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Healthy Schools London: A School's Case Study

Schools are charged with a responsibility to shape the lives of young people so that they are capable of making responsible and informed decisions which will affect their lifestyle. In the past, schools had taken pride in achieving 'Healthy Schools Status' – a nationally-accredited award scheme which rewarded schools' work on delivering a curriculum embedding pupils' Personal Social and Health Education with particular work focusing on the core themes: healthy eating, physical activity and pupils' emotional health and wellbeing.

The impact of the programme was based on a whole-school approach which involved working with children, young people, their families and Governors to provide a solid foundation for improvement. The scheme prided itself that 'Schools tell us that the National Healthy Schools Programme has brought sustained improvement in behaviour, standards of work and school management.' ([The National Healthy Schools Programme, 2008, p. 4](#)).

When that programme was disbanded in 2011, schools were left in a quandary. Those underlying principles were still held in high regard by many practitioners. Sadly, the national recognition and qualifications schools had worked hard to achieve were no longer recognised or valued. As a practitioner myself, working in a London school in which children came from poor socio-economic backgrounds, I witnessed so much work that had been done to educate families about the importance of the aforementioned four core areas and how this could affect pupils' learning potential.

Supported by funding from the Local Authority to run healthy eating workshops, we were able to invite nutritionists to work with families – a resource they may not have had access to without the school.

Healthy School's London

I was delighted to hear, in April 2013, that a programme titled 'Healthy Schools London'

would be sponsored by the Mayor of London. It echoes similar messages to the previous scheme, but with a slightly heavier emphasis on sports; (unsurprisingly, given the Olympic legacy). The Healthy Schools London scheme sets out to:

- Increase opportunity and participation for children and young people to be physically active in and out of school
- Improve links between schools and communities that promote physical activity
- Increase school meal uptake, including for pupils entitled to Free School Meals
- Improve access to healthy packed lunches and snacks.

Healthy School's London awards

There are three tiers to the Healthy Schools London award:

Bronze - Supports schools to carry out an analysis of pupils' needs, to identify actions to help pupils maintain a healthy weight, lifestyle and positive wellbeing.

As part of the Bronze application, seven areas are audited, namely: Leadership, Management and Managing Change, Policy Development, Learning and Teaching, Curriculum Planning and Resourcing, School Ethos, Culture, Environment and SMSC development, Provision of Support Services for children and young people, Staff Continuing Professional Development (CPD), Health and Wellbeing and Partnerships with parents/carers, local communities, external agencies and volunteers to support pupil health and wellbeing. This audit is reviewed by the local Healthy Schools Lead – an effective way of providing an additional point of contact and support for schools. The audit supports schools to identify the need for an underpinning framework (e.g. support from Senior Leaders, policies and staff responsibilities) for this whole-school approach to be effective, as well as acknowledging other schemes with which the schools may be involved (such as: School Travel Plans and Eco

Awards). The audit tool also helps practitioners to identify areas for development which form the basis of the School Action Plan, required for subsequent award qualifications.

Silver - Schools must undertake a needs analysis that identifies action that will help pupils to achieve or maintain a healthy weight, healthy lifestyle and wellbeing. These actions should include one universal action (i.e. that will affect all the pupils in the school) and one targeted action that is aimed at a particular group of pupils in the school. Schools would also need to develop an action plan for how they could deliver these actions, making clear the outcomes that they are aiming for and including milestones by which they will be able to measure progress made.

Gold - Requires schools to evaluate the impact of changes, demonstrate sustainability of the programme, as well as working with the wider community to achieve a healthy weight, lifestyle and/or positive wellbeing.

Themed weeks

Themed weeks, during which pupils are presented with short projects to support them to develop strong cross-curricular links, reinforces the whole-school approach and demonstrates sustainability of the Healthy Schools programme. Examples of themed weeks, held at the School in which I work, have included: Sports Week (linked with the Olympics and our Sports Day), Healthy Eating Weeks, and Environmental Weeks (linked with national events such as World Water Day).

Sports Week - This was a particular success for many reasons. The Olympic Games were being hosted in London and as such many of the children were interested in the news and developments in the preparation for the games.

We asked the children to research the values represented by the Olympic rings and looked at the countries participating in the games. We are lucky to have a diverse school community and many of the children were able to recognise flags from different countries, as well as being able to tell us about their memories of their home country. The older children researched the Olympic Games as begun in Ancient Greece and compared the games then and now. The work culminated in a special Opening Ceremony (which was attended by a local

member of the community who had been a Torch Bearer) and the children then participated in sports similar to those included in the Olympic Games.

Using our cross-curricular approach to teaching, the PSHE, PE, History, and Geography links are clear. In order to incorporate Literacy into the curriculum, the younger pupils wrote invitations and made posters inviting their family members to come and watch our Games. Some of the older pupils wrote rules for the various sports played, made leaflets about the history of the Games and persuading people to come to our events. The older pupils also wrote scripts for the Opening Ceremony and acted as commentators during the Games.

Similarly, the pupils covered their Numeracy objectives by buying tickets for the Games, working out the number of spectators that could be accommodated on benches (incorporating various calculations), measuring (e.g. the distance javelins were thrown etc.), ordinal numbers used to rank the order of runners in races and recording the number of medals won by each team in tables using tally marks and so forth.

Healthy Eating Week - This was linked with the school kitchens changing the lunch menus. Pupils considered a healthier lifestyle, focusing on healthy eating. The children were asked to design a healthy packed lunch box, building on their work on the food groups, as well as designing a bag in which to carry their lunch. Given that the pupils lunches are often made by a family member, a Coffee Morning Workshop was held to share the work done with pupils during the week. Families were also invited to food tasting opportunities in order for the children to taste the school meals on offer. This helped the school to boost the number of pupils opting for school lunches.

Raising awareness

As far as possible, we try to raise awareness of national days and events, such as *World Water Day*. We arranged for our *Environmental Week* to coincide with that date. The children had access to clean drinking water in their classes and in the playground, but we had found that children were wasting water unnecessarily and so education around water wastage was important.

Fortuitously, at a similar time, the local Borough

was introducing a fuller recycling scheme for residents so that food waste, cardboard and garden waste would be collected separately for recycling.

As part of our *Environmental Week*, we asked the children to consider the importance of recycling, reducing waste (e.g. opting to buy fruits etc. without packaging) and re-using (i.e. re-using items that could have been considered 'rubbish' for other purposes). We also invested in a school compost bin and children were encouraged to put their organic waste (from lunch and fruit times) in the compost bin. We re-used empty barrel boxes to collect rainwater which was then used to water the vegetable patch.

Each of these events related back to the standards set out by Healthy Schools London and although the school had not arranged the themed weeks with those standards in mind, they clearly fulfilled the requirements for the awards and most importantly provided a relevant and engaging curriculum.

Visitors are also invited to work with pupils across the school on a regular basis as they help to reinforce and reiterate key messages to pupils in a slightly different medium (e.g. through song-writing sessions, theatre groups who perform shows and lead workshops differentiated to each year group and sports groups (e.g. after-school clubs).

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The Healthy Schools London programme continues to be rolled out to schools across the City of London. [Healthy Schools London](#) advertise that, "The benefits go beyond health. Participating schools have also reported reduced incidents of bullying, improved behaviour and improved attendance. Headteachers have said that they found the Healthy Schools Programme helpful as a general school improvement tool."

Education and Health

Published by the Schools Health Education Unit since 1983, the journal is aimed at those involved with education and health who are concerned with the health and wellbeing of young people. Readership is worldwide as the journal is online and open access and offers an eclectic mix of articles.

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