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'Fit to Succeed' and academic achievement

The 'Fit to Succeed' (FtS) programme began in schools in the late 1990s. The programme grew as the Exeter School Sport partnership (ESSP) developed and in particular the ESSP hub site St Luke's Science and Sports College. The impact of the 'Fit to Succeed' philosophy of the St Luke's College is identified as outstanding practice in reducing childhood obesity and helping ensure the appropriate physical development of students; "the personal development and well-being of students is outstanding" (Ofsted Jan 08). The College is committed to the ethos of their students being 'Fit to Succeed' and the impact that this could have upon their academic achievement.

Since 2005, St Luke's College students have completed the Schools Health Education Unit's (SHEU) FtS Survey. The data provide a valuable forum for student voice, help 'personalise' the College curriculum and extra curricular provision to meet the needs of learners. In response to the survey results, the College has increased the variety of activities available to students leading to higher participation rates in activities before and after College and during lunchtimes.

SHEU have over 30 years of experience surveying in schools and their expertise enabled the FtS programme to obtain baseline data that helped drive the programme forward. With over 40,000 primary and secondary students having participated in the programme, the data set has proven to be a major resource. Individual schools are able to review and analyse their results online and compare

their data with a previous survey or to that of similar schools within their family. They also have the opportunity to study their results in relation to the whole partnership.

Trends (2005 → 2010)

1. The FtS items most significantly on the rise have been:

- ~ "I am in charge of my health" ('Agree' 72% → 88%)
- ~ "I enjoy school" ('Agree' 36% → 52%)
- ~ "I really enjoy most lessons" ('Agree' 33% → 51%)
- ~ Useful school lessons about bullying (at least 'Quite useful' 30% → 39%)

2. The items most significantly in decline have been:

- ~ Taking part in internal competitions at school ('Never' 37% → 48%)
- ~ Going for walks ('Never' 55% → 28%)
- ~ Worry about friends (at least 'Quite a lot' 27% → 15%)
- ~ Worry about health (at least 'Quite a lot' 26% → 15%)

Some other 'worry' trends are down, including bullying, SATs and puberty.

'Fit to Succeed' and academic achievement

SHEU sought links between the items in the FtS questionnaire, and the academic progress of the St Luke's Year 10 students. The data analysis involved results from nearly 4,000 students who completed online surveys from 2005-2010. Links were explored between FtS items, results from English, Mathematics and Science (EnMaSc)

measures and average point score (APS) measures.

Links between the items in the FtS questionnaire

Participation in physical activity is associated with:

- ~ Positive feelings about physical activities, PE lessons
- ~ More positive attitudes to school and self
- ~ Greater perceived fitness
- ~ Eating more portions of fruit/veg, rice/pasta, wholemeal bread more often
- ~ More sleep last night
- ~ More confident when meeting people their own age

Lack of participation in physical activity is associated with:

- ~ More pain medication, more cold medication

Links between FtS items and APS measures

Items associated with higher APS attainment

- ~ Feelings of being able
- ~ Eating fish more often
- ~ Portions of fruit/veg each each
- ~ Total hours of physical activity
- ~ Using Internet for school work
- ~ Using Internet for hobbies

Items associated with lower APS attainment

- ~ Hours working at paid job
- ~ Time watching TV last night
- ~ Wanting to leave school / get a job as soon as possible
- ~ Thinking school is a waste of time
- ~ Feeling a failure
- ~ Cigarette smoking

Items associated with exceeding APS targets

- ~ Gym, Walks, Rounders, Swimming
- ~ Enjoying lessons
- ~ Satisfaction with life
- ~ Positive attitudes to school
- ~ More hours' sleep last night

Items associated with missing APS targets

- ~ Spending on sweets, crisps, fast food
- ~ Eating chips, sweets more often
- ~ Want to leave school

- ~ Time spent listening to music last night
- ~ Using Internet for hobbies (also higher attainment)
- ~ Cigarette smoking

Links between FtS items and EnMaSc measures

Items associated with higher EnMaSc attainment

- ~ Higher GCSE expectations
- ~ Portions of fruit/veg a day
- ~ Total hours of physical activity
- ~ Eating meat, rice/pasta, fish, fruit more often
- ~ Feeling able
- ~ Using Internet for school work
- ~ More sleep last night
- ~ Positive attitudes to school

Items associated with lower EnMaSc attainment

- ~ Watching TV for longer last night
- ~ Using Internet/playing computer games for longer
- ~ Cigarette smoking
- ~ Negative attitudes to school

Items associated with exceeding EnMaSc targets

- ~ Feeling able
- ~ Total hours of physical activity
- ~ Worry about money

Items associated with missing EnMaSc targets

- ~ Feeling useless or a failure
- ~ More sleep last night (also higher attainment)
- ~ Time doing paid job last night

Conclusion

There seems to be a 'virtuous circle' of health and lifestyle, where more physical activity is associated with healthier habits and positive self-descriptions.

There is also a 'virtuous circle' of academic achievement, meeting or exceeding targets and positive attitudes to school.

Most interestingly for the current study, these two areas are also positively associated with each other, that is, greater participation in physical activity is generally positively associated with higher attainment and exceeding targets.