



**Australian Government**

**Australian Sports Commission**

## **Australian Sports Commission Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into the National Education Evidence Base**

The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) fully supports the establishment of an evidence base to improve educational outcomes. We support the position that recognises the importance of the physical, cognitive, social and emotional domains of whole-child development to successfully equip young Australians for active participation in an increasingly complex global economy. However, evidence clearly suggests that child development within the physical domain has significantly decreased in recent years and we need to act now in order to make a difference. Measuring and monitoring physical capability at a national level will provide great insight into the current capabilities of our children and identify where we may need to act before it is too late.

By measuring physical capabilities as part of the national education evidence base we will be able to draw upon wide-ranging data that will not only contribute to improved educational outcomes, but will support children to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.

The evidence to support the ASC's view is extensive. Research shows that:

- Physical education and sport (PES) has the potential to make significant contributions to development in the other learning domains.<sup>1</sup>
- PES have the potential to make distinctive contributions to the development of FMS and physical competence.<sup>1</sup>
- PES can support the development of social skills and behaviours, self-esteem as well as academic and cognitive development.<sup>1</sup>
- There is a positive relationship between literacy and numeracy scores and cardio-respiratory fitness, where schools with fitter children achieve better literacy and numeracy scores.<sup>2,3</sup>
- Exercise may prove to be a simple, yet, important, method of enhancing those aspects of children's mental functioning central to cognitive development.<sup>4</sup>
- Quality PE, and the consequent effects on physical activity and fitness, are strongly associated with improved cognitive performance, academic success, and lasting health benefits.<sup>5</sup>

Despite a range of key education documents such as the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, the National Education Agreement and the Early Years Learning Framework reflecting a focus on the physical, cognitive, social and emotional aspects of development, the physical element is rarely measured or monitored.

Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia highlights that a holistic approach to teaching and learning pays attention to their cognitive, physical, personal, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.<sup>6</sup> As a key domain in Early Years education and a core subject in the Australian Curriculum, in the form of Health and Physical Education (HPE), physical development is identified as a key component of a child's education. However, the ASC would argue that in practice physical capability is not currently valued, or measured consistently.

Limited measures of physical development are included in the Australian Early Development Census.<sup>7</sup> There is also no continuation of this data collection beyond the Early Years.

Despite a focus on children's physical development within the HPE curriculum, there is an absence of measuring tools relating to its implementation. Evidence clearly demonstrates that objectives regarding acquisition of fundamental movement skills and other movement competencies are not being met. In addition, research has found a marked decline in children's general fitness and skillfulness.<sup>8,9</sup> Due to this, it is essential to ensure that progress is being made and appropriate actions are taken to ensure the best outcomes for children. In the same way literate and numerate individuals have the tools to contribute to society through work, physically capable individuals have the tools to live healthy, productive lives and contribute fully to society.

To date, data collection on physical capabilities has been limited. The ASC is currently leading a large scale national population tracking survey, AusPlay that will report on adult and children's sport and physical recreation participation. From late 2015, AusPlay will become the single-source data currency for government that not only tracks Australian sport participation behaviours, but also informs investment, policy and sport delivery. This survey relies on self-report data and therefore is unable to provide an objective measure of physical capabilities.

In addition, the ASC is building an Australian Physical Literacy Definition and Standard to better inform future decisions on whole child development that

integrates changes across physical, affective, cognitive and social capabilities. With a cross-sector national approach, we are seeking to embed Physical literacy as a core component of a child's development and education that will help individuals lead healthy and fulfilling lives through purposeful activity and movement.

The ASC suggests that data sampling (rather than census data) as an effective snapshot of development to help identify current progress and areas for improvement of physical capabilities. This would enable the capturing of valuable insights while at the same time assist in keeping costs to a minimum. In addition, by undertaking this type of data collection a number of sectors including education, sport and health, as well as community members including schools, teachers and parents, will be able to make informed decisions that will support the development of Australian children in line with stated educational outcomes.

As part of the ASC's Participation Game Plan, *Play.Sport.Australia*, one of our key priority action areas is the focus on younger Australians participating in sport. By participating, young people will develop skills and good habits that underpin lifelong physical fitness. Research tells us that young people who play or have played sport on a regular basis are more likely to lead a more active lifestyle as adults, which we know is important to our health and wellbeing.

Similarly, the Australian Health and Physical Education Curriculum emphasises the importance of the 'acquisition of movement skills and concepts to enable students to participate in a range of physical activities – confidently, competently and creatively'. For that reason, the ASC is committed to working with the education sector to build opportunities for all Australian children to participate in quality and consistent sport experiences in the school environment.

The ASC is currently taking a leadership role in supporting a focus on physical literacy for the betterment of all young Australians. Physical literacy is an approach that advocates for whole child development and considers the interrelatedness of the physical, affective, cognitive and social learning capacities. It is our belief, that with this focus and in partnership across the education, health and sport sectors, we can support better education outcomes, improved health and wellbeing and the next generation of Australians realising the broader benefits to sports participation.

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