

**CASE STUDY**

# **Place-based Whole Systems Work with Schools in South Tees**

# PLACE-BASED WHOLE SYSTEMS WORK WITH SCHOOLS IN SOUTH TEES

**The Creating Active Schools (CAS) Framework is a research-based whole-school behaviour change approach to increasing and improving physical activity in schools. It was designed collaboratively by practitioners, policymakers, and researchers, including staff from YGT and our Ambassador organisation, Redcar & Eston School Sport Partnership (RESSP).**

The framework provides a whole school strategy toolkit that enables schools to determine the priorities and training required to become active schools. It supports a school's embedding of physical activity in policies, systems, behaviours, and environments so that it becomes everyone's responsibility, from pupils to staff, parents, and governors.

Following the creation of the CAS framework, YGT and Tees Valley Sport (TVS) developed a collaborative partnership to deliver an initial CAS pilot across South Tees. This would be a test and learn approach, understanding how the framework would land locally and how the approach could evolve to maximise physical activity in schools.

Together, they recognised the need to reframe what physical activity can mean for schools and provide senior leaders with a structure that aims to transform the culture of physical activity within their setting and uses movement to improve academic and holistic outcomes for pupils.

The initial focus was on only six schools, to allow time and capacity to fully understand each school's needs, gather valuable insight and test and adapt their approach. From there, the model was developed further in response to learning and rolled out to more schools.

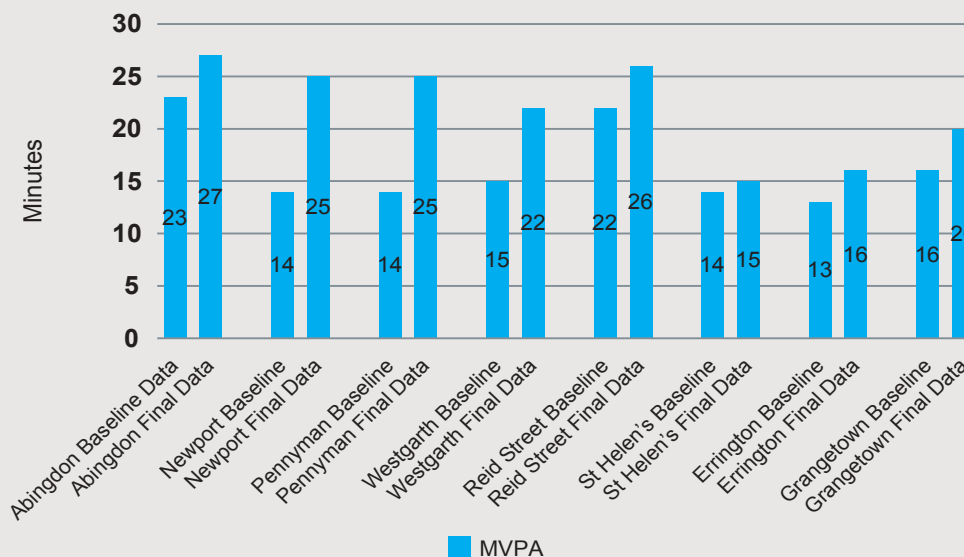
## Impact of the Programme

Following the initial pilot, the workstream is now into its third academic year, with a total of **25 schools** engaged in the Redcar, Middlesbrough, and broader Cleveland area, with a **total of 8410 pupils**. **718 staff** have been trained. To support their Sport England expansion work, TVS funded additional schools outside South Tees in Stockton, Darlington, and Hartlepool to participate.

Each school was also provided a pack of 120 child-friendly wearable activity trackers called Moki bands. Using a simple wristband that records steps and active minutes, the bands measure the children's moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) levels and show staff real-life data. The aim was to inspire schools to move more by providing an accurate picture of the children's physical activity levels.

The graphic below shows the MVPA (Moderate to Vigorous Physical Activity) data for eight CAS schools, comparing baseline data to final data when the children wore the MOKI bands. Each school has shown an increase in MVPA from the baseline measurement to the final measurement across the 23/24 academic year. The increases vary among schools, with the highest increases observed at Newport and Pennyman (both showing an increase of 11) and the smallest increase observed at St Helen's (with an increase of 1). This data suggests improvements in physical activity levels across the schools, which is a positive indicator of enhanced physical health and possibly the effectiveness of interventions or programmes implemented to increase physical activity.

## MVPA



The increases represent minimums for the improvements observed, as the baseline data may be higher than pre-intervention levels as it is often the first time the children have worn the trackers and are excited to demonstrate how active they are.

Staff were also surveyed regarding their understanding and perceptions around

physical activity before commencement and after the school's engagement with CAS was established. The results are shown below. The greatest impacts were in confidence in implementing physical activity within the school, frequency of implementing active lessons and perceptions of the school's value of physical activity.

MEASURE	BEFORE ENGAGEMENT	AFTER INTERVENTION COMMENCED	CHANGE	NOTES
<b>Importance of PA – staff rating the importance of PA at 7 or higher</b>	84%	87%	3%	This positive shift suggests that the project successfully heightened staff awareness of the value of physical activity within the school setting.
<b>Confidence in implementing PA – staff rating confidence of 7 or higher</b>	58%	71%	13%	The data highlights that the project had a significant effect on equipping staff with the skills and assurance needed to integrate physical activity into their teaching practices.
<b>Understanding of the impact of PA on a child's brain – staff rating 7 or above</b>	72%	82%	10%	The rise indicates enhanced knowledge among staff, likely due to the training and educational components of the project.
<b>Understanding PA's link to long-term health – staff rating 7 or above</b>	86%	87%	2%	This modest but meaningful increase suggests that the CAS project contributed to a greater awareness of the health benefits associated with regular physical activity.
<b>Frequency of conducting active lessons (at least once per week).</b>	67%	88%	21%	The data demonstrates that the project had a profound impact on encouraging staff to incorporate physical activity into their daily teaching routines more frequently.
<b>Enjoyment of PA</b>	71%	79%	8%	This suggests that the CAS project not only improved staff attitudes toward physical activity but also made it a more enjoyable and engaging experience for them.
<b>Perceived school support for PA – staff rating 7 or higher</b>	51%	63%	12%	The findings reveal that CAS has positively influenced staff perceptions of their school's commitment to promoting and supporting PA.

## The Journey

The initial schools were selected from submitted Expressions of Interest to take part, and they were offered:

- One-to-one support.
- Access to the CAS profiling toolkit.
- A whole school set of MOKI bands.
- Funding via the Dragon's Den project.
- Whole school staff training.
- Networking opportunities.
- Insight & intelligence.

Each school is unique, and for the South Tees pilot to be successful, each had to set up a management committee, self-review their school, select priorities, work at their own pace, and embed changes before moving on. The one-to-one support from RESSP and TVS was tailored to the schools' needs.

Establishing a Management Committee was fundamental as this demonstrated that the entire school was committed and that responsibility wouldn't only be with the PE subject lead. As a minimum, a Senior Leadership Team (SLT) member and a project lead were required to participate. However, what was positive was that others wanted to be involved, including the health and wellbeing lead, PE subject leader, lunchtime supervisors, class teachers, headteachers, deputy head teachers, and school governors.

RESSP and TVS each took responsibility for leading three schools, attending management committee meetings to provide advice, offer challenges, and help drive the pilot forward. During the initial management meeting, the focus was on assessing the schools' strengths and weaknesses and completing the CAS profiling toolkit.

After the review, each school identified three priority areas for development. Following this, RESSP and TVS delivered a staff training session to ensure all staff within each school understood the importance of physical activity and its health benefits, the impact it has on children's well-being, how a lack of it can lead to long-term health conditions and its positive impact on academic performance. Staff were also given the opportunity to review what they were already doing and consider what they could do to improve the physical activity levels of their children.

To effectively change a system, everyone must be involved, but leadership from the management team is essential. Historically, PE, school sports, and physical activity have been primarily directed by the PE subject leader. However, following the training,

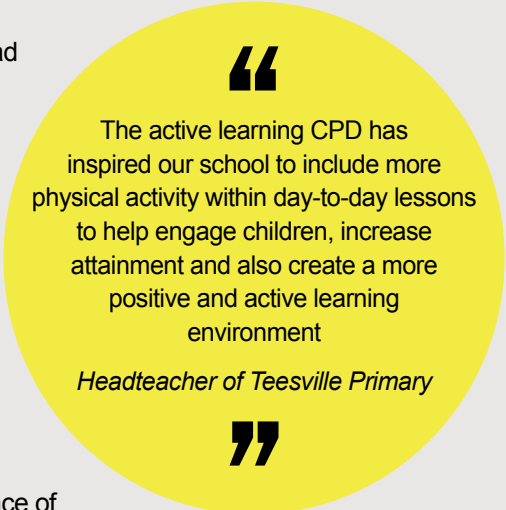
there was evidence that each management committee was taking the lead and implementing whole-system changes to create a more active environment for children and young people.

During initial conversations, school staff had expressed the belief that most of their children were active for 60 minutes a day. However, following issuing MOKI bands, an analysis of the data revealed that this perception was inaccurate and that children were, on average, only active for 13 minutes daily. It also showed that no children achieved 30 minutes per day. An analysis of a one-hour PE lesson showed only 19 minutes of MVPA. The data served as a wake-up call for staff and senior leaders and reinforced the importance of CAS. Additionally, the Moki bands helped educate the children, and the data motivated them to be more active through friendly competition within classes, year groups, across the school, and among friends. Schools could also measure activity levels before and after implementing new interventions to assess their effectiveness.

Children have different competence, confidence, and motivation levels regarding physical literacy. Engaging children and young people in the co-design of activities helps to engage them and gives them a sense of ownership. To reinforce this ethos, a Dragon's Den-style event was launched. Each school was asked to educate a group of children on the benefits of physical activity and ask them to design what would make their school more active. Each school was allocated a £5,000 budget for this project.

The children consulted within their school before formulating their ideas. Once they had their proposal, they pitched their ideas to the YGT, RESSP, and TVS dragons at Teesside University. All six schools were successful in their pitches, and funding from YGT was released to each one.

The funding has been used to buy equipment and technology that support more activity in school. One example is the implementation of Amazon Alexa, which is fitted with alarms and installed in each classroom. When the alarm sounds, the class has a physical activity break. Schools have reported that playtimes are more active, and children come back into class more focused and ready to learn.



*Headteacher of Teesville Primary*

To reflect the progress schools are making within the system, RESSP introduced ripple effect mapping to demonstrate the changes each one has made; these include:

- Staff training on the benefits of physical activity.
- More active play and lunchtimes.
- Active bursts training and implementation.
- Applying for Opening Schools Facilities funding (DfE) to create more physical activity opportunities outside of curriculum time but on the school site.
- Active lessons.
- Active travel schemes and training.
- Active corridors.
- Development of outdoor spaces.
- Policy changes on PE kit.
- Policy changes on active lessons.

CAS helped identify the interconnecting components of a whole-school adaptive subsystem and exposed the complexity required to create system change. The initial six pilot schools recognised that systemic change takes time. With continued support from RESSP and TVS, they have remained committed and continue identifying and prioritising development areas.

Claire Tennyson, Partnership Manager & Executive Director at RESSP, said, “Working with only six schools allowed us to test and learn the initial CAS framework and gather insight from schools. This insight has been invaluable in helping us contextualise the model for our place.”

“As a result, we have designed a simpler approach, which was met with enthusiastic support from all the headteachers involved.”

“Class activity data continues to be tracked through the Moki bands, and research has been conducted to understand the children’s perception of physical activity to ensure they are enjoying it and are motivated to be active.”

“Additionally, we are surveying staff to gauge perceptions about how much value the school places on physical activity and their confidence in implementing it.”

“Teachers are telling us that children are happier and more engaged when they are physically active. Easterside primary school highlighted that low-level misbehaving, which had been an ongoing problem, stopped the day every child was active for at least 20 minutes”, added Claire.

The original CAS online tool was very comprehensive, but the feedback received was

that a simpler model was needed. Schools are short on time, so we knew we needed to make it easier for them to do the right thing. Creating a new self-review tool that is simple and easier to use was well-received by the schools. In addition to the self-review tool, we have also developed a guidance tool. This simpler approach allows schools to take more of a lead in the work and be clearer about how and where it requires external support from partners.

As part of the programme, schools completed a self-review on the whole framework. They then selected three priority areas to develop in their first year of the programme. Across all schools in the first two years, the priority areas included:

**Policy:** Monitoring and evaluation (4 schools); School improvement plan (2 schools).

**Stakeholders:** Parents (9 schools); Teachers & school staff (8 schools); Wider stakeholders (4 schools).

**School environment:** Outdoor space (11 schools); Classroom environment (2 schools); Hall timetable (2 schools); Corridors (1 school); Moveable resources (1 school).

**Opportunities:** Non-PE Curriculum lessons (6 schools); Active travel (2 schools); PE (2 schools).

Once a school has completed an area of development they were encouraged to select another area of development. At the end of their first year in the programme on average schools made 3.1 areas of improvement.

The insight and learning from CAS has also influenced Active Families, a programme aimed at understanding how families can be supported to be active outside of school and how schools can change their engagement methods with parents. It builds on the early insight that many parents didn’t see a role in enabling their children to be active and considered this the school’s responsibility. A Creating Active Families Officer has been recruited to support the work.

Some the schools have produced videos demonstrating the impact of the work. Here are three examples.



**Example 1**



**Example 2**



**Example 3**