

## Sports participation

Low impact for moderate cost, based on limited evidence.



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Sports participation interventions engage pupils in sports as a means to increasing educational engagement and attainment. This might be through organised after school activities or a programme organised by a local sporting club or association. Sometimes sporting activity is used as a means to encourage young people to engage in additional learning activities, such as football training at a local football club combined with study skills, ICT, literacy, or mathematics lessons.

### How effective is it?

The overall impact of sports participation on academic achievement tends to be positive but low (about two additional months' progress). However, there is recent evidence from the UK that sports participation can have a larger effect on, for example, mathematics learning when combined with a structured numeracy programme (with one study showing an impact of up to ten months' additional progress). In this circumstance the 'participation' acted as an incentive to undertake additional instruction.

The variability in effects suggests that the quality of the programme and the emphasis on, or connection with, academic learning may make more difference than the specific type of approach or sporting activities involved. Participating in sports and physical activity is likely to have wider health and social benefits.

### How secure is the evidence?

There have been a number of reviews linking the benefits of participation in sport with academic benefits. There is, however, considerable variation in impact, including some studies which show negative effects. Overall, the evidence is rated as limited.

### What are the costs?

Costs are estimated at about £300 to £400 per pupil per year excluding clothing, equipment, and travel costs. These costs vary according to equipment, venue, and group size. There would also be a difference in cost between providing sports activities on school premises, and pupils attending existing provision. Overall, costs are estimated as moderate.

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## Sports participation: What should I consider?

*Before you implement this strategy in your learning environment, consider the following:*

1. Being involved in extra-curricular sporting activities may increase attendance and retention.
2. Impact varies considerably between different interventions, and participation in sports does not straightforwardly transfer to academic learning. It is likely that the quality of the programme and the emphasis on or connection with academic learning may make more difference than the specific type of approach or activities involved.
3. Planned extra-curricular activities which include short, regular, and structured teaching in literacy and mathematics (either tutoring or group teaching) as part of a sports programme, such as an after school club or summer school, are much more likely to offer academic benefits than sporting activities alone.
4. If you are considering sports participation as an approach to improving attendance, engagement and attainment, have you considered how you will evaluate the impact?

## Technical Appendix

### Definition

Sports participation interventions engage pupils in sports as a means to increasing educational engagement and attainment. This might be through organised after school activities or a programme organised by a local sporting club or association. Sometimes sporting activity is used as a means to encourage young people to engage in additional learning activities, such as football training at a local football club combined with study skills, ICT, literacy, or mathematics lessons.

**Search Terms:** extracurricular activities; extracurricular programs; school club; sports/athletic participation; out of school activities, non-academic school activities; leisure/recreation activities

### Evidence Rating

There are two meta-analyses and one systematic review with effect size estimates suggesting that the impact of engaging in sports tends to be positive, but low. Two of these have been conducted in the last ten years. This evidence includes observational studies and there is only limited research with strong causal inference. There is evidence from the UK that sports and learning participation can have a more dramatic effect on, for example, mathematics learning as assessed by standardised tests when combined with a structured numeracy programme (with one study showing an impact of up to ten months' additional progress). Overall, the evidence is rated as limited.

### Additional Cost Information

Cost are estimated at about £300 to £400 per pupil per year excluding clothing, equipment, and travel costs. These costs vary according to equipment, venue, and group size. There would also be a difference in cost between providing sports activities on school premises, and pupils attending existing provision. Overall, costs are estimated as moderate.

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## Summary of effects

Meta-analyses	Effect size	FSM effect size
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The right hand column provides detail on the specific outcome measures or, if in brackets, details of the intervention or control group.

## Meta-analyses abstracts