

Active School Flag

Physical activity promotion through self-evaluation in primary schools in Ireland

Department of Education and Skills, Ireland

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Joining forces in health promotion to tackle the burden of chronic diseases in Europe. November 24-25, 2015. Vilnius, Lithuania.

BACKGROUND

Active School Flag (ASF) is based on a 'whole school' approach and aims to enhance levels of physical activity for school aged children through developing a physically educated and physically active school community.

An active school:

- delivers a broad and balanced physical education curriculum
- promotes inclusive physical activity throughout the school day
- works in partnership with others to promote a physically active school culture
- organises an Active School Week every year.

METHODS

To achieve the Active School Flag schools self-evaluate and then plan, implement and monitor improvements across four areas: physical education, physical activity, partnerships and Active School Week.

Every school appoints an ASF coordinator and forms an ASF committee with representatives from as many areas of school life as possible (management, teachers, non-teaching staff members, pupils, parents and members of the community). Inclusivity and student voice are central to the ASF process.



The ASF website www.activeschoolflag.ie shares out ideas and exemplars of best practise. Schools plan improvements in response to their own local needs and priorities and commit to a set of actions which are then linked with a defined set of indicators to monitor progress. ASF has a clear set of guidelines and tools to ensure a standardised approach to support changes in the physical activity policies, environments and opportunities within the school. Schools are assessed through an accreditation visit and completion of documentation. There are defined quality control mechanisms including an ASF screening committee. Successful schools are recognised by the awarding of the ASF flag, valid for a 3 year period.

The programme was externally evaluated in 2011, based on data submitted by 21 schools using an inductive thematic approach.

RESULTS

ASF was launched in 2009. 673 schools have now received ASF, including 634 primary schools and 39 post primary schools, representing 19% of all primary schools and 5% of all post-primary schools in the Republic of Ireland.

Evaluation findings show that schools awarded the ASF flag had a more structured and inclusive approach to physical activity promotion. The voluntary nature of participating in ASF combined with the flexible design of the self-evaluation allowed schools to innovate and make relevant changes based on their local context. All schools identified areas where physical activity could be enhanced and planned within their resources to implement physical activity changes. All schools were clearly focused on removing barriers to, and increasing opportunities for, participation in physical activity to get *more children, more active, more often*.

All in all the entire programme created a very happy and positive atmosphere in our school with the pupils eagerly awaiting our next challenge or improvement, with total co-operation from parents and other family members.
Scoil an Aingil Choimheádaí, Keadue NS, Co. Donegal

The whole ASF process has been hugely beneficial to all. Pupils who once would have shied away from physical activity are now embracing every opportunity to exercise. Teachers and staff now feel more comfortable in delivering a balanced Physical Exercise programme.
Glenbeigh NS, Co. Kerry



CONCLUSIONS

Self-evaluation and self-improvement processes can contribute to the promotion of whole-school physical activity. A planned, systematic and structured self-evaluation and self-improvement process resulted in ASF schools prioritising and improving physical activity promotion. ASF schools adopt more developmentally appropriate and inclusive approaches to physical activity promotion. Further research is required to examine if the actions identified during the self-evaluation process have been fully embedded in everyday school practice and if the ASF process is sustainable.

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