children engaged in healthy and active lifestyles, recommendations from the CSPPA 2018 findings have been made to shape policy and strategy for the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland's physical activity guidelines, Physical Education guidelines, sport offering both at school and in the community, active travel, and sedentary behaviour. These are detailed in the tables below.

### CSPPA 2018 recommendations for the Republic of Ireland

Domain	Current status (CSPPA 2018)	Responsibility	CSPPA Recommendation by academic group
Physical activity: meeting the physical activity guidelines ( $\geq 60$ minutes of MVPA daily)	<p>17% of primary school pupils met the physical activity guidelines</p> <p>10% of post primary school pupils met the physical activity guidelines</p>	<p>Lead: National Physical Activity Plan (NPAP) Implementation Group and National Sports Policy (NSP) Leadership Group</p> <p>Other: Health Service Executive, Sport Ireland</p>	<p>Use CSPPA 2018 figure as a baseline benchmark</p> <p>Set a realistic and meaningful target for increasing the % of children meeting the physical activity guidelines for 2019-2027</p> <p>Monitor achievement of this regularly (every 2-3 years)</p>
Sport (school sport and community sport)	<p>70% of primary school pupils participated in school sport at least once a week</p> <p>63% of post primary school pupils participated in school sport at least once a week</p> <p>80% of primary school pupils participated in community sport at least once a week</p> <p>58% of post primary school pupils participated in community sport at least once a week</p>	<p>Lead: Department of Education and Skills, NSP Sport Leadership Group</p> <p>Other: NPAP Implementation Group, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Sport Ireland</p>	<p>Use CSPPA 2018 figure as a baseline benchmark</p> <p>Set a realistic and meaningful target for increasing the % of children participating in sport regularly for 2019-2027</p> <p>Monitor achievement of this regularly (every 2-3 years)</p>

Domain	Current status (CSPPA 2018)	Responsibility	CSPPA Recommendation by academic group
Physical Education: Receiving <30 minutes/ week at primary level	18% of primary school pupils reported receiving 30 minutes or less of Physical Education per week	Lead: Department of Education and Skills  Other: NPAP Implementation Group and NSP Sport Leadership Group	Use CSPPA 2018 figure as a baseline benchmark  Set a realistic and meaningful target for increasing the % of children meeting the national Physical Education guidelines for 2019-2027  Monitor achievement of this regularly (every 2-3 years)
Meeting the Physical Education guidelines ≥120 minutes/ week at post primary school level	23% of post primary school pupils met the Physical Education guidelines		
Active travel	42% of primary school pupils actively commuted to school  40% of post primary school pupils actively commuted to school	Lead: Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport  Other: Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, NPAP Implementation Group	Use CSPPA 2018 figure as a baseline benchmark  Set a realistic and meaningful target for increasing the % of children walking and cycling to school for 2019-2027  Monitor achievement of this regularly (every 2-3 years)
Sedentary behaviour; development of National Guidelines	No National Guidelines exist	Lead: Healthy Ireland  Other: Sport Ireland, Department of Education and Skills, Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Department of Health, Health Service Executive	Develop and implement National Guidelines on sedentary behaviour

## CSPPA 2018 recommendations for Northern Ireland

Domain	Current status (CSPPA 2018)	Responsibility	CSPPA Recommendation by academic group
Physical activity: meeting the physical activity guidelines (≥60 minutes of MVPA daily)	<p>20% of primary school pupils met the physical activity guidelines</p> <p>11% of post primary school pupils met the physical activity guidelines</p>	<p>Lead: Department of Health, Public Health Agency</p> <p>Other: Department of Education, Education Authority Northern Ireland, Department for Communities, Sport Northern Ireland, Department of Transport</p>	<p>Use CSPPA 2018 figure as a baseline benchmark</p> <p>Set a realistic and meaningful target for increasing the % of children meeting the physical activity guidelines for 2019-2027</p> <p>Monitor achievement of this regularly (every 2-3 years)</p>
Sport (school sport and community sport)	<p>65% of primary school pupils participated in school sport at least once a week</p> <p>58% of post primary school pupils participated in school sport at least once a week</p> <p>65% of primary school pupils participated in community sport at least once a week</p> <p>49% of post primary school pupils participated in community sport at least once a week</p>	<p>Lead: Department for Communities, Sport Northern Ireland</p> <p>Other: Department of Education, Education Authority Northern Ireland</p>	<p>Use CSPPA 2018 figure as a baseline benchmark</p> <p>Set a realistic and meaningful target for increasing the % of children participating in sport regularly for 2019-2027</p> <p>Monitor achievement of this regularly (every 2-3 years)</p>

Domain	Current status (CSPPA 2018)	Responsibility	CSPPA Recommendation by academic group
Physical Education: Receiving <30 minutes/ week at primary level  Meeting the Physical Education guidelines ≥120 minutes/ week at primary and post primary school	19% of primary school pupils reported receiving 30 minutes or less of Physical Education per week  40% of post primary school pupils met the Physical Education guidelines	Lead: Department of Education, Education Authority Northern Ireland  Other: Colleges and universities working in initial teacher training and post-qualification development	Use CSPPA 2018 figure as a baseline benchmark  Set a realistic and meaningful target for increasing the % of children meeting the national Physical Education guidelines for 2019-2027  Monitor achievement of this regularly (every 2-3 years)
Active travel	36% of primary school pupils actively commuted to school  18% of post primary school pupils actively commuted to school	Lead: Department of Transport  Other: Department of Education, Education Authority Northern Ireland, Sustrans, Department for Health, Public Health Agency	Use CSPPA 2018 figure as a baseline benchmark  Set a realistic and meaningful target for increasing the % of children walking and cycling to school for 2019-2027  Monitor achievement of this regularly (every 2-3 years)
Sedentary behaviour	There are currently no guidelines on sedentary behaviour	Lead: United Kingdom Chief Medical Officers	Develop and implement guidelines for sedentary behaviour published by United Kingdom Chief Medical Officers

# 1

CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION



## 1.1 BACKGROUND

The Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study 2018 (CSPPA 2018) was a follow up to CSPPA 2010 (1). Jointly funded by Sport Ireland, Healthy Ireland and Sport Northern Ireland, CSPPA 2018 was the first study to look at participation in sport, physical activity and Physical Education in an all-island context. To allow for maximum comparison between the two jurisdictions currently and potentially into the future, the same research methods were employed throughout the study. Similar to its predecessor, CSPPA 2018 was a multi-centre study undertaken by the University of Limerick (lead University), Dublin City University and University College Cork and Ulster University. The study brought together expertise from across the island in physical activity, sport and Physical Education.

CSPPA 2018 used self-report questionnaires and device-based measures of habitual physical activity (using accelerometers) to assess participation levels in physical activity, sport physical education and active travel among children and youth. Physical health measures were also collected from a sub-sample of the participants to examine the relationship between physical activity levels and markers of health. Pupils' opinions, attitudes and views on the determinants of participation in physical activity, physical education and sport were assessed through a series of focus group interviews (Republic of Ireland only) and will form part of a separate report. A small number of school administrators (Principals, Vice-Principals or a nominated teacher) completed a questionnaire on school sports participation, facilities and resources.

### THE AIMS OF CSPPA 2018 WERE TO:

- Comprehensively assess the participation levels of Irish and Northern Irish children in sport, physical activity and Physical Education, using both subjective and objective means;
- Provide quality surveillance data on the current physical activity levels of Irish and Northern Irish children;
- Determine factors that enhance or inhibit participation levels of Irish and Northern Irish children in sport, physical activity and Physical Education;
- Explore the relationships between regular participation in physical activity and health for children; and
- Provide a comparison, where possible, between CSPPA 2010 and CSPPA 2018.

To allow for comparisons to 2010, Chapters 2-6 will discuss the Republic of Ireland results only with Northern Ireland results being discussed in Chapter 7. Final concluding chapters compare some of the key high-level results between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland along with pointing to recommendations arising from the study.

## 1.2 THE POLICY CONTEXT

The importance of sport, physical activity and Physical Education in the Republic of Ireland, is reflected by recent changes in policy related to those three domains, specifically the development of the National Physical Activity Plan (Get Ireland Active!) (2) and the National Sports Policy (3), and numerous recent changes to the Physical Education curriculum (e.g. Leaving Certificate Physical Education (LCPE)).

“Get Ireland Active!” is Ireland’s first national physical activity plan. The overarching target of the plan is to *‘increase the proportion of the population across each life stage undertaking regular physical activity by 1% per annum across the lifetime of Healthy Ireland’* (p.13). More specifically, using some of the 2010 findings as a baseline, the target for children aged 0-18 is to increase the proportion of children undertaking at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous (MVPA) physical activity everyday by 1%.

Action Area Two specifically targets children, and identifies fourteen multi-dimensional actions (ref. 8-21) intended to improve physical activity participation. These include: extending the Active School Flag (ASF) initiative to a further 500 further schools; fully implementing the Physical Education Curriculum for all primary and post primary schools so that all pupils are meeting the Department of Education and Skills’ (DES) minimum recommended guidelines; and renewing the National Play and National Recreation Policies to develop a new strategic direction for promoting physically active play. Action Area Seven deals with the monitoring and evaluation of policies, programmes and outcomes relating to physical activity. It commits to establishing: a systematic, regular and long-term national surveillance system to monitor physical activity levels in each of the target groups; and a set of baseline figures on physical activity and sedentary levels for each of the target groups. CSPPA 2018 and future iterations of CSPPA can contribute to these actions.

The National Sports Policy 2018-2027 sets out a vision for Irish sport in 2027, along with 57 actions seeking to transform the Irish sporting landscape over the next decade. Of the three high level goals, one is about increasing active and social participation in sport with targets already set for adults (from 43% to 50% of the population) and to be set for children. Findings from CSPPA 2018 will inform 2027 target setting for children’s sport participation, which will subsequently be assessed biennially.

Physical Education curriculum and policy have changed dramatically since CSPPA 2010, particularly at post primary level. Since 2017, a new compulsory area of learning was introduced at Junior Cycle, titled Wellbeing. Within this programme, a minimum of 135 hours are dedicated to Physical Education throughout the Junior Cycle. **The implication of this is that Physical Education is now a compulsory element for all pupils in the first three years of their post primary school education.** At Senior Cycle level, the phased introduction of two new curricula for Physical Education commenced in September 2018 with Leaving Certificate Physical Education (LCPE) being an examinable subject and Senior Cycle Physical Education (SCPE) a non-examinable subject. Sixty four schools<sup>1</sup> are currently involved in the Phase 1 rollout with a National rollout planned for September 2020. At primary school level, the 1999 Physical Education curriculum is still in place (six strands: outdoor and adventure; aquatics; dance; athletics; gymnastics; and games) although this is currently under revision with a new curriculum expected to be published in the near future.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2018-press-releases/PR18-07-23.html>

## 1.3 STUDY METHODS

CSPPA used a cross-sectional research design, similar to the previous study, with some important changes:

- Questionnaires were completed using tablet / laptop technology rather than on paper;
- Disability status was assessed using the Child Functioning Module questionnaire (developed by UNICEF and Washington Group on Disability Statistics (5, 6)); and
- Family socioeconomic status was assessed using the Family Affluence Scale II, which stratifies individuals into low, medium or high family affluence (7). Previously we used parent's employment status.
- Ethical approval was granted through the relevant committees within the participating institutions.

## 1.4 SCHOOL SAMPLE

The sampling frame for the schools involved in CSPPA 2010 included all primary and post primary schools in the Republic of Ireland. Special schools, Junior-only schools and colleges of further education were removed from the database, as they were not within the age cohort, or target population of this study. A systematic one stage cluster sampling method was used as opposed to a simple random method, this meant that a slightly larger sample had to be recruited to account for design effects and to allow for refusal to participate. Schools were stratified by four criteria:

- School gender: male, female or mixed;
- Socio-economic status: disadvantaged or non-disadvantaged (DEIS<sup>2</sup> vs. non-DEIS) for the Republic of Ireland; percentage of free meals class (low, medium or high) for Northern Ireland;
- School location: urban or rural (categorised by population density); and
- Size: small, medium or large (based on total number of pupils). For the Republic of Ireland, school sizes were determined by creating tertiles using all primary or post primary schools (tertile 1=small, tertile 2=medium and tertile 3=large). For Northern Ireland, the school size was supplied by the Department of Education Northern Ireland.

Recruitment letters were distributed to all sampled schools, with researchers following up by a phone call to the school Principal within seven days.

For the Republic of Ireland, all 123 schools which participated in 2010 and were eligible, were invited to participate (n=114). The nine schools that were ineligible had either closed or merged with larger schools in the area. A recruitment letter was sent to the eligible schools and followed up with a phone call within a week. 74 (65%) of these schools participated in CSPPA18 (24 declined the invitation to participate and 16 could not be contacted and/or scheduled). To ensure the samples were representative in terms of school gender, socio-economic status, location and size an additional 12 schools who met the stratification criteria for these hard to reach year groups, but had not participated in CSPPA 2010 were recruited.

As schools from Northern Ireland were not part of CSPPA 2010, all mainstream primary and post primary schools from Northern Ireland were included in the sampling frame for CSPPA 2018. Similar to ROI, Schools that were not within the age cohort, or targeted population of the study, were removed from the database. An equivalence sample was drawn up to reflect the Republic of Ireland sample. This sample consisted of 51 schools in total (20 primary and 31 post primary), of which 29 schools (9 primary and 20 post primary) were recruited to give an equivalence sample to the Republic of Ireland sample. In the case where a school declined to participate, a school with a similar stratification profile was approached to participate.

Once a school was selected, every child within the specific year group for that school was deemed eligible and invited to participate. This method was feasible and used to maximise the likelihood of each cluster selected being a small-scale representation of the total population of that geographical area. In addition, the CSPPA 2018 data were weighted to avoid bias from the clustered data.

### SAMPLE WEIGHTING

To ensure that the sample for reporting was representative of the school going populations in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, different weightings were used for the analysis of the primary school pupils only, the post primary school pupils only and the combined sample. Data were weighted by the ratio of the proportion of that respondent's gender within that class/year in the school population to the proportion of that respondent's gender within that class/year in the survey sample. There were three weights calculated for each region (six altogether): primweight which was used to relate the primary school sample proportions to the primary school population and was therefore used in all primary school only analyses; postweight which was used to relate the post primary sample proportions to the post primary school population and was therefore used in all post primary school only analyses; and combweight which was used to relate the total sample proportions to the primary and post primary school populations combined and was therefore used in all analyses combining the two sub-samples. Information for weighting was obtained from the Department of Education and Skills (Republic of Ireland) and the Department of Education (Northern Ireland). The data used to weight the sample is presented in Appendix 1.

## 1.5 PARTICIPANT PROFILE

The participant profile is presented in **Table 1**, with further sample breakdown in **Appendix 2**. In total, between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, 115 schools (48 primary and 67 post primary) participated in CSPPA 2018. The cluster sampling methodology employed by CSPPA, combined with sample weighting provides a representative sample of the school going populations in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. As the original Republic of Ireland sample in 2010 had been chosen totally randomly and there was no reason to think these schools were not still representative in terms of their characteristics, it was felt safe to enrol these schools again should they decide to take part and this would save costs and time in terms of the study processes.

**Table 1: Participant profile for CSPPA 2018**

	Republic of Ireland		Northern Ireland	
	Primary	Post primary	Primary	Post primary
<b>All schools (n)</b>	39	47	9	20
<b>All Pupils (n)</b>	1,103	3,594	446	1,508
<b>Pupils by Sex (%)</b>				
Boy	44	45	51	48
Girl	56	54	49	49
Other	0	1	0	3
<b>Average Age of Pupils (Years; M+SD)</b>	11.43 (±0.7)	14.11 (±1.51)	10.57 (±0.51)	14.31 (± 1.84)
<b>Family Affluence Scale<sup>3</sup> (%)</b>				
Low	22	21	23	19
Medium	58	59	54	58
High	20	20	23	23
<b>Pupils by School Class (n)</b>				
<b>Primary Pupils</b>				
5th / Year 6	542		184	
6th / Year 7	561		262	
<b>Post Primary Pupils Junior Cycle</b>				
1st Year / Year 8		1,635		297
2nd Year / Year 9		946		250
3rd Year / Year 10		303		204
Year 11		-		358
<b>Post Primary Pupils Senior Cycle</b>				
4th Year / Year 12		210		225
5th Year / Year 13		340		92
6th Year / Year 14		158		82
<b>School administrators (n)</b>	19	23	5	6

<sup>3</sup> Family Affluence Scale (FAS) is a measure of socio-economic status. Reference: Boyce W, Torsheim T, Currie C, Zambon A. The Family Affluence Scale as a Measure of National Wealth: Validation of an Adolescent Self-Report Measure Social Indicators Research. 2006; 78(3):473-87.

## 1.6 DATA ANALYSIS

Some important points regarding the analyses to note are:

- Only differences that were deemed to be statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) were reported throughout this report.
- For sedentary leisure time, a ceiling figure of 12 hours has been applied, to account for time spent in school and sleeping.
- Data were collected from a small sample of 4th class students ( $n=16$ ); they have been included in the overall primary school results, but do not appear for any of the class by class analyses.
- Pupils were able to identify as boy, girl or other. Due to the small number of pupils who identified as other (1%), gender related outputs only included boy and girl.
- All percentages were rounded up or down to the nearest whole number. Due to this, some tables may sum to 99%, or 101%.
- For data that was skewed (i.e. not normally distributed), values were reported as means (medians) in tables, to allow for comparison to 2010 but also to account for the distribution of the CSPPA 2018 data.

## 1.7 LIMITATIONS

CSPPA 2018 was a cross-sectional study providing a snapshot of participation levels by children in physical activity, sport, Physical Education and active transport based on children's self-report. As with all self-report surveys, some response bias may have occurred. To minimise this and to enhance the accuracy of responses, developmentally appropriate and psychometrically valid self-report instruments were used, all assessments were administered in-person and supervised by a highly trained CSPPA research team, participants were encouraged to answer honestly, and anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed. In addition, for self-reported physical activity, internal validity was assessed using device-based measures of habitual physical activity, which strongly supported the self-reported results.

To allow for comparisons to the results from CSPPA 2010, similar methods and measures were used in almost all cases. However, some differences should be noted. For example, while efforts were made to recruit the same schools involved in the previous study ( $n = 114$ ) this was not always possible due to changes in schools, such as amalgamations and refusals. Despite these efforts, it was difficult to recruit a balanced sample across the post primary school years in the ROI and 72% of the study participants here were drawn from 1st and 2nd year. A contributing factor to this was the increase in the size of 1st and 2nd year classes in the CSPPA 2018 sample compared to CSPPA 2010. Class sizes increased by 20% and 29% respectively compared to 2010. To account for the over-representation of 1st and 2nd year participants from the ROI Ireland post primary school sample, the data were weighted using data received from the Department of Education and Skills (Ireland) and the Department of Education (Northern Ireland) (see explanation of weighting above).

For CSPPA 2018, participants were asked to self-report their gender (male, female or other). While the number of children and youth who identified as other (n=69 or 1% of the included sample between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland) are included in the sample summary, the low numbers did not make it possible for them to be included separately in the main analyses.

In 2018, there was a slight change in the wording of the question<sup>4</sup> to primary school pupils assessing the average duration of each Physical Education class. As such, it is not possible to provide a direct comparison between 2010 and 2018 in total minutes of Physical Education, nor the proportion of primary school pupils meeting the Physical Education guidelines of 60 minutes a week. However, it is possible to compare the proportion of primary school children who reported receiving 30 minutes or less of Physical Education per week at 2010 and at 2018. This information is presented in the report.

Finally, the list of sports presented to CSPPA participants in the questions on community sport, school sport and physical education was limited to 22 activities, similar to 2010 and 2005. This non-exhaustive list was supplemented with a catchall “other” option which allowed participants to report other sports in which they took part during community sport, school sport or physical education. While this approach had little bearing on the overall levels of reported participation in community sport, school sport or physical education it is possible that the participation rates in certain sports, not specifically identified in the list of 22 have been understated in the report. Boxing, netball, volleyball, triathlon and rowing are examples of sports not specifically identified in the list of 22.

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<sup>4</sup> In 2010, primary pupils were asked, on an open-ended basis to indicate the length of a Physical Education class. In 2018, they were asked to select among a range of options (up to a maximum of 50 minutes for a single Physical Education class) as a response to this question. As a result, direct comparison for the total minutes of Physical Education between the two years is not possible.

# 2

## CHAPTER 2 PHYSICAL ACTIVITY



## 2.1 KEY FINDINGS

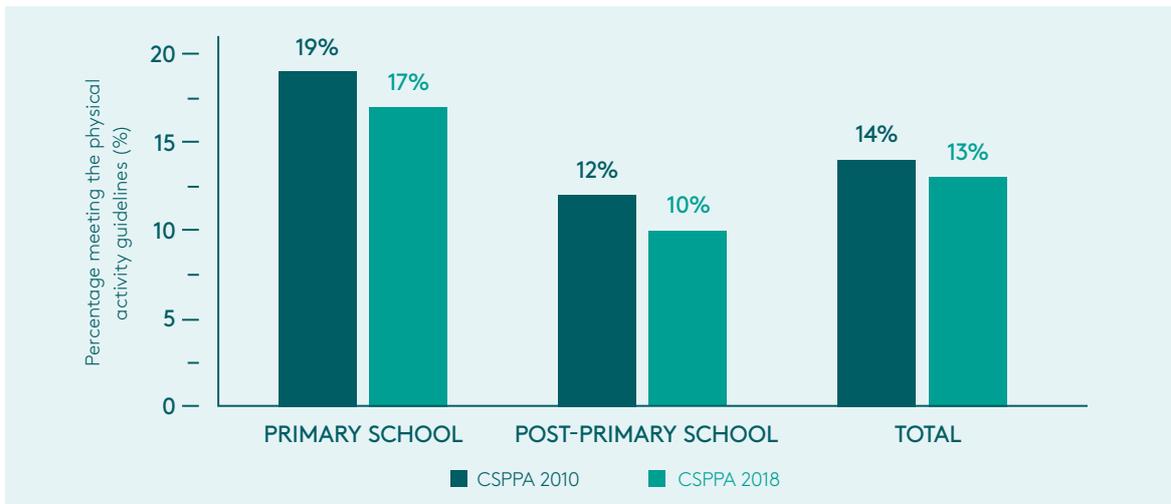
- 13% of Irish children reported meeting the physical activity guidelines of at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity daily (17% primary children and 10% post primary children). These proportions have decreased slightly since 2010 when 14% of children met the guidelines (19% primary and 12% post primary).
- Fewer girls (9%) met the physical activity guidelines than boys (17%). This gender difference was evident in both primary (13% vs. 23%) and post primary (7% vs. 14%) schools. The gender difference seen in 2010 has continued in 2018.
- Since 2010, the proportion of primary school boys meeting the physical activity guidelines has dropped from 27% to 23%.
- In the transition from primary to post primary school a large decrease was evident in those meeting the physical activity guidelines from 17% to 13%. Further declines in physical activity levels with age were seen at post primary school level.
- In post primary schools, pupils from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were less likely to meet the physical activity guidelines.
- Children who met the guidelines had higher levels of cardiorespiratory fitness which is an important marker and predictor of cardiovascular health.
- Active children reported higher levels of happiness.
- More than 50% of children reported owning an activity tracking device (e.g. a smart watch). The likelihood of meeting the guidelines was stronger among those who owned and used these devices.

## 2.2 INTRODUCTION

Within the National Physical Activity Plan, physical activity is defined as *'any bodily movement produced by the skeletal muscle which causes energy expenditure greater than at rest and which is health enhancing'* (p.5). This definition is deliberately broad, so that virtually all types of physical activity of interest, such as active play, active transport (walking or cycling), Physical Education, sport and deliberate exercise, are included. The National Physical Activity Plan states that all children should achieve at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) daily to meet the National Physical Activity Guidelines. In addition to this, muscle strengthening, flexibility and bone strengthening exercises should be undertaken three times a week. **The National Physical Activity Plan aims to increase the proportion of children meeting the physical activity guidelines by 1% per year.** The plan also aims to establish baseline figures on physical activity levels for each target group. This version of CSPPA will be able to contribute to the development of these baseline figures. This chapter explores the proportion of children meeting the physical activity guidelines, the number of days they achieve at least 60 minutes of MVPA, and the association between physical activity and health.

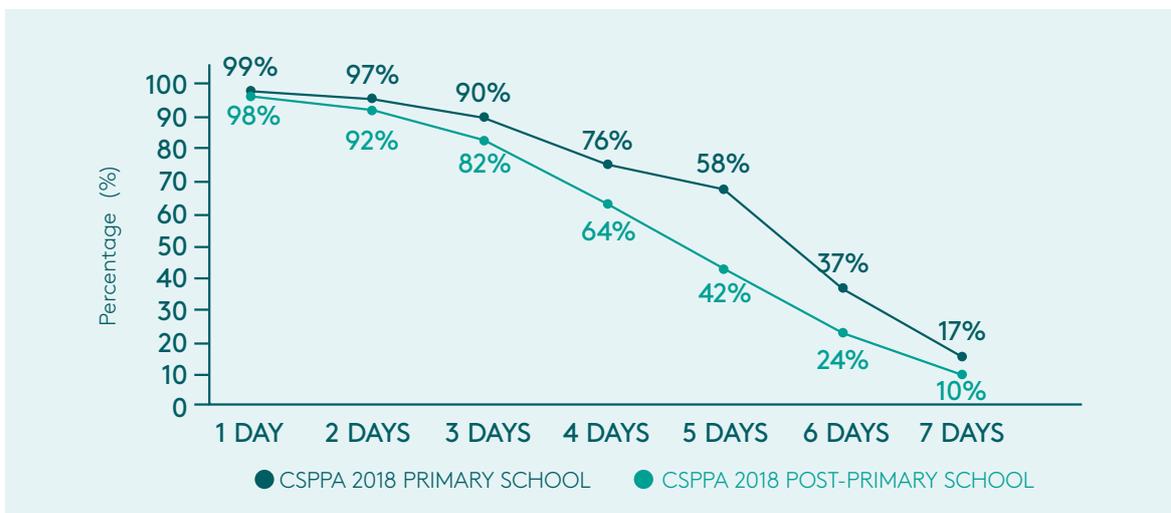
## 2.3 MEETING THE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY GUIDELINES

Survey participants were asked to report the number of days in the previous 7 days and in a typical week that they were physically active for at least 60 minutes at a moderate intensity or greater. Based on the average response to these two questions, thirteen percent of CSPPA participants reported being active every day i.e. they met the National Physical Activity Guidelines. This 13% was made up of 17% of primary pupils and 10% of post primary pupils. These activity levels were lower than those reported in 2010 (**Figure 1**). **In the context of the policy objective of increasing physical activity levels by 1% per annum, this represents a worrying decrease in meeting the physical activity guidelines at primary and post primary school.**



**Figure 1: Proportion of children meeting the physical activity guidelines - CSPPA 2010 and CSPPA 2018**

**Figure 2** shows the proportion of children reporting meeting the 60 minutes MVPA threshold on different numbers of days per week. While almost all primary and post primary children achieved at least 60 minutes of MVPA once a week, 90% and 82% respectively did so on three days a week while 58% and 42% respectively achieved it five times a week.

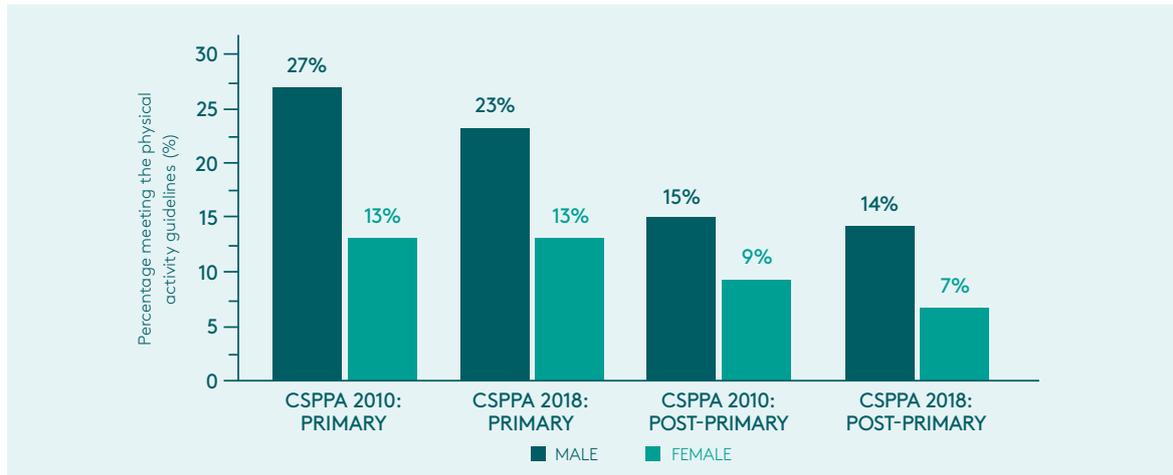


**Figure 2. Proportion of children who undertook at least 60 minutes of MVPA on 1-7 days per week**

**Fewer girls met the physical activity guidelines, compared to boys (9% vs. 17%).**

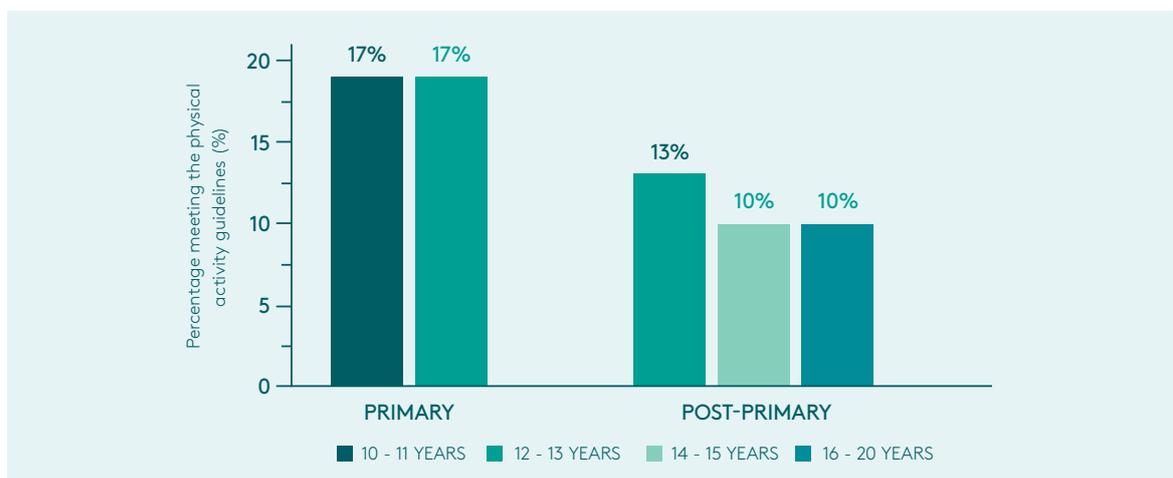
This gender difference was evident at primary school (13% vs. 23%) and post primary school (7% vs. 14%). **Figure 3** presents the proportion of children, by school level and gender, achieving the physical activity guidelines. Similar to 2010, girls were less likely to meet the physical activity guidelines at primary and post primary school levels.

**However, the most significant change has been the decline in the proportion of primary school boys meeting the physical activity guidelines from 27% to 23%.** It is also a concern that the proportion of post primary girls meeting the guidelines which was already small at 9% has declined even further to only 7% in 2018.



**Figure 3: Proportion of children by gender and school level who met the physical activity guidelines**

At primary school level, age did not influence the likelihood of meeting the guidelines. However, at post primary level there was a sharp decline in meeting the guidelines in the early teenage years with levels being maintained thereafter (**Figure 4**). Given the presence of a significant number of 12 – 13 year olds among both the primary and post primary school samples it was possible to compare levels of physical activity in the different school contexts. **A noticeable difference was evident with 17% of primary school 12 – 13 year olds meeting the guidelines compared to 13% of 12 – 13 year olds in post primary schools.** This suggests a strong school transition effect where the challenges posed by a new school environment, greater academic pressures and more homework may impact negatively on the likelihood of children meeting the guidelines in the early years of their post primary education.



**Figure 4: Proportion meeting the physical activity guidelines by age category**

At post primary school level, children from the highest socioeconomic background (as measured by the Family Affluence Scale (FAS)<sup>5</sup> were more likely to meet the physical activity guidelines (12%), than those in the medium (10%) and low (10%) FAS groups (**Table 2**). No differences existed at primary or post primary school level between children with and without disabilities in terms of meeting the guidelines.

**Table 2: Proportion meeting the physical activity guidelines by socioeconomic status**

Socioeconomic level	Primary school	Post primary school	Total
Low FAS (%)	17	10	12
Medium FAS (%)	17	10	12
High FAS (%)	18	12	14

To assess the extent to which the self-reported results were accurately capturing physical activity levels, a sub-sample of 275 children wore an activity monitor over an extended period. These devices allowed for the objective quantification of total and daily amounts of physical activity. **Based on the activity monitor data, 11% of the sub-sample was classified as meeting the physical activity guidelines, which was similar to the self-reported proportion of 13%. Furthermore, no significant differences existed between the number of self-reported days that at least 60 minutes of MVPA was achieved and the objective measurement of MVPA. These results add validity to the CSPPA 2018 self-reported physical activity findings.**

## 2.4 PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND HEALTH

Physical health measures were collected from a sub-sample of 1,325 participants (48% boys, average age 13.3 (+1.5) years). Cardiorespiratory fitness, blood pressure, waist circumference and body mass index were the measures used to assess health status. Using internationally established criteria for determining healthy versus unhealthy for each of these measures, the proportion of those deemed as healthy for each measure is presented in **Table 3**.

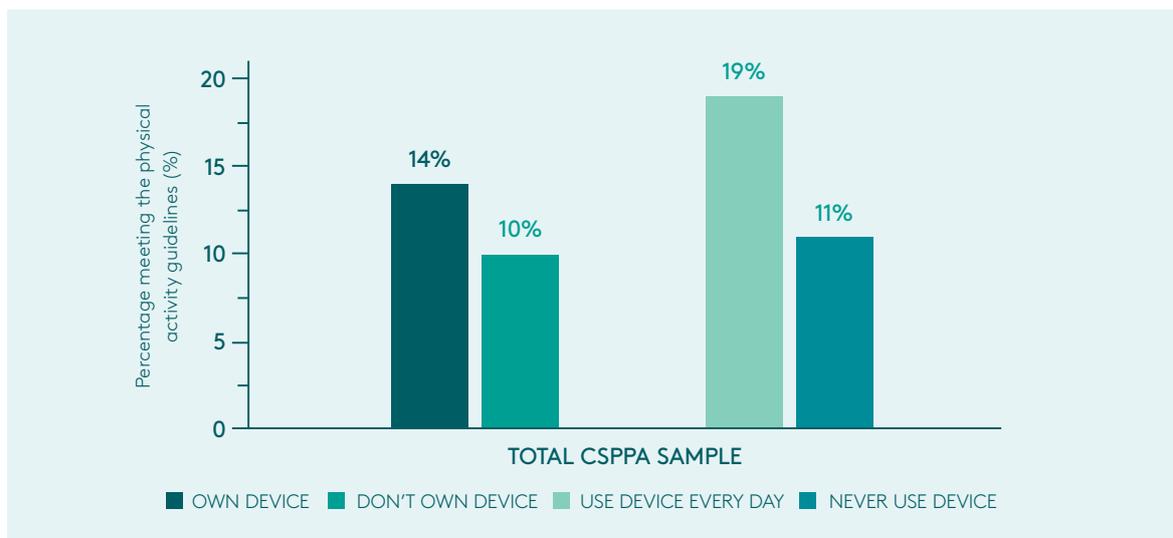
**Table 3: Proportion of those deemed healthy for physical health measures**

Physical health measure	Primary school (%)	Post primary school (%)	Total (%)
Body Mass Index	70	75	74
Blood pressure	87	94	92
Waist circumference	80	85	84
Cardiorespiratory fitness	84	76	77

<sup>5</sup> FAS was assessed based on the answers to questions around family ownership of computers and cars, number of holidays in the last 12 months and the respondent having their own bedroom.

Across the entire sub-sample, 74% had a healthy body mass index with less than 1% being underweight, 20% being overweight and 6% being obese. More than three quarters had a healthy cardiorespiratory fitness level (77%) while the majority had healthy blood pressure (92%) and waist circumference (84%) measures. **At primary and post primary school levels, higher cardiorespiratory fitness was associated with more days where at least 60 minutes of MVPA were achieved. This may be the most important physical health association, as higher levels of cardiorespiratory fitness are associated with decreased cardiovascular risk factors (8), as well as overall life satisfaction (9) in children and adolescents.** For self-reported happiness, a higher number of days where at least 60 minutes of MVPA was achieved was associated with feeling 'very happy', compared to 'not happy at all' at primary (4.9 vs. 3.6 days/week) and post primary (4.5 vs. 3.1 days/week) school levels.

Finally, a recent area of interest for researchers has been the role of physical activity tracking devices (e.g. apps, smart watches, etc.) in meeting the physical activity guidelines (10). More than half of primary (53%) and post primary (54%) school pupils reported owning a physical activity tracking device. **Meeting the physical activity guidelines was associated with owning a physical activity monitoring device, using a physical activity monitoring device and the frequency of use of such devices as shown in Figure 5.**



**Figure 5: Proportion meeting the physical activity guidelines by device ownership and usage**

## 2.5 SUMMARY

Overall, physical activity levels dropped since 2010, with girls still being less likely to meet the physical activity guidelines than boys. While levels of physical activity are higher in boys at all ages, the proportion of boys at primary school level meeting the guidelines has decreased sharply from 27% to 23%. It is also a concern that the proportion of post primary girls meeting the guidelines has declined from 9% to 7%. A decline in physical activity was evident in early adolescence with a plateau for those aged between 16 and 20. The transition between primary and post primary school influenced the likelihood of meeting the physical activity guidelines suggesting that this may be an area worth tackling to improve physical activity levels. At post primary school level, those in the highest socioeconomic class were most likely to meet the physical activity guidelines, while functional difficulty status (as a measure of disability) did not influence the likelihood of meeting the guidelines.

Generally, Irish children appeared to be in good physical health based on the sub-sample who provided physical health measures. Importantly, those achieving at least 60 minutes of MVPA on a greater number of days had a higher cardiorespiratory fitness level, which is important for both current and future health. Regardless of school level, owning, using and frequency of use of a physical activity monitor was associated with a higher proportion of children meeting the physical activity guidelines.

# 3

## CHAPTER 3 COMMUNITY SPORT



## 3.1 KEY FINDINGS

- 80% of primary and 58% of post primary school pupils reported participating in community sport at least once a week compared to 79% and 64% respectively in 2010.
- Since 2010, there has been a 7% increase in the proportion of primary school children playing community sport at least 4 times a week with similar increases occurring among boys and girls.
- At post primary level, 38% of pupils reported never participating in community sport, an increase of 4% on the 2010 figure. Non-participation among girls now stands at 45%.
- At primary and post primary school levels, boys, those attending a rural school, individuals without disabilities and children from more affluent backgrounds were significantly more likely to participate in community sport and be members of a sports club.
- The gradients in active participation and club membership were more prominent in the post primary than primary school years.
- Participation in community sport declined with age among post primary pupils.
- 75% of primary and 67% of post primary pupils reported belonging to at least one community sports club.
- Team sports were the most popular for boys throughout the school years while girls preferred a combination of team and individual sports activities regardless of school level.

## 3.2 BACKGROUND

The publication last year of the National Sports Policy 2018-2027 highlights the importance of sport within the Republic of Ireland. The policy sets out the vision for Irish sport in 2027 and includes 57 actions intended to transform the sporting landscape over the next decade. Of the three high level goals in the policy, one is about increasing participation in sport. Targets have already been set for adults while findings from CSPPA 2018 will be used to set the targets for children.

For the purposes of this report, participation in sport has been divided into two domains, namely community sport (referred to in the 2010 report as extra-school sport) which takes place in clubs and centres outside the school environment, and school sport (previously referred to as extra-curricular sport) which happens within a school setting but is not part of the formal Physical Education curriculum. This chapter deals with community sport while Chapter 4 looks mainly at school sport while also including some material combining participation across both domains. Both chapters explore participation, frequency of participation and the range of sports participated within these settings.

### 3.3 PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY SPORT

At primary school level, 80% of pupils reported participating<sup>6</sup> in community sport at least once a week, while 58% of post primary pupils reported participating at least once a week. These represent an increase of 1% and a decrease of 6% at primary and post primary school levels respectively since 2010 (**Table 4**). **The proportion of primary school pupils who never participate in community sport has remained unchanged at 7%; in the case of post primary pupils the proportion of non-participants has increased by 4% to 38%.**

**Table 4: Frequency of community sport participation for primary and post primary school pupils**

Frequency (%)	Primary School		Post Primary School	
	CSPPA 2010	CSPPA 2018	CSPPA 2010	CSPPA 2018
4 or more days a week	22	29	24	23
2-3 days a week	37	37	30	29
1 day a week	20	14	10	6
Less often	14	13	2	4
Never	7	7	34	38

The frequency of participation for boys and girls at primary and post primary schools is presented in **Table 5**. The picture is mixed. **At primary school level, there has been a significant increase in the proportion of boys and girls participating in community sport on 4 or more days a week.** At post primary school level, declines in the numbers participating once a week among boys and girls have been mirrored by increases in the numbers never participating. **Of significant concern is that 45% of post primary girls reported never participating in community sport.**

**Table 5: Frequency of community sport participation for boys and girls**

Frequency (%)	Primary School				Post Primary School			
	BOY		GIRL		BOY		GIRL	
	2010	2018	2010	2018	2010	2018	2010	2018
4 or more days a week	27	35	18	24	30	30	17	19
2-3 days a week	35	38	40	37	33	32	28	26
1 day a week	18	13	21	16	7	4	12	7
Less often	14	8	14	16	2	4	3	3
Never	7	7	7	8	28	31	40	45

<sup>6</sup> For primary school pupils, participation in community sport involved self-reported frequency of attendance at a sports field/ground/leisure centre to take part in some form of sport or physical activity. The use of this measure allowed for comparison with 2010 results.

**Table 6** presents the frequency of community sport participation by post primary school year. Patterns are broadly similar to those seen in 2010 with declines in the numbers participating frequently and increases in the numbers not participating as children progress through the school years. Compared to 2010, the numbers of non-participants in 2018 during the first three post primary years were very similar. One notable difference is that there was little by way of a 4th or Transition Year effect in 2018, which was associated with fewer non-participants in 2010. Worryingly, 52% of 6th year pupils reported never participating.

**Table 6: Frequency of community sport participation by school year**

2010	1st year	2nd year	3rd year	4th year	5th year	6th year
4 or more days a week (%)	27	26	23	21	16	19
2-3 days a week (%)	30	31	29	33	30	25
1 day a week (%)	12	10	8	12	8	6
Less often (%)	2	1	3	2	1	3
Never (%)	29	32	37	32	45	47
2018	1st year	2nd year	3rd year	4th year	5th year	6th year
4 or more days a week (%)	29	28	25	16	20	16
2-3 days a week (%)	33	30	27	28	28	23
1 day a week (%)	6	7	6	7	2	6
Less often (%)	4	4	6	4	2	2
Never (%)	28	32	36	45	48	52

## 3.4 FACTORS INFLUENCING PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY SPORT

We looked at the socio-economic and demographic factors which influenced the likelihood of a child participating in sport at least once a week in a community setting. The key factors here were gender, school location, disability status, socio-economic status and age. These are reported in **Table 7** below.

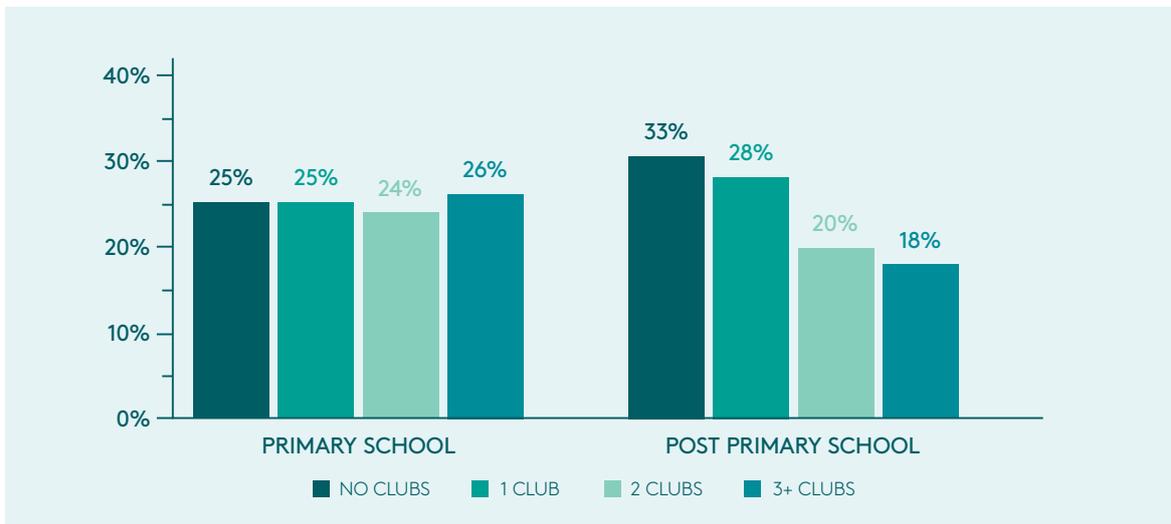
**Table 7: Participation Rates in Community Sport by various factors**

	Primary School (%)	Post Primary School (%)
<b>Gender:</b>		
Boys	86	66
Girls	77	52
<b>School Location:</b>		
Rural	85	67
Urban	74	45
<b>Disability Status:</b>		
No functional difficulties	81	61
At least 1 functional difficulty	72	43
<b>Socio-Economic Status:</b>		
High FAS	82	65
Low FAS	75	47
<b>Age Category:</b>		
12 - 13		67
14 - 15		61
16 -20		50

**It is notable that the gradients by gender, school location, disability and socio-economic status increase substantially from primary to post primary school levels.** For example, a 9% difference in participation rates between boys and girls turns into a 14% difference among post primary school pupils. **In the context of a general decline in numbers of current participants between primary and post primary levels, the fact that this decline is more pronounced among groups, where participation rates are already lower during the primary years, is a serious policy concern.**

### 3.5 MEMBERSHIP OF A SPORTS CLUB

In 2018, the CSPPA study included new questions on sports club membership. Encouragingly 75% of primary school children and 67% of post primary children reported being members of at least one community sports club as shown in **Figure 7** below. On average, primary school children reported belonging to 2.7 sports clubs while post primary pupils reported membership of 2.3 sports clubs.



**Figure 7: Community sports club membership levels among primary and post primary pupils**

As with active participation in community sport, club membership levels also decline, in overall terms and in the numbers of clubs, as children progress through their school years. While less than one quarter (24%) of pupils in 1st year of post primary are not members of a sports club this has increased to 47% by the time they get to 6th year. Also in line with active participation patterns, membership of a sports club showed significant variation by gender, school location, disability, age and socioeconomic status as in **Table 8**.

**Table 8: Sports Club Membership among primary and post primary pupils by various factors**

	Primary School (%)	Post Primary School (%)
<b>Gender:</b>		
Boys	81	74
Girls	71	61
<b>School Location:</b>		
Rural	82	75
Urban	67	55
<b>Disability Status:</b>		
No functional difficulties	76	69
At least 1 functional difficulty	66	54
<b>Socio-Economic Status:</b>		
High FAS	83	74
Low FAS	63	55
<b>Age Category:</b>		
12 - 13		76
14 - 15		70
16 -20		59

### 3.6 RANGE OF SPORTS PLAYED IN COMMUNITY SPORTS CLUBS

Children who reported playing sport in a community setting were further asked to identify all sports that they had engaged in at least once in the previous 12 months. This broad reference period was chosen in order to get an indication of the range of sports available to Irish children, which are presented in alphabetical order **Table 9**.

Table 9: Range of community sports for primary and post primary school pupils by gender

Sport / activity (%)	Primary School			Post Primary School		
	BOY	GIRL	ALL	BOY	GIRL	ALL
Adventure activities	2	2	2	4	5	4
Aerobics/exercise class	1	1	1	1	3	2
Athletics	8	11	10	9	12	11
Badminton	1	2	2	5	4	5
Baseball/rounders	2	1	2	2	3	3
Basketball	13	9	11	12	10	10
Camogie / Hurling	25	19	21	21	16	18
Cross-country running	3	4	4	5	5	5
Dance	2	23	14	2	22	13
Gaelic football	38	30	34	39	26	32
Golf	2	1	1	1	1	1
Gymnastics	1	11	7	1	8	5
Handball	2	2	2	4	2	3
Hockey	3	7	5	2	4	3
Horse riding	4	6	5	2	9	6
Martial arts	6	4	5	9	4	6
Rugby	20	4	11	12	4	8
Soccer	55	16	33	43	12	26
Squash	3	1	2	2	1	1
Surfing	2	2	2	2	2	2
Swimming	12	21	17	10	19	15
Tennis	3	4	3	4	5	5
Triathlon	1	2	2	1	1	1
Volleyball	2	<1	1	2	4	3
Weight training	1	1	1	15	9	12

At primary school level, soccer, Gaelic football, hurling, rugby and basketball were the five most popular activities for boys while for girls there was more of a mix with Gaelic football, dance, swimming, camogie and soccer being the five most popular activities. At post primary school level, the same team sports continued to be popular among boys with the addition of weight training among the top five. For girls, Gaelic football, dance, swimming, camogie and soccer were again the five most popular sports (albeit in a different order to the primary school situation). So, despite the considerable range of activities that are now potentially available to Irish children, it is still the case that the landscape of club sport is dominated by little more than a handful of activities at primary and post primary level.

### 3.7 SUMMARY

This Chapter reports on active and social<sup>7</sup> participation in community sport by Irish children. It presents a mixed picture. It is encouraging that more primary school children reported participating regularly while fewer primary children reported never participating. On the other hand, the opposite proved to be the case with post primary children. Furthermore, strong participation gradients continue to be seen around gender, disability and socio economic status. In the context of declining levels of participation through adolescence and young adulthood the fact that these gradients get larger during these years is a significant policy concern. Membership of sports clubs was generally high throughout the survey sample but, as with active participation, tended to decline with age. Lower membership of community sport clubs was also noted for girls, those with disabilities and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, regardless of school level. The majority of popular community sports were team based, with girls more likely to participate in individual sports compared to boys.

# 4

## CHAPTER 4 SCHOOL SPORT



## 4.1 KEY FINDINGS

- 70% of primary and 63% of post primary school pupils reported participating in school sport at least once a week. This represented an increase of 7% for primary school pupils but a decrease of 10% for post primary school pupils since 2010.
- The numbers reporting never participating in school sport decreased by 4% at primary school level but increased by 14% at post primary school level since 2010.
- At post primary school level, participation in school sport was more popular among:
  - Boys (70%) than girls (57%);
  - Pupils attending rural schools (69%) than urban schools (54%);
  - Younger age groups e.g. 12 – 13 year olds (76%) vs. 16 – 20 year olds (54%);
  - Pupils with no disabilities (65%) than those with disabilities (52%); and
  - More affluent pupils (66%) than less affluent pupils (56%).
- Traditional team games dominated school sport for boys and girls at both primary and post primary school levels.
- Pupils benefit from a significant level of coaching undertaken by teachers and sports coaches and by the level of inter-school sports competition that takes place throughout the school system.
- Participation in sport, in the community and school, on its own is insufficient for most children to meet the National Physical Activity Guidelines.

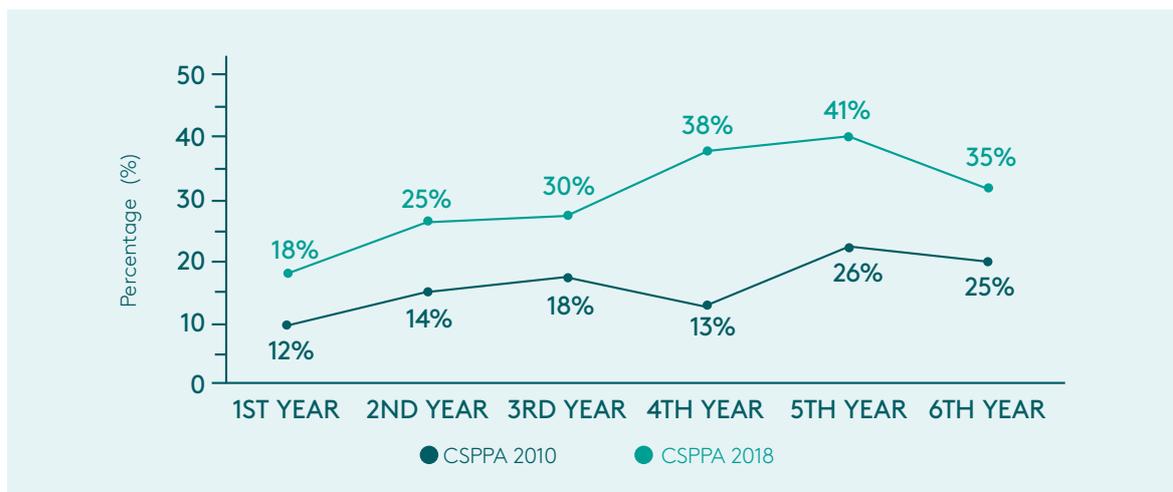
## 4.2 PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL SPORT

Seventy percent of primary school pupils and 63% of post primary pupils reported participating in school sport at least once a week. These figures represent an increase of 7% at primary level but a decrease of 10% at post primary level since 2010 (**Table 10**). The increase in primary schools and the decrease in post primary schools were driven primarily by changes in the participation rates of those who played on at least 4 days a week. **Meanwhile, the proportion of primary pupils who never participated in school sport decreased by 4% but increased by 14% among post primary pupils.** Like in the case of community sport, this represents a mixed picture with some good progress being made at primary level but significant challenges emerging in the post primary context.

**Table 10: Frequency of school sport participation for primary and post primary school pupils**

Frequency (%)	Primary School		Post Primary School	
	CSPPA 2010	CSPPA 2018	CSPPA 2010	CSPPA 2018
4 or more days a week	18	28	31	21
2-3 days a week	24	25	26	27
1 day a week	21	17	16	15
Less often	13	10	11	7
Never	24	20	16	30

These challenges become particularly pronounced as the pupils proceed through the post primary school system as is apparent from **Figure 8** which shows that non-participation levels were higher in 2018 across every school year than they were in 2010. The other notable feature here is the lack of a positive transition year effect as was the case in 2010.



**Figure 8: Proportion of post primary school pupils who reported never participating in school sport by school year for CSPPA 2010 and CSPPA 2018**

As was the case with community sport, participation<sup>8</sup> in school sport showed significant variation across different groups as seen in **Table 11** below.

<sup>8</sup> In the context of school sport, a participant means somebody who participated at least once a week in sport in school outside the PE curriculum.

**Table 11: Participation rates in school sport among primary and post primary pupils by various factors**

	Primary School (%)	Post Primary School (%)
<b>Gender:</b>		
Boys	67	70
Girls	72	57
<b>School Location:</b>		
Rural	70	69
Urban	70	54
<b>Disability Status:</b>		
No functional difficulties	71 (ns) <sup>9</sup>	65
At least 1 functional difficulty	65 (ns)	52
<b>School DEIS Status:</b>		
DEIS School	63	58
Non-DEIS School	72	64
<b>Socio-Economic Status:</b>		
High FAS	71 (ns)	66
Low FAS	70 (ns)	56
<b>Age Category:</b>		
12 - 13		76
14 - 15		65
16 -20		54

Comparing the above table with Table 7 around community sports, it is clear that the gradients which exist in active participation in sport – around gender, disability and socio-economic status – develop and grow in large part primarily during the post primary years. This has been a consistent finding of research<sup>10</sup> on sport in Ireland over the past decade and something which policy needs to address if it is to achieve its objectives around increasing participation in sport throughout the population.

<sup>9</sup> These differences are not statistically significant.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.sportireland.ie/Research/Keeping-Them-in-the-Game-2013-/>

## 4.3 RANGE OF SPORTS PLAYED IN SCHOOL

The range of school sports participated in by primary and post primary school pupils is presented in alphabetical order in **Table 12**.

**Table 12: Range of school sports for primary and post primary pupils (participated in the last 12 months)**

Sport / activity (%)	Primary School			Post Primary School		
	BOY	GIRL	ALL	BOY	GIRL	ALL
Adventure activities	2	4	3	3	4	3
Aerobics/exercise class	<1	1	1	<1	1	1
Athletics	15	19	17	9	10	10
Badminton	1	2	2	9	9	9
Baseball/rounders	11	12	11	3	3	3
Basketball	35	33	34	22	21	21
Camogie / Hurling	23	22	22	16	11	13
Cross-country running	7	10	8	5	5	5
Dance	6	24	16	1	9	5
Gaelic football	38	34	36	32	19	25
Golf	<1	0	<1	0	4	<1
Gymnastics	3	12	8	1	3	2
Handball	4	7	6	4	1	3
Hockey	3	13	9	2	8	5
Horse riding	1	2	2	1	2	1
Martial arts	2	1	2	2	1	1
Rugby	17	8	12	10	3	6
Soccer	57	35	44	39	13	25
Squash	1	1	1	1	<1	<1
Surfing	2	1	1	2	1	1
Swimming	12	14	13	3	4	4
Tennis	3	7	5	3	3	3
Triathlon	2	1	1	1	<1	1
Volleyball	3	6	5	3	9	6
Weight training	1	1	1	5	3	4

At primary level, soccer, Gaelic football, basketball, hurling and rugby were the five most popular school sports for boys, while for girls the top five sports were soccer, Gaelic football, basketball, dance and camogie. At post primary level, the most popular boy sports remained the same as seen at primary school level while for post primary girls, athletics replaced dance in the top five list. As was the case with community sport, just over a handful of sports dominate the school sport landscape in terms of participation numbers.

Within the Physical Education curriculum, it is acknowledged that school sport that is organised and/or implemented by teachers, or others in a voluntary capacity, should be linked to the Physical Education programme where possible. **Table 13** presents the breadth of engagement in school sports activities classified under the Physical Education strands at both primary and post primary school levels. **It is not surprising that school sport was dominated by games-related activities in particular team sports. Compared to 2010, games-orientated sports were even more dominant in CSPPA 2018.**

**Table 13: Participation in school sport by Physical Education strands**

Strand (%)	Primary School		Post Primary School	
	CSPPA 2010	CSPPA 2018	CSPPA 2010	CSPPA 2018
Athletics	16	23	13	11
Outdoor and Adventure	6	7	10	6
Dance	11	16	5	5
Aquatics	12	14	4	4
Gymnastics	6	8	5	2
Games	50	75	35	56
Unallocated <sup>11</sup>	8	7	9	6

## 4.4 ETHOS OF SPORT IN SCHOOLS

As well as asking the children about their involvement in sport in school, they were also asked about coaching they received in school and the number of school teams they had represented in the previous 12 months. Further, a small number of school Principals were surveyed about the role and importance of sport in their schools.

61% of primary school children and 43% of post primary children reported that they had received some coaching to help them get better at sports. In primary schools the coaching burden was shared mainly, and equally, between teachers (26%) and sports coaches (28%) whereas in the post primary situation the teachers were the primary sources of this coaching (26%) compared to coaches (15%).

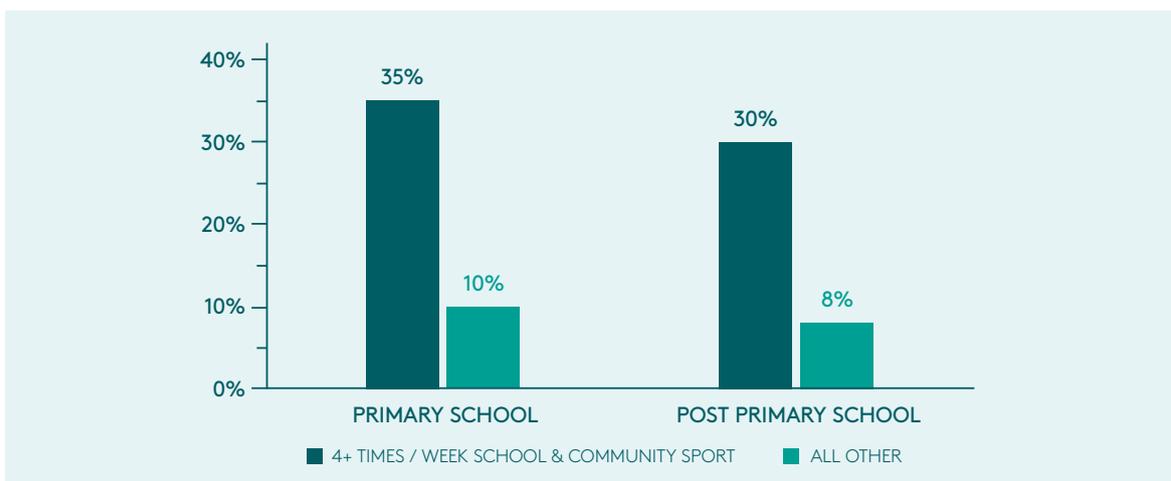
Very high numbers of children reported representing their school in competition over the previous 12 months. In primary schools 86% of children had been part of a school team while among post primary pupils the figure was 62%.

Among school Principals, sport was seen as an important contributor to the ethos of the school, with each school Principal involved in the survey deeming it to be either 'very important' (43% primary, 57% post primary) or 'fairly important' (57% primary, 43% post primary).

According to school Principals, Gaelic football was the most common sport played in interschool competition with similar proportions of schools competing at primary (79%) and post primary (87%) school level. Other team sports such as soccer, basketball, hurling, rugby and camogie were all well represented in interschool competition. Seven out of the top 10 activities were from team based invasion games. Interschool competition was not, however, restricted to the dominant team events. Athletics, cross-country running and badminton were also among the top 10 most common sports and activities entered into interschool competition.

## 4.5 PARTICIPATION IN SPORT AND MEETING THE NATIONAL PHYSICAL ACTIVITY GUIDELINES

While the earlier part of this chapter has dealt exclusively with school sport, these last sections look at participation in community and school sport in combination. The first issue we look at is the relationship between participation in sport and meeting the National Physical Activity Guidelines. To do this, we draw a comparison between the "most sporty" children in CSPPA i.e. those who reported playing sport in school and in the community at least four times a week in each case, and the rest of the CSPPA sample. The comparison is shown in **Figure 9**.



**Figure 9: Meeting the National Physical Activity Guidelines by levels of sports participation among primary and post primary pupils**

While it is encouraging to see that frequent participation in sport contributes to the likelihood of a child meeting the physical activity guidelines, it is also clear that participation in sport alone is not sufficient in this regard. **The results here highlight that meeting the physical activity guidelines is going to require much more than getting children involved in sport - a collective effort to get children active across all domains (e.g. travel, play, Physical Education and sport) is required. In this context, the multi-sectoral, collaborative approaches, promoted in the National Physical Activity Plan and the National Sports Policy, have considerable merit.**

## 4.6 CUMULATIVE MEASURE OF PARTICIPATION

Combining the two domains of participation allows us to get an insight into the overall volume of sports participation by children. **Figures 10a and 10b** do just that, looking at the frequency of participation by gender in primary and post primary schools respectively.

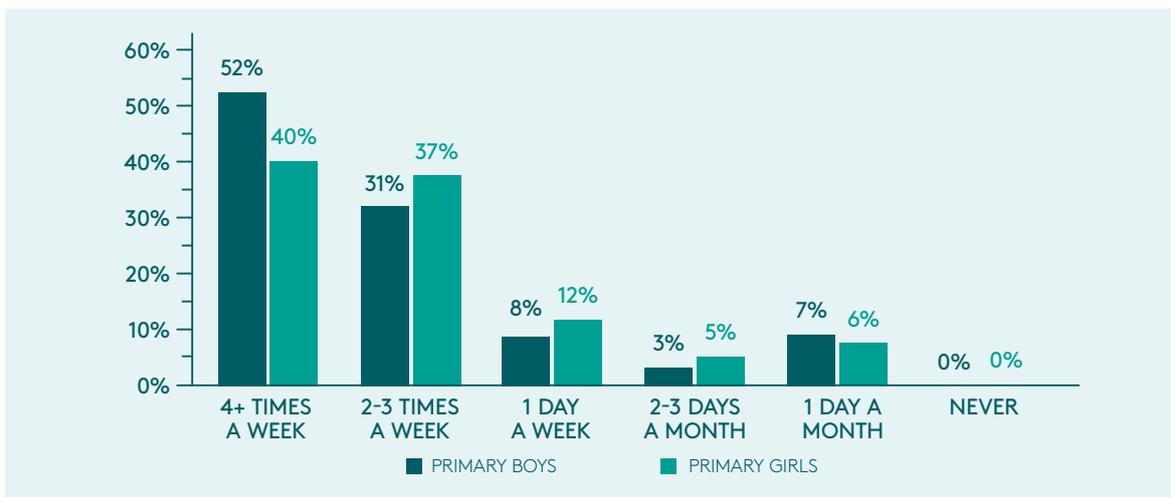


Figure 10a: Frequency of participation in any sport among primary school pupils by gender



Figure 10b: Frequency of participation in any sport among post primary school pupils by gender

As has been reported elsewhere<sup>12</sup> almost all primary school children are playing some sport regularly, whether in the school or community environment (or both) with 91% reporting their participation at least once a week. While overall participation rates are still relatively high across post primary school level with 76% taking part in some sport at least once a week, the decline that is felt is experienced most strongly among girls. So, while 89% of primary school girls reported playing sport regularly this figure fell to 72% among post primary school girls. It is also noteworthy that almost one quarter of post primary girls (23%) reported never participating in any sport either in the school or in the community. Apart from the gender gradient seen here, it is the case that the gradients around disability, socio-economic status and age (among post primary pupils) seen earlier in these chapters on sport were evident in the combined analysis.

## 4.7 NON-PARTICIPATION IN SPORT

Following on from the previous section, we look briefly at non-participation in sport which here is defined as not participating in either school sport or community sport at least once a week (i.e. no sport participation at least once a week). At primary school level, 10% of pupils were non-participants while the figure rose to 24% among post primary pupils. **Table 14** reports on the differences in non-participation levels across various groups in primary and post primary settings.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.sportireland.ie/Research/Keeping-Them-in-the-Game-2013-/>

**Table 14: Non participation in any sport among primary and post primary pupils by various factors**

	Primary School (%)	Post Primary School (%)
<b>Gender:</b>		
Boys	7 (ns)	17
Girls	9 (ns)	29
<b>School Location:</b>		
Rural	6 (ns)	17
Urban	10 (ns)	33
<b>Disability Status:</b>		
No functional difficulties	7	21
At least 1 functional difficulty	15	38
<b>Socio-Economic Status:</b>		
High FAS	5	21
Low FAS	13	38
<b>Age Category:</b>		
10 - 11	6 (ns)	
12 - 13	10 (ns)	
12 - 13		15
14 - 15		22
16 -20		46

In respect of the gradients, similar patterns were observed around non-participation as have been reported earlier around participation with the gradients emerging and growing most strongly in the post primary school years.

## 4.8 SUMMARY

The primary focus of this Chapter has been on participation in sport in schools. The results represent a mixed bag, mirroring the earlier findings around community sport. While some good progress has been made at primary school level with increases in the proportion of children participating regularly along with a decline in the numbers of non-participants since 2010, the reverse has been the case with post primary pupils. As with sport in the community, the gradients in school sports participation emerge and grow in the post primary school years. These gradients are particularly strong around gender, socio-economic status, school location, age, and disability status. Team sports dominate with little evidence that school sport truly supports the breadth of activities envisaged under the Physical Education curriculum strands. School sport is regarded by school Principals as being important to the school's ethos and this is underscored by the scale of coaching delivered to the children by teachers and club coaches. A significant amount of inter-school sports competition happened throughout the school years.

It is encouraging that sport plays such a significant role in helping children achieve the National Physical Activity Guidelines. However, it is also clear that participation in sport alone is, for the vast majority of children, insufficient for them to meet the Guidelines. A collective effort combining sport, active travel, Physical Education and play as endorsed in the National Physical Activity Plan and the National Sports Policy is required.

# 5

CHAPTER 5

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION



## 5.1 KEY FINDINGS

- 51% of primary school pupils reported receiving Physical Education classes at least twice a week in 2018 compared to 41% in 2010.
- 18% of primary pupils reported receiving 30 minutes or less of Physical Education per week in 2018 compared to 22% in 2010.
- 23% of post primary pupils reported meeting the Department of Education and Skills' (DES) Physical Education recommended minimum of 120 minutes per week. Compared to 2010, this figure represents an increase from 10%.
- Average weekly minutes of Physical Education increased at post primary school level from 77 minutes to 89 minutes since 2010.
- Boys were more likely to meet the Physical Education guidelines at post primary school level than girls.
- The games strand of Physical Education dominated the primary and post primary offerings in Physical Education. Other strands, such as outdoor and adventure activities, aquatics and gymnastics were poorly represented based on children's reported participation levels.
- Perceived levels of swimming ability have declined since 2010 possibly associated with reduced access to the aquatics strand under the Physical Education curriculum.

## 5.2 INTRODUCTION

The Physical Education landscape in the Republic of Ireland has undergone numerous changes since 2010. While primary schools are still following the 1999 Primary School Education Curriculum a revised curriculum is currently being planned. **Under the 1999 Curriculum, primary school pupils are recommended to receive at least 60 minutes of Physical Education per week.** The curriculum is divided into six strands; outdoor and adventure; aquatics; dance; athletics; gymnastics; and games. Meanwhile, to promote physical activity and Physical Education in primary schools, the Active School Flag (ASF) initiative was developed. The ASF, which aims to get more schools, more active, more often, is a Department of Education and Skills (DES) initiative, and is supported by Healthy Ireland. Active School Flag status is awarded to schools that strive to achieve a physically educated and physically active school community, and is valid for three years. At the time of writing, 24% of primary schools had ASF status.

At post primary school level, many Physical Education options are available, at both Junior and Senior Cycle. At Junior Cycle, schools currently have the options of Short Course Physical Education, or since 2017, Physical Education under the Wellbeing programme (which makes Physical Education compulsory for all of the Junior Cycle). Schools have the option of following the 2003 Junior Cycle Physical Education Curriculum (seven strands; outdoor and adventure activities; aquatics; athletics; dance; gymnastics; games; and health related activity), the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) Short Course Physical Education exemplar (four strands; physical activity for health and wellbeing; games; individual and team challenges; and dance and

gymnastics), or a school designed and approved programme. At Senior Cycle, two new Physical Education curricula were introduced in 2018, examinable Leaving Certificate subject (Leaving Certificate Physical Education (LCPE)) and a non-examinable subject (Senior Cycle Physical Education (SCPE)). **Using the 2003 Curriculum as a guide, it is recommended that post primary school pupils receive at least 120 minutes of Physical Education per week.**

This chapter will examine how much weekly Physical Education children receive, the content of Physical Education classes, and the relationship between the ASF initiative and physical activity, Physical Education and sport participation.

### 5.3 PRIMARY PHYSICAL EDUCATION FREQUENCY AND DURATION

In 2018, 2% of primary school children reported no Physical Education per week; no change from 2010. For those who received Physical Education, 45% reported receiving Physical Education 2-3 times per week, with an additional 6% reporting Physical Education 4 or more times per week. This reflects a positive shift in the frequency of Physical Education classes from 2010, when only 41% of pupils reported receiving Physical Education twice a week or more (**Figure 11**).



**Figure 11: Frequency of Physical Education in Primary schools.**

Eighteen percent of primary pupils reported receiving a total of 30 minutes or less of Physical Education per week in 2018, compared to 22% in 2010. **While this slight improvement is to be welcomed, it is nonetheless a concern that almost one in five primary pupils are reportedly getting no more than 30 minutes of Physical Education a week.** Children attending a rural school were more likely to receive 30 minutes or less of Physical Education a week than those attending an urban school (21% vs. 14%) while no differences were found between boys and girls or between DEIS and non DEIS schools in this regard.

## 5.4 POST PRIMARY PHYSICAL EDUCATION FREQUENCY AND DURATION

At the post primary school level in 2018, 5% reported no Physical Education per week; no change from 2010. Twenty-three percent of pupils reported meeting the Physical Education minimum recommended guidelines of 120 minutes per week. This figure represents a 13% increase from the 2010 result. In 2018, similar proportions met the guidelines for the first 3 years of schooling while there was an increase in the numbers meeting the guidelines in 4th (Transition) Year, followed by a decline in the Senior Cycle years, culminating in only 11% of 6th year pupils meeting the guidelines (**Table 15**).

**Table 15: Proportion of pupils who received the PE minutes guideline by class/year group**

Class/year	CSPPA 2010 Meeting PE guidelines (%)	CSPPA 2018 Meeting PE guidelines (%)
1st year	10	20
2nd year	6	19
3rd year	10	25
4th year	24	43
5th year	8	22
6th year	0	11

Post primary boys (28%) were more likely to meet the minimum recommendation of 120 minutes per week than girls (19%). Those attending an all-Boys school were more likely to meet the Guidelines (40%) than those attending an all-Girls school (17%), or a mixed school (23%). Further differences existed by school location (urban=25% vs. rural=22%) and by school DEIS status for girls only (DEIS schools = 12% vs. non-DEIS schools = 20%).

Minutes of Physical Education increased at post primary school level from 77 to 89 minutes per week since 2010. The weekly Physical Education minutes were relatively consistent from 1st to 5th year but declined sharply in 6th year. Apart from looking at the average duration of Physical Education classes, CSPPA 2018 also looked at the breakdown between single, double and triple Physical Education classes. Between 2010 and 2018 there were some notable developments in post primary school as shown in **Tables 16 and 17** below.

Table 16 shows that the majority of pupils (64%) reported receiving a double class of Physical Education per week (an 8% decrease since 2010). The proportion of single Physical Education classes increased by 20% since 2010 (47% vs 27%). Boys were three times more likely to report receiving triple classes of Physical Education than girls (10% vs. 3%).

**Table 16: Timetabled Physical Education classes per week for post primary school pupils**

	None		Single		Double		Triple	
	2010	2018	2010	2018	2010	2018	2010	2018
Boys (%)	6	4	18	42	80	66	7	10
Girls (%)	4	1	34	51	65	63	3	3
All (%)	5	2	27	47	72	64	5	6

**Table 17** shows that most of the reported triple Physical Education classes were delivered to 4th (Transition) Year pupils. While there has been an increase in reported triple classes for 4th year boys (66% vs. 52%), reported triple classes have halved for 4th year girls since 2010 (16% vs. 30%). **This means that 4th year boys were four times more likely to receive a triple class of Physical Education than girls were.** For 6th year boys, there was a marked decrease in reported double Physical Education classes since 2010 (4% vs. 72%), with a corresponding increase in reported single classes (81% vs. 4%). Girls in 6th year reported an increase in single (83% vs. 61%) and double (32% vs. 8%) Physical Education classes since 2010. For 5th year pupils, there were significant increases in reported double classes for both boys (up 24%) and girls (up 23%).

**Table 17: Physical Education class periods for boys and girls by post primary school year**

	BOYS (%)						GIRLS (%)					
	Single		Double		Triple		Single		Double		Triple	
	2010	2018	2010	2018	2010	2018	2010	2018	2010	2018	2010	2018
1st	19	44	96	76	0	1	14	33	94	83	0	2
2nd	20	32	85	87	0	1	44	36	60	79	0	1
3rd	11	40	100	84	0	2	28	42	81	83	0	0
4th	11	35	42	29	52	66	13	82	58	13	30	16
5th	30	28	72	94	0	0	59	47	38	61	0	0
6th	4	81	72	4	0	0	61	83	8	32	0	1

## 5.5 CONTENT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION CLASS

The content of Physical Education classes is shown in **Table 18**. At primary school level, the most popular Physical Education activities for boys were basketball, soccer, Gaelic football, swimming and baseball/rounders. For girls, the five most popular activities were basketball, Gaelic football, soccer, athletics and dance. At post primary school level,

badminton and athletics replaced Gaelic football in the top five list for boys while for girls, badminton and baseball/rounders replaced Gaelic football and dance among the top five.

**Table 18: Reported content of Physical Education classes over last 12 months**

Sport/activity (%)	Primary School			Post Primary School		
	BOY	GIRL	ALL	BOY	GIRL	ALL
Adventure Activities	12	20	17	9	17	13
Aerobics	3	5	4	6	9	8
Athletics	42	50	46	43	46	45
Badminton	6	5	5	56	60	58
Baseball /rounders	43	41	42	37	51	45
Basketball	69	70	69	72	71	72
Camogie / Hurling	37	36	36	9	8	9
Cross-country running	19	24	22	10	7	8
Dance	29	49	41	7	38	24
Gaelic football	59	56	57	36	21	28
Gymnastics	17	30	25	27	35	31
Golf	<1	0	<1	0	<1	<1
Handball	17	20	19	33	21	26
Hockey	18	30	25	33	30	31
Horse riding	<1	1	1	<1	1	1
Martial arts	3	1	2	7	7	7
Rugby	30	23	26	24	16	20
Soccer	64	51	57	78	51	63
Squash	1	2	1	5	1	3
Surfing	1	1	2	3	2	2
Swimming	48	37	43	11	7	9
Tennis	8	13	11	11	14	12
Triathlon	1	1	2	1	1	1
Volleyball	3	4	7	22	32	27
Weight training	1	1	1	15	13	14

**Table 19** shows the extent to which the Physical Education strands (athletics, outdoor and adventure activities, dance, aquatics, gymnastics and games) were represented by the reported content of Physical Education classes at primary and post primary school level.

**Table 19: Representation of the Physical Education strands at primary and post primary school level**

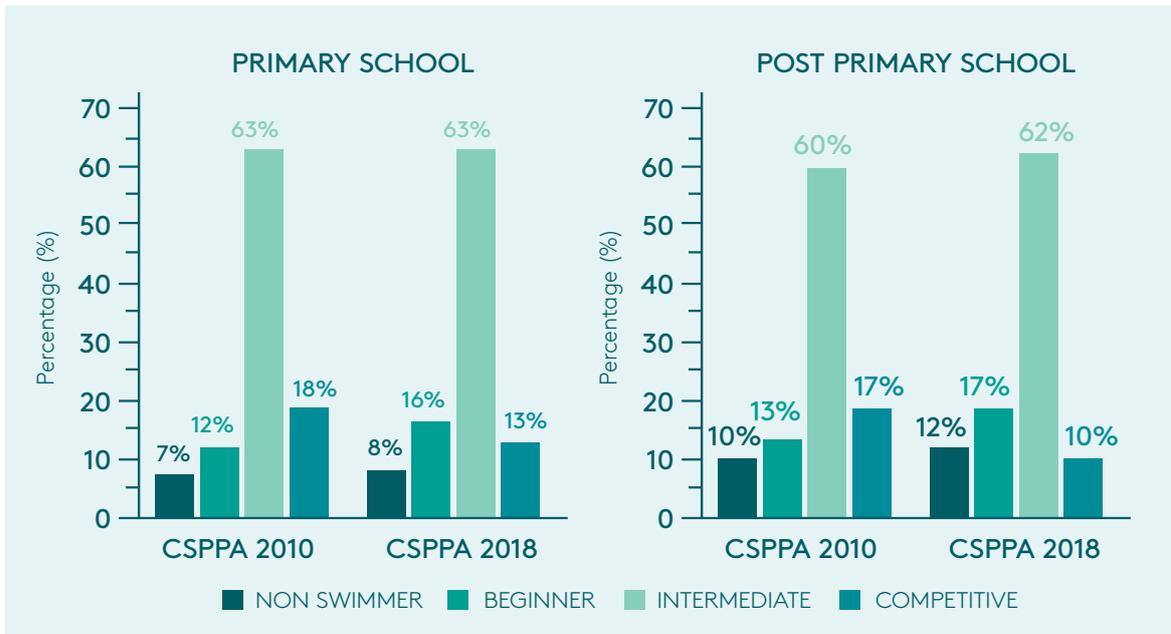
Strand (%)	Primary School		Post Primary School	
	CSPPA 2010	CSPPA 2018	CSPPA 2010	CSPPA 2018
Athletics	50	56	47	46
Outdoor and Adventure <sup>13</sup>	14	20	26	17
Dance	43	41	24	24
Aquatics	50	43	15	9
Gymnastics	30	25	28	31
Games	99	98	83	93
Unallocated <sup>14</sup>	34	12	36	28

**Table 19** highlights that the Physical Education curricula were primarily games driven, while other strands were relatively poorly represented. **The decline in the numbers of children getting access to swimming opportunities during Physical Education at both school levels is noted in the context of the National Sports Policy which identified swimming as one of the activities with the potential to deliver significant benefits over the life course.**

**Figure 12** presents the changes in perceived swimming ability for primary and post primary pupils. At both school levels there was an increase in the number of beginners with a roughly corresponding decrease in those who considered themselves to be competitive. Looked at in the context of the decrease in levels of access to the aquatics strand of Physical Education, this perceived decline in swimming ability among the CSPPA cohort is not surprising.

<sup>13</sup> Outdoor and adventure includes adventure, horse riding, rowing, surfing, triathlon, winter sports, canoeing, sailing, fishing, shooting, skate-boarding, orienteering and rock climbing.

<sup>14</sup> Reflects where activities did not fit comfortably into one of the six strands e.g. weight training, martial arts, boxing, wrestling, aerobics, gym and exercise activities; or were not specified.



**Figure 12: Perceived swimming ability of primary and post primary school pupils**

A potential influencer of the choice of sports delivered during Physical Education classes were the facilities available to the school. For example, across primary and post primary schools, basketball was a very popular PE sport underpinned in no small part by the fact that 63% of primary and 96% of post primary schools had ready access to basketball courts on-site. In contrast, the lack of on-site access to swimming pools for most schools helps explain the low levels of reported participation in swimming during Physical Education classes. However, while convenient access to facilities is important, this alone is insufficient to ensure pupil exposure to a broad and balanced Physical Education curriculum, as other factors like appropriate levels of teacher education are also required. For example, pupil participation in the gymnastics strand of the Physical Education curriculum was reported as much lower in the post primary (24%) than in the primary (31%) sector, despite post primary schools having greater access to multi-purpose indoor halls and gymnastics equipment. **An examination of teacher training, confidence and potential barriers to teaching the less well-served components of the Physical Education curriculum is recommended.**

## 5.6 ACTIVE SCHOOLS FLAG (ASF)

The ASF was introduced by the Department of Education and Skills to support participation in Physical Education, sport and physical activity within the school setting. It is primarily focused on primary schools. Using data from the Mayo Education Centre, it was possible to identify ASF schools involved in the CSPPA survey. Thirty percent of the primary school pupils were identified as attending ASF schools during the 2017-2018 academic year. Significantly, more girls (74%) attended ASF schools in comparison to non-ASF schools (48%). As girls were shown to be less likely to meet the physical activity guidelines, a direct comparison between ASF and non-ASF schools was not undertaken. However, among pupils attending ASF schools, no gender differences were found in physical activity levels, whereas boys were significantly more likely to meet the physical activity guidelines than girls in non-ASF schools. Further research into the effect of the ASF programme in primary schools is warranted.

## 5.7 SUMMARY

At primary school level, more children reported receiving at least two classes of PE per week. While there was a decline in the proportion of primary school children reporting that they received 30 minutes or less of Physical Education per week, it was the case in 2018 that almost one in five primary children experienced this situation.

In post primary school there was a significant increase on the 2010 figure in the proportion of children meeting the Physical Education guidelines. In parallel, average weekly minutes of Physical Education increased at post primary level since 2010. Boys, and those attending urban schools, were more likely to report receiving the Physical Education guidelines. Additionally, those attending an all-Boys school were more likely to meet the guidelines compared to those attending an all-Girls or a mixed school. Among girls, those attending non-DEIS schools were more likely to meet the Physical Education guidelines than those attending DEIS schools.

The games strand of the curriculum continued to dominate Physical Education classes, with lower levels of participation reported for other strands, such as outdoor and adventure activities, aquatics and gymnastics. Reported levels of swimming ability declined since 2010 possibly associated with decreased access to the aquatics strand of the Physical Education curriculum reported by the CSPPA participants. Access to facilities (either on-site or off-site), only partially explained the sports being offered during Physical Education classes. Finally, tentative results suggest that gender differences in achieving the physical activity guidelines may be lessened with the ASF programme, although further research is needed.



CHAPTER 6

**ACTIVE TRAVEL  
AND SEDENTARY  
BEHAVIOUR**



## 6.1 KEY FINDINGS

### *Active travel*

- 42% of primary and 40% of post primary school children reported walking or cycling to or from school. This was an 11% increase at primary school level and no change at post primary level since 2010.
- At primary school level, more 6th class pupils reported actively commuting than 5th class pupils (47% vs. 36%).
- At post primary school level, active commuting peaked during 4th year (61%), but was lowest among 6th year pupils (23%).
- Higher proportions of those attending urban schools reported actively commuting than those attending rural schools.
- Children with disabilities were more likely to actively commute at both primary and post primary school level.
- Not enough safe places to cross the road (26%) and the distance being too far (32%) were the main barriers to active commuting for primary and post primary pupils respectively.

### *Sedentary behaviour*

- On average primary school children engaged in 5.1 hours per day of sedentary time; for post primary pupils the figure was 6.6 hours per day.
- At post primary school level, boys had lower sedentary leisure time than girls (6.4 vs. 6.8 hours/day).
- 63% percent of primary and 42% of post primary pupils met the sedentary screen time guideline of not more than 120 minutes/day. The proportion meeting the guideline decreased as children progressed through their education with 52% of 1st years meeting it compared to 35% of 6th year pupils.
- Daily sedentary leisure time did not influence the likelihood of meeting the physical activity guidelines.
- Since 2010, there has been an increase in the average time spent doing homework. At primary school the increase was from 31 minutes / day to 44 minutes / day; at post primary level the increase was from 67 minutes / day to 84 minutes / day. Girls reported spending more time on homework than boys.

## 6.2 BACKGROUND

Active travel refers to making all, or part of a journey, by physically active means such as walking or cycling. Pupils who walk or cycle to school have higher overall levels of physical activity, have better cardiorespiratory fitness, and are more likely to be physically active into adulthood (11-13). Aside from health benefits, there are also economic (14) and environmental (15) benefits to engaging in active travel. Under Action Area Four (Environment) of the National Physical Activity Plan, promoting active

transport is identified as one of the most practical and sustainable ways to increase population levels of physical activity. Developing and promoting walking and cycling, through strategies, policies and infrastructure, feature heavily as actions under this area (p.24) of the Plan.

Sedentary behaviour, defined as any waking behaviour in a sitting or reclining posture, with an energy expenditure of no more than 1.5 METs <sup>15</sup>(16), is a newer behaviour of interest among researchers and policy makers. As sedentary behaviour can be viewed as an independent risk factor for health (17), it is possible for individuals to meet the physical activity guidelines, but still accrue large amounts of sedentary time. Two Action points in the National Physical Activity Plan reflect the importance of decreasing sedentary behaviour;

- Action 28 (p.22) – Develop national guidelines on sedentary behaviour; and
- Action 51 (p.32) – Establish a set of baseline figures on physical activity and sedentary levels for each of the target groups.

The difficulty in developing national guidelines for sedentary behaviour is reflected by the current lack of such guidelines worldwide. Despite this, children are recommended to have no more than 120 minutes of sedentary screen time per day (18). In an Irish context, overweight and obese adolescents accumulate more minutes of overall sedentary screen time daily compared to their normal-weight counterparts (19).

**The measurement of sedentary behaviour using self-report methods has developed considerably over the past decade and, as a result, it is considered that the figures are not comparable between 2010 and 2018. It has therefore been decided to only report on the 2018 figures in this report. One exception to this approach occurs in respect of time spent doing homework, where the question has not changed since 2010, and where both sets of results are shown.**

This chapter will examine the proportion of children engaging in active travel, the perceived barriers to active travel, the amount of time children spend in sedentary leisure time, the proportion meeting the sedentary screen time guideline, and the link between daily sedentary leisure time and meeting the physical activity guidelines.

## 6.3 ACTIVE COMMUTING

Active commuting is defined as either walking or cycling to, or from, school. 42% of primary and 40% of post primary children actively commuted as part of their school journey (**Figure 13**). **Active commuting increased at primary level by 11% while remaining unchanged at post primary school level, since 2010.** The mode of commuting among primary and post primary pupils is shown in **Figure 14**.

<sup>15</sup> MET stands for Metabolic Equivalent Task where one MET is equal to the rate you burn calories while you are sitting.

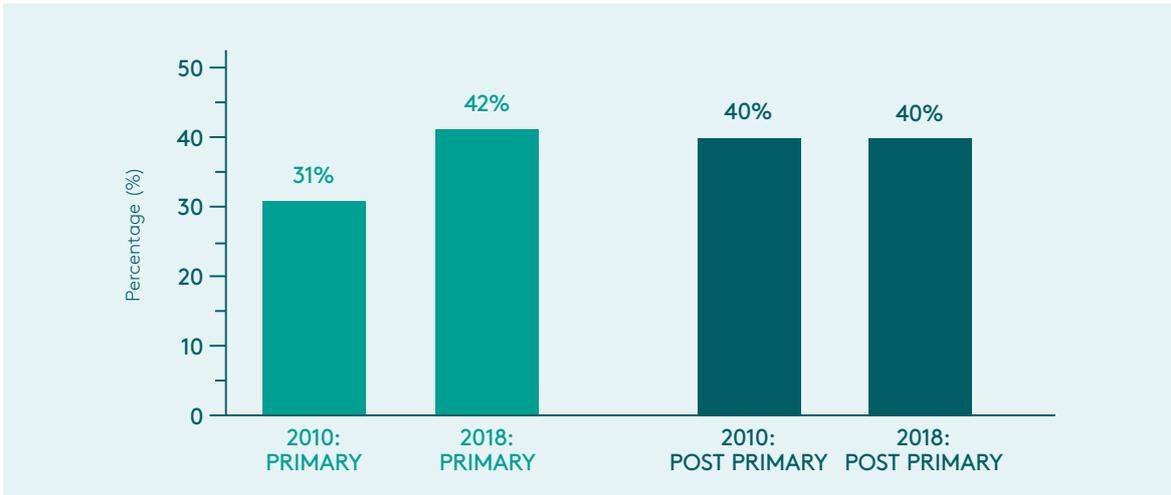


Figure 13: Proportion of primary and post primary pupils actively commuting in 2010 and 2018

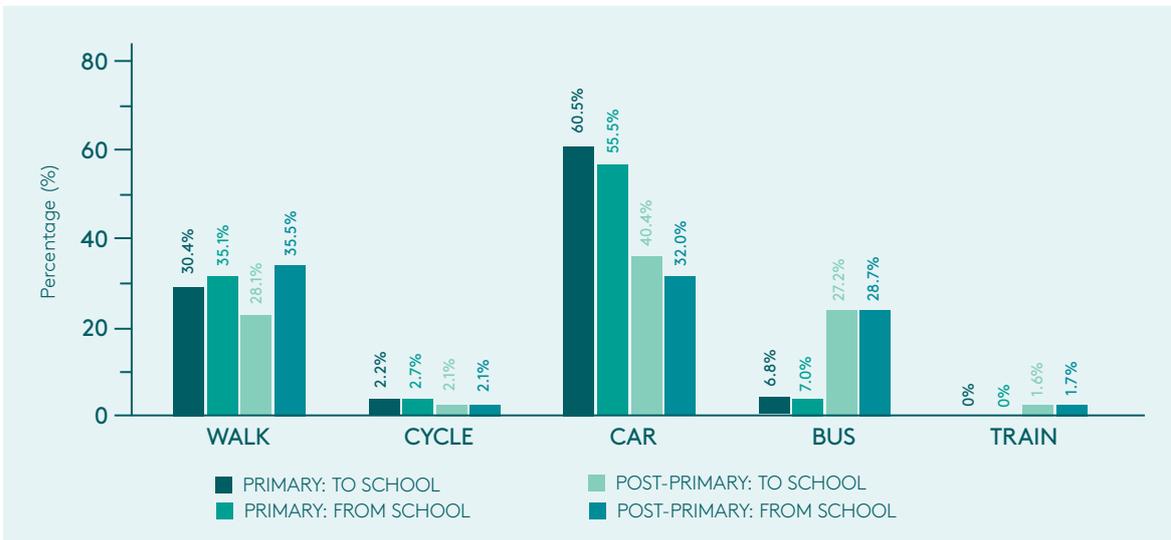


Figure 14: Modes of transport to, and from school, for primary and post primary pupils in 2018

Active commuting varied across different groups within primary and post primary schools. **Table 20** below shows some of the key comparisons in this respect.

**Table 20: Active Commuting among primary and post primary pupils by various factors**

Factor	Primary School (%)	Post Primary School (%)
<b>School Class:</b>		
5th class	36	
6th class	47	
1st year		35
2nd year		39
3rd year		35
4th year		61
5th year		48
6th year		23
<b>School Location:</b>		
Rural	24	24
Urban	65	63
<b>Disability Status:</b>		
No functional difficulties	41	38
At least 1 functional difficulty	52	46

For those who identified as passive commuters (i.e. commute by car, bus or train), not enough safe places to cross the road was identified as the biggest barrier (26%) for primary school pupils. For post primary school passive commuters, the distance they had to travel was identified as the biggest barrier to active commuting (**Table 21**). The weight of the school bag also acted as a significant deterrent to active commuting at both school levels.

**Table 21: Barriers to active commuting for primary and post primary school pupils**

Barriers	Primary School (%)	Post Primary School (%)
Heavy school bag	22	28
Not enough safe places to cross the road	26	10
Too much traffic	20	9
Not enough cycle lanes	20	8
Footpaths are too narrow	17	7
Poor lighting	3	3
Distance is too far	6	32
Parents will not allow it	14	6

## 6.4 SEDENTARY BEHAVIOUR

The measurement of sedentary behaviour using self-report methods has developed considerably over the past decade. This was reflected in the use of an updated sedentary behaviour questionnaire derived from the Determinants of Diet and Physical Activity consortium (20) which captured more sedentary behaviours than were captured in 2010. Therefore, in the main only 2018 results are presented here starting with Table 22 which shows the average (mean and median) number of sedentary hours / day for primary and post primary pupils.

**Table 22: Daily sedentary leisure time for primary and post primary school pupils 2018**

School Level	CSPPA 2018
Primary	5.1 (4.4)
Post primary	6.6 (6.4)

Note: Results are presented as mean (median) values, to account for the skewedness of the data.

At post primary school level, clear differences existed between 1st year pupils (6.2 hours/day) and 6th year pupils (7.6 hours/day) while girls (6.8 hours/day) spent more time in sedentary leisure time, than boys (6.4 hours/day).

**Significantly higher numbers of primary pupils (63%) than post primary pupils (42%) met the sedentary screen time guideline of no more than 120 minutes / day.** A consistent fall off in the proportions meeting the screen time guidelines was noted by school class with children in 5th class (66%) most likely to meet them and those in 6th year (35%) least likely to.

The daily amount of time spent in sedentary leisure time had no influence on the likelihood of meeting the physical activity guidelines at primary and post primary school levels.

Average time spent doing homework has increased significantly throughout the school system since 2010. For primary pupils the increase was from 31 minutes / day to 44 minutes / day while for post primary pupils an increase of 17 minutes / days saw the average reach 84 minutes / day. Average homework time was highest during the exam years with 3rd year (101 minutes/day) and 6th year (114 minutes/day) pupils having the highest amount of homework time. On average, post primary girls spent almost 20 minutes more on homework each day than boys (92 vs. 74 minutes/day).

## 6.5 SUMMARY

Active commuting levels have increased by 11% at primary school level since 2010 while remaining unchanged at post primary school level. As expected, active commuting was higher among those who attended urban schools at both school levels. Children with disabilities reported engaging in more active travel than those without disabilities regardless of school level. A lack of safe places to cross the road and distance were the main barriers to active commuting among primary and post primary children respectively. The size of the school bag also featured as a significant barrier.

Children reported spending around a quarter of their days in sedentary activities. However, daily sedentary leisure time did not influence the likelihood of meeting the physical activity guidelines. A higher proportion of primary school pupils met the sedentary screen time guideline compared to post primary school pupils. Average daily time spent doing homework has increased at both school levels since 2010 with girls spending more time on homework than boys.

# 7

## CHAPTER 7 NORTHERN IRELAND



## 7.1 KEY FINDINGS

- 13% of Northern Irish children met the physical activity guidelines (20% primary school pupils, 11% post primary school pupils) of at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) per day. Fewer girls met the guidelines, compared to boys (10% vs. 16%).
- Higher levels of self-reported happiness were associated with more days where at least 60 minutes MVPA was achieved.
- 65% of primary and 58% of post primary school pupils reported participation in school sport at least once a week.
- 65% of primary and 49% of post primary school pupils reported participation in community sport at least once a week.
- 19% of primary pupils reported receiving 30 minutes or less of Physical Education per week.
- 40% of post primary school pupils reported meeting the Physical Education guidelines of at least 120 minutes/week.
- The average weekly minutes of Physical Education was 122 at post primary school level.
- 36% of primary and 18% of post primary school pupils reported actively commuting to school (either cycle or walk). Insufficient safe places to cross the road (primary school) and distance (post primary school) were the main reasons cited for not actively commuting to school.
- On average, primary and post primary school pupils spent 5.0 and 6.9 hours/day in sedentary leisure time respectively.
- 59% of primary and 40% of post primary school pupils met the sedentary screen time guideline of no more than 120 minutes/day.

## 7.2 BACKGROUND

The addition of Ulster University to the CSPPA 2018 Research Team allowed the CSPPA Study to be expanded into Northern Ireland for the first time. Not only did this allow for the participation rates in physical activity, sport and Physical Education to be explored on an all-Ireland basis, it also allowed a comparison to be made between the two jurisdictions.

Similar to the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland has a number of policies pertaining to physical activity, sport and Physical Education sponsored by three different Government Departments (Education, Health and Communities) which each set out objectives, targets and actions under these policies. Unlike the Republic of Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales, Northern Ireland currently has no bespoke national physical activity strategy.

## 7.2.1 PHYSICAL ACTIVITY POLICY

A number of policies encompass physical activity objectives in Northern Ireland, including; 1) A Fitter Future for All: Outcome Framework 2015-2019 (21) - an obesity strategy which includes objectives around creating an environment that supports, and promotes, a physically active lifestyle and healthy diet, and increasing the percentage of the population meeting the Chief Medical Officers' guidelines on physical activity (22); and 2) the Healthy Child, Healthy Future: A Framework for the Universal Child Health Promotion Programme in Northern Ireland – also focuses on healthy diet and increasing physical activity (23). In the area of active transport, Changing Gear: A Bicycle Strategy for Northern Ireland provides some specific targets for increases in cycling by 2025, including; 20% of all journeys of less than one mile to be cycled, 10% of all journeys between one and two miles to be cycled, and 5% of all journeys between two and five miles to be cycled, with further percentage increases in cycling set out for 2040 (24). The Building an Active Travel Future for Northern Ireland Policy aims to increase the distance walked and cycled in Northern Ireland by 2020 (25). The lack of specific targets relating to physical activity in Northern Ireland, and disjointed surveillance efforts, makes it difficult to determine the effectiveness of these policies in altering physical activity.

## 7.2.2 SPORT

'Sport Matters', The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Recreation 2009 - 2019, identifies 26 high-level targets, and sets the key strategic priorities for sport and physical recreation over the next ten years (27). **Specific targets which address children and younger people include:**

- **To have established a baseline for the number of children of compulsory school age participating in a minimum of two hours quality Physical Education per week by 2011.**
- **To provide every child in Northern Ireland over the age of eight years with the opportunity to participate in at least two hours per week of school sport and physical recreation by 2014.**
- **To have increased the number of people in Northern Ireland who are members of at least one sports club by 2014.**

In addition, it is intended to inform future investment by all stakeholders across the public, private and community/voluntary sectors. The high-level targets are structured to reflect the current and anticipated needs of sport and physical recreation. These relate to participation, performance and places. Sport Matters is currently under review by a cross-departmental group led by the Department for Communities, with a plan to produce a cross-sectoral strategy for the development of sport and physical activity in Northern Ireland 2020-2030. This chapter will examine the participation rates of primary and post primary school children in physical activity, sport and Physical Education. In addition, the active travel, and sedentary behaviour habits of children will be explored. Finally, a comparison will be made between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, across the main research themes.

### 7.2.3 PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Physical Education is a compulsory part of the Northern Ireland statutory curriculum for all pupils at every key stage, from age four to 16 (26). Schools determine how much time is devoted to Physical Education in the curriculum, but departmental guidance recommends that they should provide pupils with a minimum of two hours curricular Physical Education per week. Although it is not classed as a policy or strategy, it is an important piece of legislative work that has a direct effect on access and quality of delivered physical activity and sport for young people.

## 7.3 PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Similar to the Republic of Ireland, children in Northern Ireland are recommended to achieve at least 60 minutes of MVPA daily. Thirteen percent of Northern Irish children met the physical activity guidelines (i.e. at least 60 minutes of MVPA daily). This 13% was made up of 20% of primary school pupils, and 11% of post primary school pupils. Less than 1% of primary school pupils, and 3% of post primary school pupils, do not achieve at least 60 minutes of MVPA on any day of the week. Ninety-eight percent and 97% of primary and post primary pupils respectively achieved at least 60 minutes MVPA once a week, 85% and 76% achieved it three days per week and 55% and 40% achieved it five days per week (Figure 15).

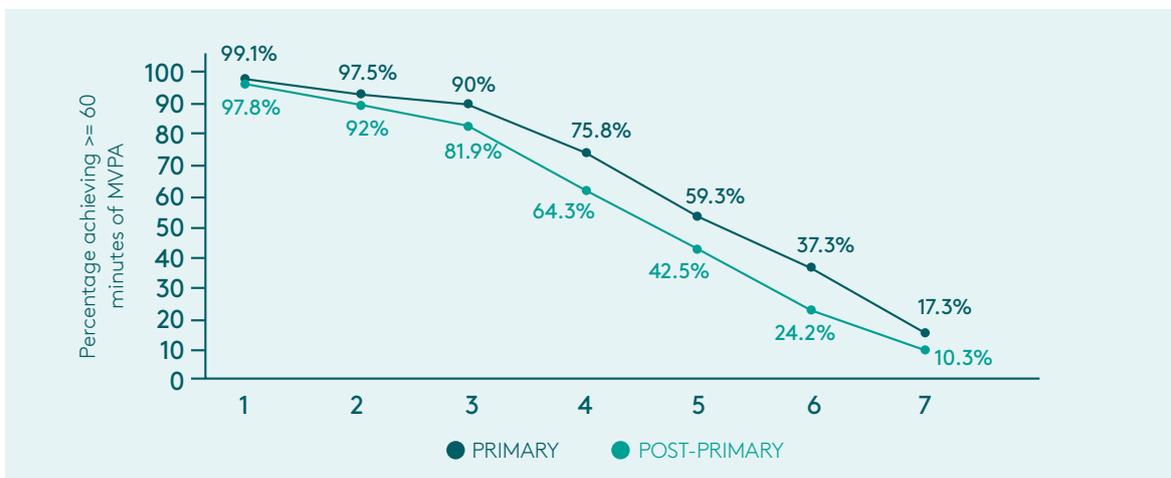
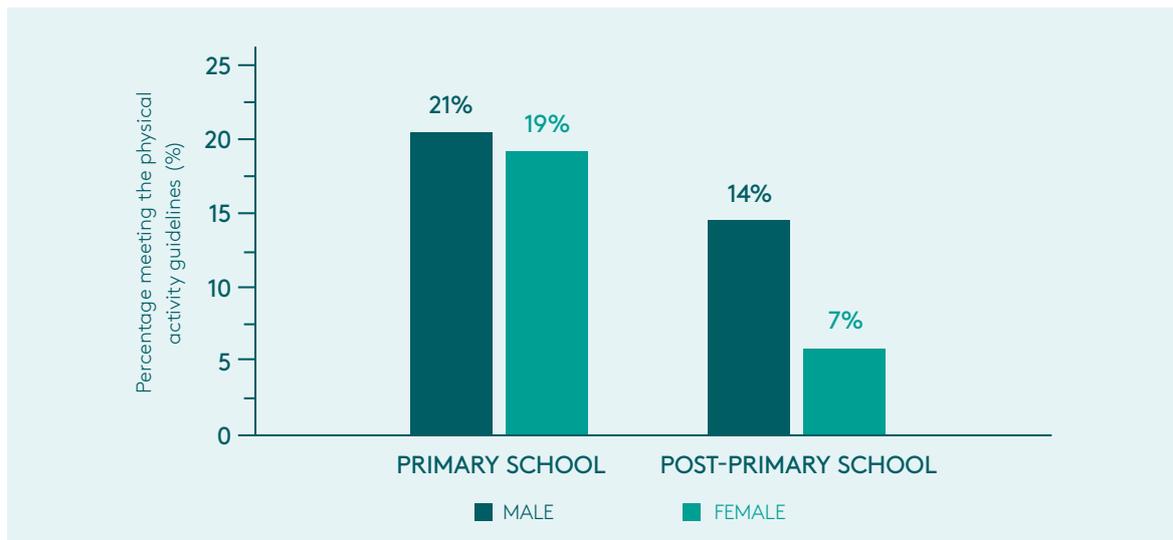


Figure 15: Proportion of children who undertook  $\geq 60$  minutes of MVPA on 1-7 days per week

Fewer girls met the physical activity guidelines, compared to boys (10% vs. 16%). This gender difference was evident in both primary school (19% vs. 21%) and post primary school (7% vs. 14%) levels. Figure 16 shows the proportion of children, by school and gender, achieving at least 60 minutes of MVPA daily per week. Post primary school girls had the lowest prevalence of meeting the physical activity guidelines, with only 7% obtaining at least 60 minutes of MVPA.



**Figure 16: Proportion of participants, by gender, who met the physical activity guidelines**

At primary school level, 99% of the participants fell within the 10-11-year-old age category, so no difference was observable between age categories. However, at post primary school level, the proportion meeting the physical activity guidelines decreased with increasing age categories (12-13 years=17%, 14-15 years=12%, 16-20 years=6%). No difference existed by socioeconomic status and meeting the physical activity guidelines at either school level; however, a higher proportion of those without a disability at primary school level, met the physical activity guidelines (22% vs. 7%).

Physical health data was not collected as part of the Northern Ireland protocol. However, data was collected relating to self-reported happiness. A higher number of days where at least 60 minutes of MVPA was achieved was associated with feeling 'very happy' compared to 'not happy at all' at primary (5.0 vs. 3.3 days/week) and post primary (4.5 vs. 3.6 days/week) schools.

Finally, 58% of primary, and 57% of post primary pupils reported owning a physical activity tracking device. At both school levels meeting the physical activity guidelines was associated with owning a physical activity monitoring device, using a physical activity monitoring device and the frequency of use of such devices (i.e. more regular use was associated with meeting the physical activity guidelines).

## 7.4 SPORT

Similar to the Republic of Ireland sport chapters (Chapters 3 and 4), this chapter will discuss sport from both a community sport (i.e. outside the school setting) and a school sport (i.e. within the school setting) perspective.

### 7.4.1 COMMUNITY SPORT

At primary school level, 65% of pupils reported participating in community sport at least once a week, with 49% of post primary school pupils reporting participation at least once a week. Fourteen percent of primary and 47% post primary school pupils reported never participating in community sport (**Table 23**). At post primary school level, the numbers of those who reported never participating in community sport appeared to be a significant issue.

Frequency (%)	Primary School	Post Primary School
4 or more days a week	13	18
2-3 days a week	31	22
1 day a week	21	8
Less often	21	5
Never	14	47

**Table 23: Frequency of community sport participation for primary and post primary school pupils**

At primary school level, reported current participation in community sport differed by disability status (no disabilities=67% vs. with disabilities=54%) and socioeconomic status (e.g. low affluence=53 vs. high affluence=80%). At post primary school level, reported current participation in community sport differed by year group (e.g. Year 8=73% vs. Year 14=31%), school location (rural=51% vs. urban=46%), disability status (no disabilities=51% vs. with disabilities=41%) and socioeconomic status (e.g. low affluence=40% vs. high affluence=56%).

The combined results of the range of community sports in NI schools is presented in **Table 24**.

Soccer and swimming are the most popular community sport activities being undertaken by NI school pupils. Soccer is especially popular with boys. In addition, gaelic games and rugby are popular with boys. Girls are participating in gymnastics, dance and hockey most often although it should be noted that the netball figures presented may not reflect the full levels of participation as netball was only highlighted in the survey as an optional extra sport. Weight training and athletics / cross country running proved popular with boys and girls also.

**Table 24: Range of community sports for primary and post primary school pupils combined over the last 12 months\***

Sport/activity (%)	Combined Primary and Post Primary		
	BOYS	GIRLS	ALL
Adventure activities	5	5	5
Aerobics/exercise class	1	2	1
Athletics	7	11	9
Badminton	3	5	4
Baseball/rounders	2	5	3
Basketball	7	6	6
Camogie	1	5	3
Cross-country running	6	9	8
Dance	2	20	11
Gaelic football	13	9	11
Golf	1	1	1
Gymnastics	2	16	9
Handball	3	4	3
Hockey	3	16	10
Horse riding	3	8	6
Hurling	7	2	4
Martial arts	7	5	6
Netball	0	2	1
Rugby	14	4	9
Soccer	34	10	22
Squash	2	2	2
Surfing	4	2	3
Swimming	13	18	16
Tennis	6	7	7
Triathlon	2	1	1
Volleyball	3	4	3
Weight training	9	6	7

\* For comparative reasons the list of sports presented to CSPPA 2018 participants was limited to the same 22 activities as in 2010. This non-exhaustive list was supplemented with a catchall "other" option. Sports such as netball and boxing which are very popular community sporting activities in NI were not specifically included. The data in this table may therefore under-represent the prevalence of these sporting activities in this setting.

## 7.4.2 SCHOOL SPORT

At primary school level, 65% of pupils reported participating in school sport at least once a week, with 58% of post primary school pupils reporting participation at least once a week. Twenty-three percent and 36% of primary and post primary school pupils reported never participating in school sport, respectively (**Table 25**).

**Table 25: Frequency of school sport participation for primary and post primary school pupils**

Frequency (%)	Primary School	Post Primary School
4 or more days a week	26	16
2-3 days a week	25	27
1 day a week	14	14
Less often	12	6
Never	23	36

Similar to the Republic of Ireland, being a current participant in school sport was defined as participating in school sport at least once a week. At primary school level, being a current participant in school sport did not differ by school class, gender or school location, but did differ by disability status (no disabilities=68% vs. with disabilities=43%) and socioeconomic status (e.g. low affluence=59% vs. high affluence=76%). At post primary school level, being a current participant in school sport differed by year group (e.g. Year 8=78% vs. Year 14=32%) and gender (boy=66% vs. girl=50%).

The range of school sports for primary and post primary school pupils is presented in **Table 26**. Soccer, basketball, rugby, gaelic football and swimming or athletics were the most popular school sports for boys with hockey, soccer, dance, basketball, athletics, cross country and gymnastics being the most popular girls' sports. Boys favoured team sports with girls having a combination of team and individual sports.

**Table 26: Range of school sports for primary and post primary school pupils combined over the last 12 months\***

Sport/activity (%)	Combined Primary and Post Primary		
	BOYS	GIRLS	ALL
Adventure activities	4	7	5
Aerobics/exercise class	2	3	2
Athletics	11	18	14
Badminton	6	3	4
Baseball/rounders	10	13	11
Basketball	22	18	20
Camogie	1	3	2
Cross-country running	11	15	13
Dance	6	18	12
Gaelic football	13	10	12
Golf	<1	<1	<1
Gymnastics	3	15	9
Handball	6	5	5
Hockey	10	25	18
Horse riding	2	2	2
Hurling	4	1	3
Martial arts	5	3	4
Netball	0	8	4
Rugby	19	9	14
Soccer	48	21	34
Squash	2	3	2
Surfing	3	2	2
Swimming	12	15	14
Tennis	10	11	10
Triathlon	3	1	2
Volleyball	5	7	6
Weight training	5	3	4

\* For comparative reasons the list of sports presented to CSPPA 2018 participants was limited to the same 22 activities as in 2010. This non-exhaustive list was supplemented with a catchall "other" option. Sports such as netball and boxing which are very popular school sport activities in NI were not specifically included. The data in this table may therefore under-represent the prevalence of these sporting activities in this setting.

## 7.5 PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Regardless of school level, pupils in Northern Ireland are recommended to receive 120 minutes of Physical Education per week. The proportion of those who reported receiving no Physical Education per week was 3% at primary school level. Among those who received Physical Education, 6% reported four or more times per week, 45% two-three times per week, 48% once a week and 2% less often. 19% of primary pupils reported receiving 30 minutes or less of Physical Education a week. Also, at primary levels, children attending an urban school were more likely to receive 30 minutes or less Physical Education per week than those attending a rural school (22% vs. 14%).

At post primary level, 40% reported meeting the Physical Education guidelines. Meeting the Physical Education guidelines differed by school year (e.g. Year 9=65% vs. Year 14=17%), gender (boy=45% vs. girl=34%) and school location (rural=47% vs. urban=33%). Of interest, those with disabilities were also more likely to meet the guidelines (with disabilities=51% vs. no disabilities=38%). The average amount of weekly Physical Education at post primary school was 122 minutes/week. The average weekly minutes of Physical Education by year group are given in **Table 27**.

**Table 27: Proportion of pupils meeting the Physical Education guidelines by class/year group**

Year	CSPPA 2018 PE Minutes	CSPPA 2018 Meeting PE guidelines (%)
Year 8	102 (90)	31
Year 9	190 (160)	65
Year 10	125 (120)	52
Year 11	155 (105)	49
Year 12	127 (105)	35
Year 13	60 (0)	14
Year 14	46 (0)	17

Note: Data are presented as mean (median) values due to the skewedness of the data.

The content of primary and post primary schools' Physical Education classes is presented in **Table 28**. Boys PE was dominated by soccer with baseball / rounders, basketball, swimming, rugby, combined gaelic games (football and hurling) and athletics being most popular. The most popular girls' PE activities included hockey, athletics, baseball / rounders, dance, gymnastics and basketball. Both boys and girls had a combination of team and individual sports with boys favouring team-based activities and girls preferring individual sports.

**Table 28: Content of primary and post primary school Physical Education classes combined over the last 12 months\***

Sport/activity (%)	Combined Primary and Post Primary		
	BOYS	GIRLS	ALL
Adventure activities	8	11	10
Aerobics/exercise class	5	12	8
Athletics	45	50	47
Badminton	21	26	23
Baseball/rounders	48	52	50
Basketball	45	42	43
Camogie	2	6	4
Cross-country running	26	35	30
Dance	24	46	35
Gaelic football	25	17	21
Golf	<1	<1	<1
Gymnastics	16	41	28
Handball	18	17	17
Hockey	27	52	40
Horse riding	1	3	2
Hurling	10	2	6
Martial arts	7	4	5
Netball	<1	13	6
Rugby	35	23	29
Soccer	71	34	52
Squash	6	6	6
Surfing	3	4	3
Swimming	37	44	40
Tennis	20	27	23
Triathlon	2	<1	1
Volleyball	11	15	13
Weight training	13	9	11

\* For comparative reasons the list of sports presented to CSPPA 2018 participants was limited to the same 22 activities as in 2010. This non-exhaustive list was supplemented with a catchall "other" option. Netball, a popular activity in Physical Education in NI, was not specifically included. The data in this table may therefore under-represent the prevalence of this PE activity in schools in NI.

### Swimming Competency

Confidence and competency in swimming is high among NI school children particularly those in primary schools. Only 4% of primary school children reported being unable to swim. Among post primary pupils the figure was 12%. The majority of pupils at both levels classified themselves as “intermediate” swimmers (51% primary and 59% post-primary). “

## 7.6 ACTIVE TRAVEL

Thirty-six percent of primary school, and 18% of post primary school children reported being active commuters (i.e. walk or cycle to, or from, school). The breakdown of the modes of transport for commuting to and from school is presented in **Figure 18**.



Figure 17: Proportion of primary and post primary pupils who actively commuted to school

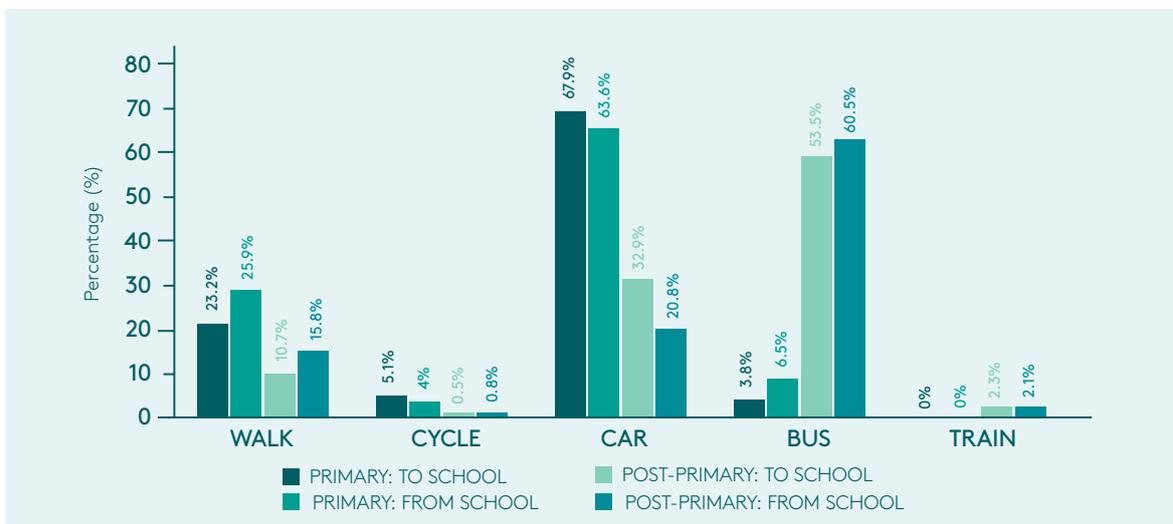


Figure 18: Modes of transport to, and from school for primary and post primary school pupils

No gender differences existed at primary (37% vs. 34%), or post primary (18% for both) school levels. At primary school level, a higher proportion of Year 7 pupils (46%) reported actively commuting to school, compared to those in Year 6 (25%). Also, school location (rural=28% vs. urban=39%) influenced active commuting at primary school level.

At post primary school level, the proportion actively commuting was relatively stable from Years 8-12 (16%-23%), but declined to 13% in Year 13, and to 10% in Year 14. School location (rural=13% vs. urban=23%) and disability status (no disabilities=16% vs. with disabilities=24%) also appeared to influence active commuting at post primary school level. For those who were identified as passive commuters, not enough safe places to cross the road was the main barrier to active commuting (29%), while distance was the main barrier for post primary school pupils (48%).

## 7.7 SEDENTARY BEHAVIOUR

Average daily sedentary leisure time was 5.0 hours for primary school pupils, and 6.9 hours for post primary school pupils. Differences existed between school year and the average amount of daily sedentary leisure time at primary (Year 6=4.6 hours/day vs. Year 7=5.5 hours/day) and post primary (e.g. Year 8=5.9 hours/day vs. Year 14=7.7 hours/day) school levels. Peak daily sedentary leisure time was recorded for Year 13 (8.4 hours/day). While no difference existed between boys and girls at primary school level (5.2 vs. 4.8 hours/day), boys reported less sedentary leisure time than girls at post primary school level (6.5 vs. 7.4 hours/day).

59% of primary and 40% of post primary school pupils met the sedentary screen time guideline of no more than 120 minutes / day. At primary school level, more Year 6 pupils met the guideline (65%), compared to Year 8 (52%). At post primary school level, the proportion of those meeting the sedentary screen time guideline decreased as pupils progressed through their post primary education (e.g. Year 8=53% vs. Year 14=34%). The daily amount of time spent in sedentary leisure time did not influence meeting, or not meeting, the physical activity guidelines at primary school level (5.5 vs. 4.9 hours/day); however, at post primary school level, those who met the physical activity guidelines, spent less time in sedentary leisure time (6.2 vs. 7.0 hours/day). On average, primary school pupils spent 36 minutes/day doing homework, with boys spending more time than girls, on homework (37 vs. 34 minutes/day). For post primary school pupils, the average amount of time spent on homework was 92 minutes/day, with Year 12 (GCSEs) and Year 14 (A-Levels) having the highest amounts of homework time (128 and 133 minutes/day, respectively). On average, girls spent almost ten minutes more on homework each day (97 vs. 88 minutes/day).

## 7.8 COMPARISON BETWEEN NORTHERN IRELAND AND THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

**Table 29** presents a comparison between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, across the main research questions.

**Table 29: Comparison between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland**

Outcome		
<b>Physical activity</b>	ROI	NI
Meeting the physical activity guidelines (%) <sup>16</sup>	13	13
Primary school meeting the physical activity guidelines (%)	17	20
Post primary school meeting the physical activity guidelines (%)	10	11
<b>Physical Education*</b>	ROI	NI
Primary children receiving NO Physical Education minutes per week (%)	2	3
Primary children receiving 30 minutes or less of Physical Education per week (%)	18	19
Post primary school meeting the Physical Education guidelines (%)	23	40
Average minutes of weekly Physical Education for post primary schools (minutes)	89	122
<b>School sport</b>	ROI	NI
Primary school pupils participating in school sport at least once a week (%)	70	65
Post primary school pupils participating in school sport at least once a week (%)	63	58
<b>Community sport</b>	ROI	NI
Primary school participation in community sport at least once a week (%)	80	65
Post primary school participation in community sport at least once a week (%)	58	49
<b>Active travel</b>	ROI	NI
Primary school pupils engaging in active travel (%)	42	36
Post primary school pupils engaging in active travel (%)	40	18
<b>Sedentary behaviour</b>	ROI	NI
Primary school average daily sedentary leisure time (hours)	5	5
Post primary school average daily sedentary leisure time (hours)	7	7
Primary school meeting sedentary screen time guideline (%)	63	59
Post primary school meeting sedentary screen time guideline (%)	42	40

<sup>16</sup> That the NI and ROI figures here are the same despite the fact that NI figures for primary and post primary cohorts are slightly higher is due to a combination of rounding of the figures along with the relative contribution of the post primary and primary samples to the final figures.

Note: RoI=Republic of Ireland; NI=Northern Ireland; \*in Northern Ireland, at least 120 minutes of Physical Education per week is the guideline for both primary and post primary school level; however, in the Republic of Ireland, the guideline for primary schools is at least 60 minutes/week and at least 120 minutes/week for post primary schools.

Across both jurisdictions, the largest differences were observed for the following:

**Physical Education:** In both jurisdictions, while very few primary school children reported receiving no Physical Education, about 1 in 5 reported receiving 30 minutes or less of Physical Education per week. At post primary school level, almost 20% more pupils in Northern Ireland (40%) met the guideline, compared to the Republic of Ireland (23%), where the Physical Education guidelines are the same (i.e.  $\geq 120$  minutes/week). The post primary school pupils in Northern Ireland received greater than 30 minutes more Physical Education per week than their counterparts in the Republic (89 vs. 122 minutes/week).

**Sport:** For school sport, participation rates differed for primary (Republic of Ireland=70% vs. Northern Ireland=65%) and post primary (Republic of Ireland=63% vs. Northern Ireland=58%). For community sport, the differences were also evidenced between the two jurisdictions, particularly at primary school level (Republic of Ireland=80% vs. Northern Ireland=65%), with a smaller difference at post primary school level (Republic of Ireland=58% vs. Northern Ireland=49%).

**Active travel:** Active travel rates in primary school were similar (Republic of Ireland=42% vs. Northern Ireland=36%); however, at post primary school level, the Republic of Ireland rate was more than double that of Northern Ireland (40% vs. 18%).

**Sedentary behaviour:** Similar levels of sedentary behaviour were found across both jurisdictions, with children self-reporting between 5 and 7 hours per day spent sitting during their free time.

## 7.9 SUMMARY

In Northern Ireland, 13% of children met the physical activity guidelines, with girls less likely to meet the guidelines, when compared to boys (10% vs. 16%). About one in five (19%) primary pupils reported receiving 30 minutes or less Physical Education per week. In post primary, 40% of pupils reported meeting the Physical Education guidelines (120 minutes), with the average weekly minutes of Physical Education of 122 minute. Regarding sport participation, at primary school level, 65% of pupils reported to participating in school and community sport at least once a week. At post primary school level, the participation rates were 58% and 49%. Thirty-six percent of primary and 18% of post primary school pupils actively commuted to school (either cycle or walk). Finally, on average, primary and post primary school pupils spent 5.0 and 6.9 hours/day in sedentary leisure time respectively, with the proportion of those meeting the sedentary screen time guideline being 59% at primary school level, and 40% at post primary school level.



## CHAPTER 8

# SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



With this latest iteration of CSPPA, CSPPA 2018 was able to examine the current participation rates of children, across physical activity, sport and Physical Education. In addition, active travel and sedentary behaviour habits were also explored. This allowed for comparisons, where possible, to be made with 2010. With the addition of Ulster University to the Research Team, CSPPA was expanded into Northern Ireland for the first time. Not only did this allow for participation rates in Northern Ireland to be examined, it also allowed a comparison to be made between both jurisdictions, across the main research questions. This chapter will link the findings of CSPPA 2018 to current policy (where applicable and available), and set recommendations across the main domains (**Tables 30 and 31**).

## 8.1 THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

One of the primary objectives of the National Physical Activity Plan is to increase the proportion of children meeting the physical activity guidelines by 1% per annum. While a 1% increase per annum may seem minimal, overall adherence to the physical activity guidelines has changed very little since 2010. In spite of this, setting a manageable annual target of a 1% increase allows for long term planning to increase the proportion of children meeting the physical activity guidelines.

Of major concern is that, almost a decade after CSPPA 2010, the proportion meeting the physical activity guidelines was still lower for girls and for children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Additionally, the age-related decline in physical activity remained. This age-related decline is not unique to Ireland and is in fact a challenge documented in many physical activity surveillance studies globally. This complex problem requires innovative approaches such as 'Keeping Youngsters Involved' (<https://www.kenniscentrumsport.nl/en/international-projects/keep-youngsters-involved/>).

**With such noteworthy inequalities still existing in physical activity, the CSPPA 2018 Research Term urge significant policy and practice actions to address these going forward.**

Aside from increasing physical activity across each life stage, the National Physical Activity Plan also sets out other children specific targets. One such target is to expand the Active Schools Flag (ASF) to 500 schools nationwide. Tentative results from CSPPA 2018 suggest that gender differences in achieving the physical activity guidelines may be lessened with the ASF programme. The potential of the ASF initiative is significant, as it encourages schools to strive to be more physically educated and physically active. In its current format, the ASF programme is predominately aimed at primary school level. However, it is currently under development for the post primary sector. It is well recognised that those who are active during their childhood, are more likely to remain active during their later years (28, 29). As such, primary schools represent an excellent environment to develop healthy physical activity habits, which can be augmented by the ASF programme and a good quality Physical Education curriculum.

In addition to the above, the National Physical Activity Plan set a target of establishing a systematic and regular long-term national surveillance system, to monitor and evaluate participation in physical activity for the Irish population (Action 50). This was seen as important in order to monitor achievement of the physical activity guidelines across the population and to establish baseline prevalence of sedentary behaviour (which is currently unknown) (Action 51). **CSPPA 2018 can contribute to the development of**

**baseline figures for children's sport and physical activity while future, and more frequent versions of the research could be used to monitor and track physical activity participation.** With National Guidelines on sedentary behaviour being called for in the National Physical Activity Plan (Action 28), the information collected from this, and future CSPPA studies, can contribute to the development of those guidelines. To maximise the likelihood of meeting the national physical activity targets several actions are listed within the National Physical Activity Plan, including establishing a database of quality, evidence-based interventions known to be successful in promoting physical activity behaviour. This database needs to be established, and effective evidence-based interventions across multiple sectors need to be implemented in full to address the significant problem of inactivity amongst children in Ireland.

There are three high level goals outlined in the National Sports Policy, with one pertaining to increasing active and social participation in sport. While 2027 targets have been set for adults (in terms of participation rates), CSPPA 2018 has provided important data on current status in relation to achieving this goal and on recommendations for change over the next decade. **As sport participation has been examined in both school and community domains, separate targets should be set for each. Setting domain specific targets is essential for increasing the amount, quality and breadth of exposure that children get around sport participation, thus increasing their options and choices.** With the progress on meeting such targets needing to be assessed biennially, future funding could be used to allow CSPPA studies to be conducted more frequently, thus allowing sport participation progress to be routinely monitored.

Physical Education curricula in the Republic of Ireland have changed dramatically since 2010. Encouragingly at post primary level, both the proportion of those reported meeting the Physical Education guidelines and average weekly minutes of Physical Education, have increased since 2010. At primary school level, there have been some positive developments around the proportion of children reporting that they receive at least two classes of Physical Education per week. However, almost one in five primary school pupils report receiving 30 minutes or less of Physical Education per week.

With a new curriculum planned for primary school level, Physical Education becoming a compulsory component under the Wellbeing programme and Junior Cycle level, and two new Physical Education subjects at Senior Cycle level, progress of these will serve as important indicators of how they are integrating into the current school settings. Within the National Physical Activity Plan, Action Area Two refers to all pupils meeting the Department of Education and Skills' (DES) Physical Education guidelines. Both CSPPA 2010 and 2018 assessed meeting the Physical Education guidelines for post primary pupils (based on at least 120 minutes/week). Future iterations of CSPPA should continue to monitor the Physical Education curricula implementation in both primary and post primary sectors. This will provide important information against which to assess the impact of innovative curriculum change currently underway, for example around the optional examinable Physical Education (LCPE) programme. This was introduced to schools for the first time (September 2018), and it is due for national rollout from September 2020. The implementation and progress of the LCPE programme will be of interest to educators, and policy makers.

Finally, one recognised area that has the potential to contribute to increasing overall physical activity is active travel. While CSPPA 2018 showed an increase in the proportion

of those at primary school level who actively commuted to school (42% vs. 31%), active commuting at post primary school level has remained unchanged (40%); however, only 23% of pupils from 6th year reported to being active commuters. **With active travel being an age neutral form of physical activity, the decline at Senior Cycle needs to be investigated, and policy makers need to work to ensure that active travel is continuously emphasised, thus meeting the sustainable development goals, while simultaneously helping children improve their health.**

Using the results from the CSPPA 2018 study as baselines, the CSPPA 2018 recommendations across physical activity, sport, Physical Education, active travel and sedentary behaviour are outlined in **Table 30**.

**Table 30: CSPPA 2018 recommendations for the Republic of Ireland**

Domain	Current status (CSPPA 2018)	Responsibility	CSPPA Recommendation by academic group
Physical activity: meeting the physical activity guidelines ( $\geq 60$ minutes of MVPA daily)	17% of primary school pupils met the physical activity guidelines  10% of post primary school pupils met the physical activity guidelines	Lead: National Physical Activity Plan (NPAP) Implementation Group and National Sports Policy (NSP) Leadership Group  Other: Health Service Executive, Sport Ireland	Use CSPPA 2018 figure as a baseline benchmark  Set a realistic and meaningful target for increasing the % of children meeting the physical activity guidelines for 2019-2027  Monitor achievement of this regularly (every 2-3 years)
Sport (school sport and community sport)	70% of primary school pupils participated in school sport at least once a week  63% of post primary school pupils participated in school sport at least once a week  80% of primary school pupils participated in community sport at least once a week  58% of post primary school pupils participated in community sport at least once a week	Lead: Department of Education and Skills, NSP Sport Leadership Group  Other: NPAP Implementation Group, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Sport Ireland	Use CSPPA 2018 figure as a baseline benchmark  Set a realistic and meaningful target for increasing the % of children participating in sport regularly for 2019-2027  Monitor achievement of this regularly (every 2-3 years)

Domain	Current status (CSPPA 2018)	Responsibility	CSPPA Recommendation by academic group
Physical Education: Receiving <30 minutes/ week at primary level  Meeting the Physical Education guidelines ≥120 minutes/ week at post primary school level	18% of primary school pupils reported receiving 30 minutes or less of Physical Education per week  23% of post primary school pupils met the Physical Education guidelines	Lead: Department of Education and Skills  Other: NPAP Implementation Group and NSP Sport Leadership Group	Use CSPPA 2018 figure as a baseline benchmark  Set a realistic and meaningful target for increasing the % of children meeting the national Physical Education guidelines for 2019-2027  Monitor achievement of this regularly (every 2-3 years)
Active travel	42% of primary school pupils actively commuted to school  40% of post primary school pupils actively commuted to school	Lead: Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport  Other: Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, NPAP Implementation Group	Use CSPPA 2018 figure as a baseline benchmark  Set a realistic and meaningful target for increasing the % of children walking and cycling to school for 2019-2027  Monitor achievement of this regularly (every 2-3 years)
Sedentary behaviour; development of National Guidelines	No National Guidelines exist	Lead: Healthy Ireland  Other: Sport Ireland, Department of Education and Skills, Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Department of Health, Health Service Executive	Develop and implement National Guidelines on sedentary behaviour

## 8.2 NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland is currently without a bespoke Physical Activity Strategy. Outlined below is a summary of the CSPPA results in the context of some of the current Northern Ireland policies, which purport to address physical activity in young people. The disjointed nature of policy development in the area of physical activity, and the lack of consistent surveillance in Northern Ireland makes it difficult to determine the collective effectiveness of these policies in increasing physical activity among children. A physical activity plan, which incorporates, physical activity, Physical Education, sport and active travel, similar to and aligned with the National Physical Activity Plan (Republic of Ireland), would provide a cross-sectoral blueprint for policymakers, practitioners and researchers hoping to influence these domains. The inclusion of a representative sample of Northern Ireland children in CSPPA 2018 provided valuable self-report data on participation in sport and physical activity, which could be used as a baseline for such a plan.

The 2013 Millennium Cohort Study, using device-measured physical activity, found that Northern Ireland children (age 7-8) have the lowest levels of physical activity in the British Isles (43% meeting guidelines). Worryingly, CSPPA 2018 results suggest for older children levels were even lower with only 20% of primary (age 9-11) and 11% of post primary children (age 11-18) reporting sufficient physical activity to meet current guidelines. It is apparent that physical activity levels are inadequate, in decline, and should therefore be a cause for concern. Physical activity objectives for Northern Ireland children are outlined in several different strategies including A Fitter Future for All: Outcome Framework 2015-2019 and Healthy Child, Healthy Future: A Framework for the Universal Child Health Promotion Programme. Although these strategies include recommendations for the promotion of physical activity in children in the short term (2015-19), and indicators for these recommendations, they stop short of setting SMART targets for increasing physical activity, and indicating the lead, and supporting agencies responsible for delivering, monitoring and reporting on the achievement of these targets. It is essential that a new strategic approach is found that can seriously begin the process of bringing real and lasting change to children's physical activity habits and behaviours.

Department of Education guidance recommends that Northern Ireland schools (primary and post primary) should provide pupils with a minimum of two hours curricular Physical Education per week. However, CSPPA 2018 found that 19% of primary received 30 minutes or less Physical Education per week, and only 40% of post primary pupils received the recommended  $\geq 120$  minutes/week. Previous reports published by Sport Northern Ireland reported that 44% of 12-16-year-olds and 53% of 4-11 year olds 'do Physical Education in school' as a normal weekly activity (Sport Northern Ireland, 2016). The absence of a 'requirement' to meet this two hour per week guideline, means that progress and change is difficult to achieve in terms of time allocation in an increasingly challenged budgetary context, and in the face of 'curriculum squeeze' where increasing focus is placed on exam outcomes.

A healthier picture has emerged in this study for school sport participation; 65% of primary and 58% of post primary school pupils participated in school sport at least once a week. However, these figures suggest that we are still falling below the Sport Matters target set in 2011 (that by 2014 every child in Northern Ireland over the age of eight years

would be provided with an opportunity to participate in at least two hours per week of school sport and physical recreation). For community sport, primary school participation rates were the same as those seen for school sports (65%); however, at post primary school level, participation in community sport was only 49%.

Changing Gear: A Bicycle Strategy for Northern Ireland provides specific targets for increases in cycling by 2025. The Building an Active Travel Future for Northern Ireland Policy aims to increase the distance walked and cycled in Northern Ireland by 2020. The Active School Travel Programme 2013-16 has reported a 15% increase (from 40% to 55%) in children's active travel behaviour (walking and cycling) to school (Sustrans, 2017). From CSSPA 2018, only 36% of primary and 20% of post primary school pupils reported actively commuting to, or from, school, with insufficient safe places to cross the road (primary school) and distance (post primary school) being cited as the main reasons for not actively commuting to school. It is clear that continued efforts to coordinate, promote and encourage active travel to and from schools is still required. Successful health promoting school's initiatives have operated in Northern Ireland in the past, and could potentially provide a framework for change which could encompass a whole school approach to tackling the issues presented above in the school context.

Using the National Physical Activity Plan, and the CSPPA 2010 report, recommendations have been put forth for the Republic of Ireland; however, in the absence of such a cohesive plan, and previous CSPPA findings for Northern Ireland, **Table 31** below uses the Republic of Ireland model (Table 30 as an approach to developing appropriate targets. Such targets would require commitment from, and cooperation between numbers of agencies, and at this point, are presented as suggestions.

**Table 31: CSPPA 2018 suggested recommendations for Northern Ireland**

Domain	Current status (CSPPA 2018)	Responsibility	CSPPA Recommendation by academic group
Physical activity: meeting the physical activity guidelines (≥60 minutes of MVPA daily)	20% of primary school pupils met the physical activity guidelines  11% of post primary school pupils met the physical activity guidelines	Lead: Department of Health, Public Health Agency  Other: Department of Education, Education Authority Northern Ireland, Department for Communities, Sport Northern Ireland, Department of Transport	Use CSPPA 2018 figure as a baseline benchmark  Set a realistic and meaningful target for increasing the % of children meeting the physical activity guidelines for 2019-2027  Monitor achievement of this regularly (every 2-3 years)

<p>Sport (school sport and community sport)</p>	<p>65% of primary school pupils participated in school sport at least once a week</p> <p>58% of post primary school pupils participated in school sport at least once a week</p> <p>65% of primary school pupils participated in community sport at least once a week</p> <p>49% of post primary school pupils participated in community sport at least once a week</p>	<p>Lead: Department for Communities, Sport Northern Ireland</p> <p>Other: Department of Education, Education Authority Northern Ireland</p>	<p>Use CSPPA 2018 figure as a baseline benchmark</p> <p>Set a realistic and meaningful target for increasing the % of children participating in sport regularly for 2019-2027</p> <p>Monitor achievement of this regularly (every 2-3 years)</p>
<p>Physical Education: Receiving &lt;30 minutes/week at primary level</p> <p>Meeting the Physical Education guidelines ≥120 minutes/week at primary and post primary school levels</p>	<p>19% of primary school pupils reported receiving 30 minutes or less of Physical Education per week</p> <p>40% of post primary school pupils met the Physical Education guidelines</p>	<p>Lead: Department of Education, Education Authority Northern Ireland</p> <p>Other: Colleges and universities working in initial teacher training and post-qualification development</p>	<p>Use CSPPA 2018 figure as a baseline benchmark</p> <p>Set a realistic and meaningful target for increasing the % of children meeting the national Physical Education guidelines for 2019-2027</p> <p>Monitor achievement of this regularly (every 2-3 years)</p>

<p>Active travel</p>	<p>36% of primary school pupils actively commuted to school</p> <p>18% of post primary school pupils actively commuted to school</p>	<p>Lead: Department of Transport</p> <p>Other: Department of Education, Education Authority Northern Ireland, Sustrans, Department for Health, Public Health Agency</p>	<p>Use CSPPA 2018 figure as a baseline benchmark</p> <p>Set a realistic and meaningful target for increasing the % of children walking and cycling to school for 2019-2027.</p> <p>Monitor achievement of this regularly (every 2-3 years)</p>
<p>Sedentary behaviour</p>	<p>There are currently no guidelines on sedentary behaviour</p>	<p>Lead: United Kingdom Chief Medical Officers</p>	<p>Develop and implement guidelines for sedentary behaviour published by United Kingdom Chief Medical Officers</p>

# 9

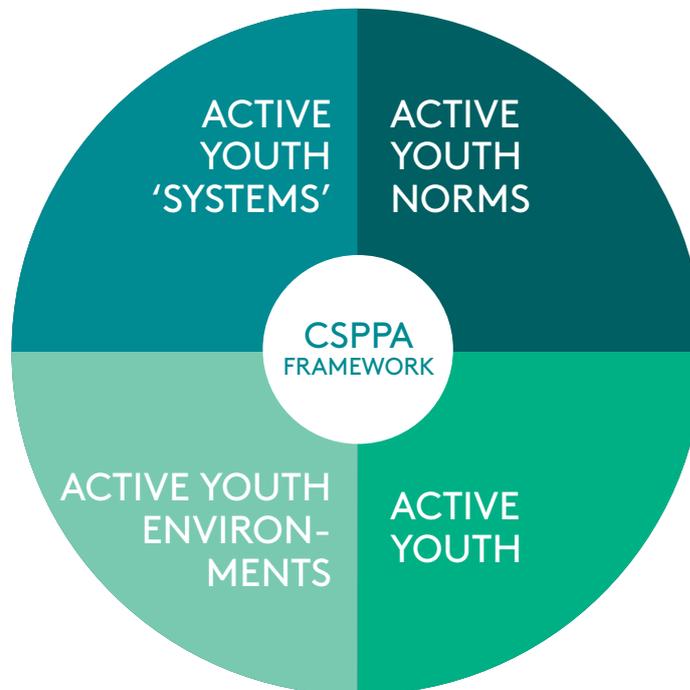
## CHAPTER 9

# CSPPA STRATEGIC ADVICE



The CSPPA research team were asked to provide some strategic advice on how best to achieve the physical activity goals listed on Tables 30 and 31. Building upon the strategic advice offered in the CSPPA 2010 report, we acknowledge that progress has been made but stress that many recommendations remain unchanged. In order to have effective national action to address current inactivity levels and achieve significant and meaningful change in reducing disparities and increasing the number of children engaging in sufficient levels of physical activity for health and wellbeing requires a 'systems-based' approach.

Both 'upstream' or policy actions that address economic, cultural, social and environmental issues identified in CSPPA, and 'downstream' more individually focused, school or community-based opportunities are needed to address this very real and complex problem. Inspired by the Global Action Plan on Physical Activity (see: [www.who.int/ncds/prevention/physical-activity/gappa/](http://www.who.int/ncds/prevention/physical-activity/gappa/)) the research team recommend the adoption of a framework across four strategic action areas, involving the creation of:



**Figure 19: The CSPPA framework for strategic action to meet challenges identified**

## CREATE ACTIVE YOUTH SYSTEMS

*This involves governance, monitoring and intelligence and physical activity promotion for children and youth in all policies. Key deliverables under Active Youth Systems include strengthening existing and developing new partnerships, excellent resource mobilization to effectively use what is already in place, advocating for additional funding and resources (where required), delivering on active youth in all policies and setting meaningful and realistic targets supported by a comprehensive intelligence gathering and research agenda to evaluate reach, effectiveness and sustainability of actions undertaken.*

### 1. Strengthen the Partnership Approach

The level of insufficient physical activity currently prevalent in childhood in Ireland is extremely high and demonstrates that it is a 'wicked' or complex problem. To solve wicked problems, co-ordinated multiple strategies across all Government sectors and agencies is required. Essentially, there is one goal, 'to increase physical activity', and strategies to achieve this are identified through multiple agendas including transport, sport, education, health, local Government, housing, planning, finance etc.

In the Republic of Ireland, the National Physical Activity Plan Implementation Group and the National Sports Policy Leadership Group comprise cross-sectoral representation for the purpose of implementing physical activity and sport policy to address Ireland's current inactivity epidemic. These groups need to provide strong leadership to address the specific challenges identified in the CSPPA results summarised on Tables 30 and 31. Real change will be more likely with a strong collaborative cross-sectoral effort and these mechanisms provide the partnership approach to achieve this. In Northern Ireland, several Government departments and agencies are listed in Table 31, the identification of a similar structure for the purpose of partnership to meet the CSPPA challenges is recommended, ideally linked to national policy and targets in the area of physical activity.

### 2. Set Meaningful and Realistic Targets for 2020-2027

Use the CSPPA data to set realistic and meaningful national targets for all of the physical activity behaviours that children engage in, that is overall physical activity, sport, Physical Education and Active Transport within 12 months of publication of the CSPPA report. Whilst play was not a focus of this report, this behaviour is very important, particularly to the younger child, so this should be considered. Each target should have an identified 'Lead', who will take responsibility for driving the change, an identified 'partnership team' who will assist and support the Lead in achieving change, and an identified 'timeframe' so that regular progress can be demonstrated.

### 3. Monitoring & Intelligence

There is need for a robust, surveillance system to be put in place. This system would carefully monitor the levels of physical activity of children on the island of Ireland to determine change, highlight any increasing risk of inactivity early for effective intervention, and evaluate the success rates of interventions in achieving the activity targets identified earlier.

#### 4. Excellent Resource Mobilisation

Audit current existing practice for promotion of sport and physical activity for all youth and identify changes to make current offerings more effective and efficient. This would involve advocating for additional resources where needed.

#### 5. 'Active Youth' in All Policies

Advocate for all policies that impact on the lives of children and young people to raise awareness of national physical activity guidelines, to promote the benefits of participation in sport and physical activity, and to increase opportunities for participation in quality sport and physical activity opportunities for all children.

### CREATE ACTIVE YOUTH NORMS AND SOCIETIES

*This is where the social norms and attitudes not only support, but proactively foster a climate of sport and physical activity participation for youth within the island of Ireland. Key deliverables under Active Youth Norms include the development of an 'Active Youth' communication plan and an ongoing platform for interaction with adequate funding and resources.*

#### 1. 'Active Youth' Communication Plan

Develop an 'Active Youth' communication plan using social media, public education campaigns and mass participation events to create and develop a brand 'Active Youth' as a normal part of growing up within the island of Ireland. Such an initiative should help enhance knowledge, understanding and appreciation amongst children, youth, parents and the wider society of the need for and multiple benefits associated with physical activity and sport participation.

#### 2. 'Active Youth' Resourcing

The provision of adequate funding and resources to support 'Active Youth' will need to be made available.

### CREATE ACTIVE YOUTH ENVIRONMENTS

*This involves creating supportive spaces and places that promote and safeguard the rights of youth of all ages and abilities to have equitable access to safe places and spaces in their cities and communities in which they can engage in regular physical activity. Key deliverables under Active Youth Environments include improved active travel, road safety, access to spaces and places and a multi-sport model.*

#### 1. Active Travel

Walking to and from school and other activities within a youth's residential environment is a viable form of daily physical activity for all emphasising the importance of strengthening the integration of urban and transport planning policies to ensure compact, mixed-land use to enhance and promote walking, cycling, scooting, skating and other forms of active transport that appeal to children and youth.

## 2. Improve Road Safety and Personal Safety for Pedestrians, Cyclists

Prioritise and implement policy actions to improve road and personal safety of pedestrians and cyclists.

## 3. Active Play and Recreational Environments

Enhance access to quality public spaces, green spaces, and recreational spaces including river and coastal areas and sports for all amenities. Take into consideration the needs for safety, age-friendly, family-friendly and equitable access.

## 4. The Importance of a Multi-Sport Model

Remodel access for sport and physical activity participation away from the currently dominant uni-sport model, that is one sport (or a limited number of similar sports), one club, one ground to a more multi-sport model, that is a variety of sports (individual and team based), numerous clubs, all catered for in one ground. A hypothetical situation would involve the full family going to a single location to partake in recreational and competitive dance, football, basketball, gymnastics, badminton and hurling. One venue, numerous interests catered for, one bill in terms of facility maintenance. This could have major participation, financial and social implications.

## CREATE ACTIVE YOUTH

*The provision of high-quality education, programmes and opportunities for youth to be active is necessary. This provision must prioritise resources for those most in need, targeting population-wide initiatives and consolidating good practice, developing new practice where needed to enhance impact. Key deliverables under Active Youth include investing in people, broadening the offering, removing inequalities and targeting sports at danger of disappearing.*

### 1. Invest in People: The Human Resource

We recommend investing in people - coaches, teachers, sports development officers- to improve the link between the school and the community settings. One example would be to establish in Ireland an 'Active Schools Network' similar to the evidence-based initiative in Scotland. The goal of Active Schools Scotland is to provide more and higher quality opportunities to take part in sport and physical activity before school, during lunchtime and after school, and to develop effective pathways between schools and sports or activity clubs in the local community (see: <https://sportscotland.org.uk/schools/active-schools/> for more details).

Programmes that active school co-ordinators could offer would include daily physical activity opportunities, school clubs, active travel, playground games, festivals and competitions and links to community programmes. A successful active schools network would involve partnership with education, health promoting schools, green schools, Local Sports Partnerships, travel co-ordinators and road safety officers, sports development officers (at local and regional levels), recreation and leisure, local sports clubs and community groups.

## 2. Remove Gender, Age and Social Inequalities

Address the low proportion of girls who are involved in regular physical activity. Importantly, the gender inequalities shown to exist in the timetabling of Physical Education in schools must be removed. In many schools, this can be answered simply through timetabling rearrangement. Participation rates decrease as children age. This was evident in Physical Education, in sport and physical activity. The large drop in the number of youth participating in sports following the transition out of school is an issue that current sports policies and strategies have failed to address. The pathways, or choices, that are available to youth to encourage them to stay engaged in sport and physical activity need to be critically evaluated and redeveloped to reduce dropout. Strategic planning needs to address how to retain this high risk group and interventions like 'Keeping Youngsters Involved' ([www.kenniscentrumsport.nl/en/international-projects/keep-youngsters-involved/](http://www.kenniscentrumsport.nl/en/international-projects/keep-youngsters-involved/)) should be used to address this issue. Social disadvantage has been largely ignored in relation to sports provision. This study found that children and youth from higher socio-economic backgrounds participate more in sport than those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Current sport and physical activity opportunities for participation in Ireland may reflect and even exaggerate disparities amongst social class groupings. For example, dance and swimming are the top two physical activities for girls; both require paying to use facilities (halls or swimming pools). Sports policy in Ireland must cater for the socially and economically disadvantaged.

## 3. Broaden the Range of Programmes

This research has found that there is a lack of balance in the opportunities provided to youth for participation in physical activity. This lack of balance can be seen across all three pillars of participation, in school and community sport and in Physical Education. For example, in the games strand of Physical Education curriculum, the number of opportunities provided for participation in traditional team sports or invasion games outnumber the opportunities to participate in non-invasive court or fielding games. This is amplified at community level and in after school opportunities. Non-engagement may reflect a lack of choice or a lack of interest. Either way, strategies need to be developed to assist in broadening the range of opportunities to include activities like gymnastics, dance, aerobics and martial arts. This will require significant changes in grassroots developments and sports policy development will need to drive these changes. Educational policy must ensure that schools adhere to the full Physical Education curriculum with facilities expanded, where necessary, to accommodate this. This will introduce pupils to the full range of physical activities, including games (invasion, fielding and court), gymnastics, dance, aquatics, outdoor and adventure activities, athletics and health related fitness. This quality Physical Education programme must be supported by a broad and balanced extra-curricular and community-based sport programme. The goal is to provide access to safe, fun and varied sport and physical activity opportunities. This requires policy to support more equity in funding between sports for the training and deployment of development officers and coaches to work in the community and in the school, enhancing the school-community link.

#### 4. Pathways to Participation: Fundamental Motor Skills

From the age of four years children engage formally with community sport. This is an important time in terms of their motor development, and it is essential that they have access to environments that help them develop a range of skills, kicking, throwing, locomotion, balance etc. Data from CSPPA suggests that a fundamental motor skills programme, not aligned to any one sport or activity, but whose purpose is to develop overall skills and abilities common to all sports and activities is needed in Ireland. This community-based initiative would allow children of all ages to begin their journey into sport and exercise skill development in a fun and enjoyable way.

#### 5. Enforce a Minimum Physical Education Time

In the Republic of Ireland, the Department of Education and Skills currently recommend that primary school pupils receive 60 minutes, and post-primary pupils receive 120 minutes of Physical Education per week; in Northern Ireland it is 120 minutes per week for both primary and post primary. This study has found that the proportion of children and youth actually receiving this amount of time for Physical Education each week is much lower. Educational policy needs to change the word recommendation to 'requirement', and each child, irrespective of gender or age, must receive this required time. It is recommended by this research that a two-hour time period, preferably double or triple classes, be allocated to Physical Education each week in both primary and post-primary schools.

#### 6. Target Minority Sports and Activities

From this study it is evident that some sports and physical activities have significant challenges in terms of sustaining levels of participation beyond the school setting. For example, while some progress has been made since 2010, gymnastics participation was reported by 31% of the post-primary children as part of their Physical Education curriculum (most with a qualified Physical Education teacher in their school), while significantly fewer reported continuing their involvement in either community (5%) or extra-curricular clubs (2%). These extremely low numbers will have implications for recruitment and training of future coaches to teach this important fundamental motor skill. It is recommended by this report that sports and physical activities, such as gymnastics, should be identified for immediate intervention.

#### 7. The Amotivated

High proportions of youth chose to never participate in sport. A greater understanding of the needs and motivations of these children is required. Interventions to help these children find a sport or activity that they might enjoy and feel competent and confident in their ability to engage in this activity are needed. This will require looking at alternative forms of activities to suit the age, motor ability, development and interests of many children such as the iCoachKids programme (see: [www.icoachkids.eu](http://www.icoachkids.eu)).

#### 8. Sedentary Behaviour

Time spent in sedentary behaviour increases as children age; this is paralleled by a drop in physical activity. There is a need to develop national guidelines for a maximum recommended amount of sedentary behaviour for youth.



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## APPENDIX 1: DATA USED IN WEIGHTING ROI AND NI SAMPLES

### Data used to weight the Republic of Ireland sample

Class/ Year	School Type	Number (n)	Male (n)	Male (%)	Female (n)	Female (%)
4th	Primary	70,061	35,552	50.74	34,509	49.26
5th	Primary	67,117	33,211	49.48	33,906	50.52
6th	Primary	63,033	30,735	48.76	32,298	51.24
1st	Post primary	57,657	28,886	50.10	28,771	49.90
2nd	Post primary	57,212	28,599	49.99	28,613	50.01
3rd	Post primary	55,318	27,667	50.01	27,651	49.99
4th	Post primary	40,451	19,670	48.63	20,781	51.37
5th	Post primary	40,256	20,976	52.11	19,280	47.89
6th	Post primary	36,952	19,220	52.01	17,732	47.99

### Data used to weight the Northern Ireland sample

Year	School Type	Number (n)	Male (n)	Male (%)	Female (n)	Female (%)
6	Primary	25,110	12,804	50.99	12,306	49.01
7	Primary	23,884	12,213	51.13	11,671	48.87
8	Post primary	22,817	11,564	50.68	11,253	49.32
9	Post primary	22,650	11,563	51.05	11,087	48.95
10	Post primary	22,381	11,437	51.10	10,944	48.90
11	Post primary	22,102	11,280	51.04	10,822	48.96
12	Post primary	22,099	11,144	50.43	10,955	49.57
13	Post primary	15,347	6,925	45.12	8,422	54.88
14	Post primary	13,149	5,864	44.60	7,285	55.40

## APPENDIX 2: COMPARISONS TO NATIONAL DATABASES AND/OR CSPA09-10

Table A. Comparison between the Department of Education and Skills (DES), CSPA 2018 and CSPA 2010 primary school samples (Republic of Ireland)

	DES		CSPA17-18		CSPA09-10	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Sex</b>						
Mixed	2828	91	30	77	39	74
Girls	106	3	5	13	8	15
Boys	181	6	4	10	6	11
<b>Location</b>						
Rural	2807	90	25	64	44	83
Urban	308	10	14	36	9	17
<b>Size</b>						
Small	1026	33	11	28	15	28
Medium	1062	34	16	41	19	36
Large	1027	33	12	31	19	36
<b>DEIS<sup>17</sup></b>						
Disadvantaged	640	21	14	36	9	17
Non-disadvantaged	2475	79	25	64	44	83

<sup>17</sup> Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools.

**Table B. Comparison between the Department of Education and Skills (DES), CSPA 2018 and CSPA 2010 post primary school samples (Republic of Ireland)**

	DES		CSPA17-18		CSPA09-10	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Type of School</b>						
Secondary	-	-	30	64	41	59
Vocational	-	-	13	28	21	30
Community	-	-	3	6	8	11
Comprehensive	-	-	1	2	0	0
<b>Sex</b>						
Mixed	478	67	25	53	39	56
Girls	101	14	15	32	16	23
Boys	132	19	7	15	15	21
<b>Location</b>						
Rural	549	77	31	66	41	59
Urban	162	23	16	34	29	41
<b>Size</b>						
Small	237	33	11	23	18	26
Medium	237	33	13	28	22	31
Large	237	33	23	49	30	43
<b>DEIS</b>						
Disadvantaged	185	26	9	19	17	24
Non-disadvantaged	526	74	38	81	53	76
<b>Fees</b>						
Non fee-paying	654	92	44	94	66	94
Fee-paying	52	7	3	6	4	6

Table C. Comparison between the Department of Education (DoE) and CSPPA 2018 primary school samples (Northern Ireland)

	DES		CSPPA09-10	
	n	%	n	%
<b>Type of School</b>				
Controlled	389	47	8	89
Catholic Maintained	372	45	1	11
Integrated	47	6	0	0
Voluntary	13	2	0	0
Comprehensive	-	-	0	0
<b>Sex</b>				
Mixed	812	98	9	100
Girls	5	1	0	0
Boys	4	1	0	0
<b>Location</b>				
Rural	463	56	4	44
Urban	358	44	5	56
<b>Size</b>				
Small	289	35	3	33
Medium	231	28	1	11
Large	301	37	5	56
<b>Family Affluence Scale Class</b>				
Low	615	75	5	56
Medium	159	19	3	33
High	47	6	1	11

Table D. Comparison between the Department of Education (DoE) and CSPPA 2018 post primary school samples (Northern Ireland)

	DoS		CSPPA17-18	
	n	%	n	%
<b>Type of School</b>				
Controlled	67	32	9	45
Catholic Maintained	65	32	4	20
Voluntary	50	25	2	10
Comprehensive	20	10	5	25
<b>Sex</b>				
Mixed	157	78	16	80
Girls	24	12	2	10
Boys	21	10	2	10
<b>Location</b>				
Rural	39	19	9	45
Urban	163	81	11	55
<b>Size</b>				
Small	103	51	4	20
Medium	54	27	6	30
Large	45	22	10	50
<b>Family Affluence Scale Class</b>				
Low	135	67	13	65
Medium	57	28	7	35
High	10	5	0	0
<b>Fees</b>				
Non fee-paying	202	100	20	100
Fee-paying	0	0	0	0





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