

Active School Flag Ireland

Which 'life stage' for CVDs prevention targets the intervention?

Infancy, Childhood & Adolescence .

Short description of the intervention:

Aim: The ASF is an initiative which aims to enhance levels of physical activity for children through developing a physically active and physically educated school community. Target group: School-going children between the ages of 5 and 18 years. It is open to all primary, post-primary, special needs education schools and YouthReach centres. **Design/Method:** Schools are recruited to the programme by invitation and once engaged with the programme they are supported on a programme of action planning and self-evaluation based on a 'whole school' approach. Schools are firstly required to review their current provision across the areas of physical education, physical activity and partnerships and commit to a number of improvements. The review areas including elements of planning and PE curriculum, professional development, schools PE resources, activity during break times, discretionary/cross-curricular and extra-curricular activity, inclusive physical activity and active travel.

Physical Education	Physical Activity	Partnerships
Planning and Curriculum	Activity during Break Times	Working with Pupils
Professional Development	Discretionary Time and Cross-Curricular Activities	Working with Parents
Resources	Extra-Curricular Activities	Working with the Local Community
	Inclusive Physical Activity	Working with National Agencies
	Active Travel	

Partnerships also form a defined focus of review including working with pupils, parents, the local community and national agencies. This work is supported by standardised ASF guidelines and review prompts which are periodically revised. Schools include an Active School Week as part of their annual school calendar. Schools are assessed by various means including an accreditation visit, completion of documentation and there are defined quality control mechanisms including an ASF screening committee. An overview of the programme can be viewed from this short presentation http://www.activeschoolflag.ie/files/ASF_Presentation_Slides.pdf

Was the design of the intervention appropriate and built upon relevant data, theory, context, evidence, previous practice including pilot studies?

Yes. The ASF mirrors well-evaluated 'active school' models operating in other countries. The evidence to support the design of the intervention is reflected in the published work 'Flying the Active Flag – physical activity promotion through self-evaluation in primary schools in Ireland' (a full reference is provided in the references section at the end of the form). This study explored the fit between the ASF design and the evidence from the literature on the

characteristics of successful programmes including the preferences of children. Supporting schools using a self-evaluation approach is a strategy with proven effectiveness in schools contexts including in Ireland (McNamara and O’Hara 2008; Schildkamp and Visscher, 2010; Schildkamp, Visser and Luyten, 2009). The ASF mirrors best practice guidelines internationally using a whole-school approach, which is considered as one of the seven best investments for physical activity. A pilot study was not conducted. The programme started with a small number of schools and adapted its work and priorities according to the early experiences.

Did the design thoroughly describe the practice in terms of purpose, SMART objectives, and methods?

The ASF initiative 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. The application documents can be viewed at <http://www.activeschoolflag.ie/home.html>.

Schools select from a menu of options in the context of their own local needs and priorities. Once committed to a set of actions these are linked with a defined set of indicators to monitor progress. Schools appoint a teacher as the Active School Flag coordinator to lead the process. Every school must also form an Active School Flag committee. Nominees from all areas of the school life are invited to take part – management, teachers, non-teaching staff members, pupils, parents and members of the community. Pupil voice is an extremely important aspect of the ASF process. As broad a range of pupils as possible are included on the committee, including those pupils that are not interested in sports. A record of all meetings is kept. In some schools ASF pupil committee members wear badges on the days when meetings are being held. The ASF committee meets with the accreditor during the accreditation meeting. A start and end date is applied to each individual improvement.

To which type of interventions does your example of good practice belong to?

The ASF is a nationwide initiative focussed on supporting the whole school approach to enhancing physical activity. The ASF mirrors other ‘active school’ models operating throughout Europe and internationally, for example the CDC Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program in the US.

How is this example of good practice funded?

National government – core funding comes from the Department of Education and Skills with additional sponsorship from the Department of Health under the Healthy Ireland Framework for Health and Wellbeing 2013-2025.

Non-governmental organisation - Elements of the programme are supported by Ireland Active and the Federation of Irish Sport.

What is/was the level of implementation of your example of good practice?

The ASF programme was launched in 2009 and 673 schools have received the ASF to date including 634 primary and 39 post primary schools. This represents around 19% of all primary schools and 5% of post-primary schools.

What are the main aim and the main objectives of your example of good practice?

The ASF is an initiative which aims to enhance levels of physical activity for children through developing a physically active and physically educated school community.

Please give a description of the problem the good practice example wants to tackle:

Inactive and sedentary lifestyles are a major concern among Europe's children and young people, and Ireland is no exception. Regular physical activity has many benefits including direct benefits during childhood to physical and mental health, weight control and child development. Children who are physically active are more likely to be active and less likely to be overweight in adulthood. Changes in the physical activity of children influence the public health of the population. It has been estimated that in Ireland, 9% of the burden of coronary heart disease and 11% of Type 2 diabetes can be attributed to physical inactivity.

Estimates of physical activity among children in Ireland: The Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity survey 2009 estimated that 19% of primary school children and 12% of post primary school children achieve the target of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day. The pan-European Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Survey estimates that around one in four 11 to 15 year olds achieves the physical activity target and 54% watch more than 2 hours of TV every day.

Social and gender perspectives on physical activity: Similar to other European countries, girls were less active than boys and levels of physical activity increased with increasing socio-economic status.

Active play: 49% of children reported playing games outside with a parent within the last week

Active travel: It is estimated that 32% of primary children and 43% of post-primary children walk or cycle to or from school each day.

Physical education in school: Ireland scored a D- on the physical activity report card for children with just 35% of primary (5th and 6th Class) and 10% of post primary children receiving the recommended level of PE.

Extra-curricular school sport: 42% of primary and 57% of post-primary students reported participating in extra-curricular sport 2 or more times a week.

Overweight and obesity are a significant concern in Ireland, in keeping with most other European countries. In Ireland it has been estimated that one quarter of 9 years olds are overweight or obese. An infographic on childhood overweight and obesity in Ireland can be accessed here:

<http://www.safefood.eu/SafeFood/media/SafeFoodLibrary/ChildhoodObesity/childhoodobesityinfographic.jpg>

Is your example of good practice embedded in a broader national/regional/ local policy or action plan?

Yes.

- Healthy Ireland – A Framework for Health and Wellbeing 2013- 2025 (Department of Health)
- A National Physical Activity Plan is expected to be published by the Department of Health later this year.
- In addition, the Active School Flag is aligned with priorities set out in government strategies on sports participation, active travel and the prevention of overweight and obesity.

Implementation of your example of good practice is/was:

Periodic – as the programme is based in the school setting it occurs during term-time only and not in the summer months. The programme has been operating since 2009 and remains active.

Target group(s):

Children attending primary school
Children attending post-primary school
Early school leavers attending Youthreach centres

During implementation were specific actions taken to address the equity dimensions?

Yes. Particular attention is paid to the inclusion of children with additional needs such as disability and to the promotion of gender equitable programmes under the ' inclusive physical activity' strand. Partnership

working with pupils, parents, the local community and national agencies ensure that priorities are based on local needs.

In design, did relevant dimensions of equity were adequately taken into consideration and targeted?

In the early review phase when priorities are being considered, the school is prompted to consider the following:

INCLUSIVE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Inclusive Physical Activity refers to how the school caters for pupils of all abilities and interests including those with special needs, exceptional talent and disinterested pupils. Whole school physical activity events are also relevant to this review section.

How do you ensure that extra-curricular opportunities are accessible to all pupils?

How does your school ensure that pupils with special needs can play a full role in all physical activity opportunities?

How does your school encourage pupils with exceptional ability?

How does your school encourage children that are disinterested in sport to become more physically active?

Is Sports Day organised in an inclusive way, to maximise the physical activity opportunities for all?

Does your school organise accessible whole school recreational events such as hill walks etc.?

Does your school organise accessible physical activity fund raiser events?

Which vulnerable social groups were targeted?

Children living in social and economically disadvantaged circumstances

Children with disabilities and special needs

As many schools in Ireland and all-girl or all-boy schools, the issue of gender participation can only be dealt with in certain ways.

Did the intervention have a comprehensive approach to health promotion addressing all relevant determinants and using different strategies?

The design of the ASF seeks to address some of the obstacles faced by pupils in terms of physical activity and involvement in active travel and physical education in school.

The programme is rooted firmly in a whole school approach ensuring that many aspects of school life provide opportunity as well as support for physical activity as part of the school day.

Was an effective partnership in place?

The ASF works in partnership with schools and teachers. In addition the programme works in partnership with national bodies relating to the development of sports and the Health Service Executive. A list of partners involved with the programme is available here: <http://www.activeschoolflag.ie/professional-development-service->

for-teachers.html

Was the intervention aligned with a policy plan at the local, national, institutional and international level?

Yes. The programme is aligned with the Healthy Ireland Framework and the commitments made in current obesity policy. The policy is also aligned with government policy in respect of sports participation, active travel and social inclusion.

Was the intervention implemented equitably, i.e. proportional to needs

There are elements within the programme which ensure that focus is placed on inclusion of those pupils least likely to be physically active.

Were the intervention's objectives and strategy transparent to the target population and stakeholders involved?

The programme is operated with the direct involvement of pupils, parents and the local community. For example, in the review phase, during which priorities are discussed, the school considers the following prompts:

WORKING with PUPILS

Do pupils have a voice in terms of sports and physical activity provision in your school?

Has your school carried out pupil surveys on matters relating to physical education, physical activity, active travel, ASW etc.?

How are individual and team achievements celebrated within your school community?

Does your school have a Well Done Wall or Wall of Fame to acknowledge pupil achievements?

Does your school organise any form of Sports Awards? If so, what awards are given out?

What opportunities does the school offer pupils to display their physical activity skills?

WORKING with PARENTS

Do parents help out with the physical activity programmes?

Does your school participate in the HSE Be Active After School Activity Programme?

How does the Parents' Association help to promote physical activity?

How does the Parents' Association support your school's efforts to provide sports equipment and/or to improve the sports facilities?

Does your school inform parents about local clubs and physical activity opportunities in their local area?

WORKING with the LOCAL COMMUNITY

What local facilities are used by your school?

Does your school allow local clubs to utilise its sports facilities?

Does your school have established links with local clubs and physical activity organisations?

Does your school have links with community groups such as the Special Olympics or Community Games?

Have local sports persons or teams been invited to your school to talk with the pupils?

Did the evaluation results achieve the stated goals and objectives?

The success of the programme is evident from a process evaluation of the experiences of participation by schools. More directly, the success of the initiative is evidenced by the ongoing growth and development of the programme which indicates a high level of acceptability and ownership by schools and the stakeholders at school level.

It has not yet been evaluated whether the programme has resulted in improvements in physical activity among the pupils. The proximal and process outcomes are positive but the effect of the programme on end-outcomes remains

unclear. Preliminary data on physical activity based on pre- and post- assessments of children has been collected but the results are not yet available.

Did the intervention a defined and appropriate evaluation framework assessing structure, processes and outcomes?

Findings from the self-evaluation process undertaken by the school led to reshaping of priorities at school level. Materials and resources have been periodically reviewed and improved to meet the needs of schools.

Did the intervention have any information /monitoring systems in place to regularly deliver data aligned with evaluation and reporting needs?

There was a very clearly defined process in place to collect information on the work occurring in schools in terms of review and the establishment of school governance structures, the achievement of goals set by the school in any given year.

Specifically, what has been measured / evaluated?

See link 'Flying the Active Flag – physical activity promotion through self-evaluation in primary schools in Ireland' published in Irish Educational Studies, Vol.31, September 2012 (<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03323315.2012.710066#abstract>)

What are the main results/conclusions/recommendations from the evaluation?

The ASF is well accepted in schools and the self-evaluation process allows schools to cater a plan of action in the context of their local needs and assets. Schools placed physical activity in a more central position in school life as a consequence of involvement in the programme particularly in the areas of (1) alignment with curriculum structures (2) engagement with physical structures and (3) increase in organisational structures. Schools without indoor facilities were restricted in the breadth and frequency of curriculum delivery. For many schools, action planning placed an emphasis on fun and enjoyment, maximum participation and opportunities for achievement.

All schools included in the process evaluation type study prioritised changes to the playground environment as an area for development in their action plans. Schools were successful in implementing new organisational structures such as time-tables for shared equipment, zoning of spaces and activity rotas. Schools were also active in initiating more formal planning, greater provision and choice in co-curricular sport. The balance between competitive and non-competitive sports appeared to shift towards non-competitive sports in the main.

The central role of the teacher in co-curricular sport and other physical activity promotion programmes was evident. The presence of national governing body coaches was seen as an opportunity to upskill teachers. Many schools embraced the involvement of children and introduced innovative means to capture the views of pupils. Partnerships established through self-evaluation provided the potential for increasing the quantity and quality of physical activity promotion in schools. Leadership by the school was critical to the success of the programme. The self-evaluation approach requires little financial resource commitment and may represent good value for money. School's approaches to the self-evaluation reflect a multi-dimensional understanding of the purposes of, and approaches to, physical activity promotion within school communities.

In some schools, where there was a strong sporting tradition, they found it more challenging to focus on additional opportunities for children not involved in school teams. These practices were guided by school culture and maintained an adherence to competitive structures which may privilege a small number of pupils. The value placed by schools on competitive school representation needs to be accommodated within policy messages. Further research is required to examine if the actions identified during the self-evaluation

process have become embedded in every day practice and are sustained within the school.

The quality and functioning of the partnerships established through ASF should be further explored with a view to supporting sustainable partnership for all parties.

The long-term impact and sustainability of the initiative merits further investigation.

Source of information: 'Flying the Active School Flag' – full reference available in references at the end of this form.

Is the evaluation report available, preferably in English or at least an English summary?

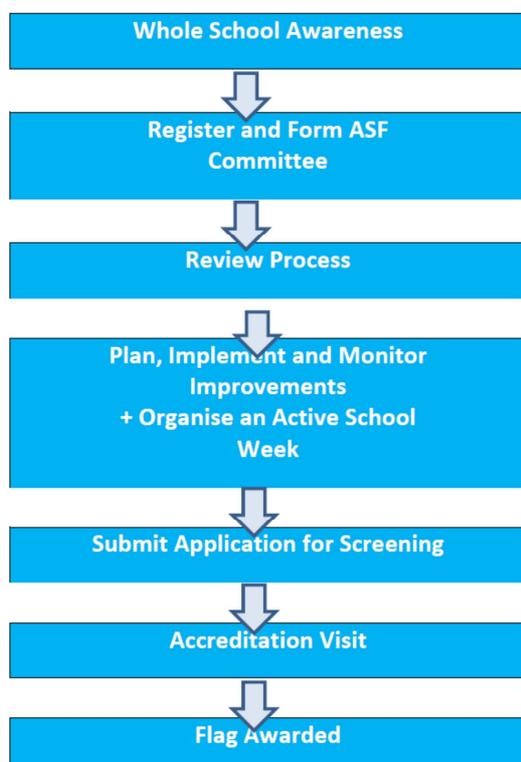
Elements of process evaluation are available at 'Flying the Active Flag' – physical activity promotion through self-evaluation in primary schools in Ireland' published in Irish Educational Studies, Vol.31, September 2012
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03323315.2012.710066#abstract>

Who implemented the intervention?

National Active School Flag Co-ordinator Within each school there is a school ASF co-ordinator and committee. Schools appoint a teacher as the Active School Flag coordinator to lead the process. Every school forms an Active School Flag committee. Nominees from all areas of the school life take part – management, teachers, non-teaching staff members, pupils, parents and members of the community.

What core activities are/have been implemented?

How to Achieve the Active School Flag



Was the intervention designed and implemented in consultation with the target population?

Yes, consultation with pupils, parents and other stakeholders is integral to the review and implementation processes.

Did the intervention achieve meaningful participation among the intended target population?

Around 670 schools have been awarded ASF.

Was the engagement of intermediaries/multipliers used to promote the meaningful participation of the target population?

The ASF partners with a number of national organisations active in the area of sport, health and physical activity in addition to local sports partnerships. A listing of the supporting partners is on the website.

Is the continuation of the intervention ensured through institutional ownership that guarantees funding and human resources and/or mainstreamed?

The programme is core funded by the Department of Education and Skills..

Is there a broad support for the intervention amongst the intended target populations?

The involvement of pupils is a core element of the programme in all its phases

Were sources of funding specified in regards to stability and commitment?

The funding for the programme is €125,000 per annum from the Department of Education and Skills with additional sponsorship from Healthy Ireland.

Were organisational structures clearly defined and described?

The ASF adopts a clear application process and guidelines to quality assure the involvement of participant schools.

Is the potential impact on the population targeted assessed?

The impact of the programme on the physical activity levels of children has not yet been formally assessed but some data has been collected in this regard and is awaiting publication. The wider impacts of the programme on school culture, behaviours and attitudes and the social inclusion of pupils, parents and communities has not been formally assessed. Feedback has been provided by schools to the national co-ordinator but this has not been subjected to an external in-depth structured analysis, rather it has been used to guide the development of the programme.

Is there available an analysis of requirements for eventual scaling up such as foreseen barriers and facilitators?

The budget for the programme is listed above. The cost to the school for processing the application is approximately €240.

What were, in your opinion, the pre-conditions for success? Were there any facilitating factors?

- The Active School Flag has been successful as it is based on evidence of what works in supporting sustainable and meaningful change i.e. by adopting a whole school approach.
- ASF works because it fits with the model of self-evaluation already used by schools in other domains – the model is culturally acceptable to schools, easily understood and schools are supported with high quality resources and guidance.
- Leadership at national and school level
- Integrated local partnerships that mobilise and amplifying the reach and impact of the programme
- Co-ordination and integration with existing programmes, assets and lead agencies
- Commitment to core involvement with stakeholders from the outset and in all stages of the programme from review to selection of priorities through to implementation and monitoring, including pupils and parents.
- ASF respects the local context allowing schools the autonomy to define their own priorities within the programme and avoids a ‘one size fits all’ approach. Schools with more flexibility in the curricula, strongly motivated and committed teachers and a devoted DOiT coordinator are preconditions for success.

What were, in your opinion, the main lessons to be learned?

- Whole school approaches can be successful but careful attention to design is critical and schools can respond to reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of current practice.
- Physical activity approaches in school can embrace many aspects of physical activity including active travel and support for extra-curricular activity not just physical education.
- Important programmes such as this should be supported with adequate resources to ensure robust external evaluation on end outcomes as well as process outcomes. It is difficult to plan a 2-year programme in schools, due to teacher and student turnover. Time constraints in schools are hindering implementation, therefore, the programme could benefit from identifying core components of the programme.

Web page related to the intervention

Active School Flag website - <http://www.activeschoolflag.ie/home.html>

References

'Flying the Active Flag' – physical activity promotion through self-evaluation in primary schools in Ireland' published in Irish Educational Studies, Vol.31, September 2012

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03323315.2012.710066#abstract>

Overview of research on Active School Flag experiences available at:

http://www.activeschoolflag.ie/files/MIC_Research-Active_School_Flag.pdf

Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity survey 2009

The CDC Comprehensive School PA Program

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/physicalactivity/cspap.htm>

Harrington DM, Belton S, Coppinger T, et al. Results From Ireland's 2014 Report Card on Physical Activity in Children and Youth. J Phys Act Health. 2014; 11: S63-S68.

McNamara, G. and O'Hara, J. (2008) The importance of the concept of self-evaluation in the changing landscape of educational policy. Studies in Educational Evaluation, 34: 173-9

Schildkamp, K. and Visscher, A. (2009) Factors influencing the utilisation of a school self-evaluation instrument. Studies in Educational Evaluation 35, no. 4: 150-9.

Schildkamp, K., Visscher, A and Luyten, H. (2010) The effects of the use of a school self-evaluation instrument. School Effectiveness and School Improvement 20, no. 1: 69-88.

Growing Up in Ireland – Overweight and Obesity among 9 year olds in Ireland – short report based on data from the Growing Up in Ireland Longitudinal Survey in Ireland. Available at:

http://www.growingup.ie/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/Second_Child_Cohort_Reports/Growing_Up_in_Ireland_-_Overweight_and_Obesity_Among_9-Year-Olds_Executive_Summary.pdf

Other relevant documents (implementation manuals, training manuals, posters, videos or other tools available for use or adaptation, etc.):

Resources for schools interesting and involved in Active School Flag are available at:

<http://www.activeschoolflag.ie/physical-education.html>

Links to professional development for teachers in the context of the programme available at:

<http://www.activeschoolflag.ie/professional-development-service-for-teachers.html>

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