



School Example:

Treloweth Primary School, Cornwall

Focus: Healthy weight

School context

Our primary school is located in a poor area of Cornwall, which is listed amongst the top 15 percent of the most socially deprived areas nationally. Based near to large housing estates, the school's catchment area includes some communities which also suffer significant health inequalities.

Health issues

We identified healthy weight as an issue that needed to be addressed amongst children and young people within our school setting – an issue that also impacts the wider Cornwall region. Teachers from all 14 classes identified a total of 22 children and young people aged between 7 and 11 in the school whose learning and development, they felt, was being adversely affected by negative concerns around weight or self esteem. Our goal was to work directly with this group to educate and raise their awareness around healthy eating and to promote exercise activities that would improve their self confidence.

Partnerships & activities

One of our most important partnerships was with parents. Whilst we wanted to work closely with this identified group of children, we did not want to single them out and stigmatise their involvement and therefore contacted all parents and carers and asked them for their ideas on how we could best address the issue. As a result, they suggested the 'Looking after Me' club and 22 children we'd already identified, took part.


Through 'Looking after Me', we established a timetable, outside class hours, that would support them to make the right decisions around healthy eating and exercising. One session, for example, involved an exercise programme where a pedometer was used to measure progress. Another time, the group looked at healthy cooking and another initiative worked with club members to promote self esteem and confidence.

We worked with a number of external partners including nutritionists from the Primary Care Trust (PCT) to involve children with assessing the nutritional value of their lunch boxes and they participated in 'taster sessions' which encouraged them to try new, healthy food options.

We also drew heavily on local leisure services. For example, some lessons saw children and young people move from the school grounds to a local leisure centre where they used the trampoline or swimming pool. Another initiative saw the group go for a meal at a farm /restaurant, where the club members selected their own healthy meal option and learnt about how their food was produced. For most, the day out was a reward as many had never been out for a meal before.

Measuring success

When addressing a sensitive issue such as healthy weight and emotional well-being, measuring success can be challenging as it's not possible to weigh participants and record weight changes.



We therefore relied on feedback from parents and participants to act as early success indicators. Their comments showed us that we were on the right path to making a positive change with one parent commenting that: "Since the club started my daughter is more positive about herself, she seems happier and more motivated and has learnt how different foods and exercise can keep her healthy. The best thing is she feels part of a team and is supported by her friends and teachers."

School staff also noticed that the children were more confident and motivated in the classroom as well. During the six month initiative, the children also kept a diary and we noticed a change in their entries during the intervention which indicated they were taking greater pride in their work and feeling more confident.

Lessons learned

My advice to any school that addresses healthy eating and emotional well-being would be around managing resources. Whilst school staff were enthusiastic about tackling the issue, it impacted on their schedule. But if managed correctly, a targeted intervention programme can really make a difference, in and outside the classroom.

Getting support from parents is also key to success. Parents need to be informed from the beginning by being invited to contribute ideas. By taking a whole school approach, we were able to get positive support from parents and also remove any possible stigma that could be attached with the club.

Contact

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