

# How are schools using PESS to improve behaviour and attitudes to learning?

The stories here show just some of the ways that schools involved in the PESS investigation have used PESS to improve behaviour and attitudes to learning. For more examples, visit QCA's PESS website at [www.qca.org.uk/pess](http://www.qca.org.uk/pess).

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# The PESS (‘Pest’) Club

**The school:** Abbey Park Middle School, which caters for pupils aged 9 to 12 in a small Worcestershire town

**The objective:** To improve the attitudes to learning, behaviour and attainment across the curriculum of a group of year 6 pupils

## The starting point

The school targeted 18 year 6 pupils (from a year group of around 80) for this project. Fifteen were chosen because they had problems concentrating, low self-esteem, learning difficulties, and social and emotional problems. Particular issues included ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), hearing difficulties and obsessive compulsive disorders. The remaining three pupils were identified as positive role models who had excellent attitudes to learning and high levels of involvement in school life.

The school wanted to improve the attitudes to learning of pupils in the first group by getting them involved in out-of-hours activities, in particular structured physical activity. Almost 70% of the pupils already took part in extracurricular clubs and activities, and the school was keen to see if this involvement could have a greater impact on their overall performance in school.

## Action

Staff set up the PESS Club – a series of after-school activities that quickly became affectionately known as the ‘Pest Club’ (to the delight of the targeted participants!). To give a whole-school feel to the project, the club offered a 50/50 split of sporting and other activities, including:

- Tri-golf (with the help of an outside coach), which culminated in an inter-school Tri-golf tournament
- a skipping workshop
- a dance mat club
- athletics (led by an outside coach)
- a Rubbish Fashion show
- keyboard sessions
- arts and craft sessions, including card making, découpage and glass painting
- cookery sessions.

There was no choice of activities – the targeted pupils were invited to bring along their PE kit and join in what was on offer. Groups and pairings were chosen to ensure that all of the pupils interacted with others, rather than staying in their own friendship groups.

As well as taking part in activities, PESS Club participants were given new responsibilities around the school, including serving in the tuck shop, acting as librarians, helping with the school’s play leader scheme, ordering new playground equipment and helping to organise the dance mat club.

## Impact

Most of the targeted pupils came on in leaps and bounds. Their overwhelmingly positive comments on the experience contrast starkly with their scepticism – and even hostility – at the start of the project. Teachers reported a dramatic improvement in their cooperative skills and noted that they think more about others rather than putting themselves first. Two of the pupils signed up to become play leaders and three have asked to become peer mentors. One pupil with an obsessive compulsive disorder has less of an issue with eating with other pupils and has even joined a community golf club having tried Tri-golf.

Attendance levels for the PESS Club stood at 98%, clearly reflecting the pupils’ commitment to the project. All of the group attended at least one club session each week and over 80% attended between two and six a week. This enthusiasm had a knock-on effect on school attendance, with 87.5% of the targeted pupils either maintaining or improving their attendance at school compared to figures for 2004/5.



Before the project, staff identified expected levels of attainment for the pupils in English, maths and science by looking at their previous performance, behavioural sheets, individual education plan (IEP) and individual behaviour plan (IBP) targets, and involvement in clubs and extracurricular activities. Against these expectations, the pupils made the following progress.

	<b>English</b>	<b>Maths</b>	<b>Science</b>
Less progress than expected (below two-thirds of a level)	25%	18.75%	18.75%
Expected progress (two-thirds of a level)	37.5%	37.5%	37.5%
More progress than expected (over two-thirds of a level)	37.5%	43.75%	43.75%

# Tackling boys' behaviour

**The school:** Deepdale Infant School in inner-city Preston, which has approximately 300 pupils aged 3 to 8

**The objective:** To improve year 2 boys' behaviour by introducing new physical activities at lunchtimes

## The starting point

The school identified a group of year 2 boys who misbehaved in the playground and realised that all had experienced major difficulties or traumas in their lives. It decided to try to tackle their behavioural problems by introducing new physical activities that were specifically designed to meet their needs.

## Action

The headteacher organised structured lunchtime tasks lasting 10 minutes, three times a week. These tasks were skill based rather than games orientated, for example spinning a hula hoop, bouncing, and jump and reach. To measure their success, the head carried out a skills test with the target group and a control group of pupils.

On Tuesday and Thursday lunchtimes, the boys were swapped from the Zoneparc red area (the football cage) to the blue area. The school trained play leaders and welfare staff on the boys' thinking and encouraged them to provide activities that would interest and stimulate the boys. As a result, they worked much more effectively with the boys on the playground and a new mutual respect developed.

The school also invited Preston North End Football Club to come and work on football skills with the pupils. Watching footballers demonstrating skills such as skipping and ball bouncing encouraged the boys to take part in activities that they had previously seen as for girls. Preston North End also led an after-school football club for pupils, which 24 pupils paid to attend.

The school let the target group of boys have 10 minutes' socialisation time at the end of each lunchtime, during which they sat quietly, calmed themselves down, and discussed any issues with the headteacher.

## Impact

This was the best year in the playground in the 13 years that the headteacher had worked at the school. There was no longer the need for a behaviour book in school: any negative incidents were caused by exuberance rather than bad behaviour. Pupils were much less likely to apportion blame and incidents were quickly forgotten about. The aggression that is often seen among year 2 pupils at the end of the summer term did not emerge.

Play leaders and welfare staff became much more proactive and provided activities for the year 2 boys when they were not in the football cage. As a result, there were far fewer incidents of negative behaviour. Although the boys still needed an adult to support their activities for the first few minutes of lunchtime, they quickly relaxed and played calmly.

The boys started to enjoy a wide range of activities, not just football. Taking their lead from the footballers who visited the school, they became more interested in activities like skipping. Having to use the blue zone contributed to improved levels of skill and coordination among the boys and they showed a significant improvement in the headteacher's skill tests, outperforming the control group.

# The impact of playground activities

**The school:** Fair Furlong Primary School in Bristol, which has approximately 340 pupils aged 3 to 11

**The objective:** To improve pupils' behaviour in the playground and, as a result, their attitudes to learning

## The starting point

The school was keen to develop the activities on offer in the playground during breaks and at lunchtimes. It hoped that this would have a positive impact on pupils' behaviour, attitudes to learning and, in some cases, attendance.

## Action

As a Zoneparc school, Fair Furlong audited pupils' needs and then established areas for a range of different pupil activities in the playground, including:

- areas for quiet activities, with good-quality seating and board games
- a fenced ballpark for fast-flowing mini-sports
- areas for more general activity, such as basketball shooting, kingball, catch up and 'piggy in the middle'.

The school also invested in good-quality PE equipment exclusively for use at playtimes and lunchtimes, including a dance stage with music where pupils could develop their own dance routines. Once a week, year 10 pupils from the nearby secondary school came and provided dance guidance and leadership.

Four learning support assistants (LSAs) took on the role of play leader at lunchtimes. School meal supervisory assistants (SMSAs) and LSAs were given a day's training on how to use the Zoneparc equipment and ideas for activities. They started to meet regularly to discuss and disseminate effective practice, including strategies for managing difficult pupil behaviour, and creating systems to reward good behaviour and encourage involvement.

## Impact

Providing a good learning environment in the playground by organising it into different activity areas enabled pupils to feel safe and encouraged them to play freely in adequate space and focus on what they were doing. As a result, there were significant improvements in their attitudes and behaviour. A small group of pupils who were disaffected and negative towards both their peers and the school environment developed greater self-esteem. They were happy to describe how the new playground activities affected their lives in a positive, productive way.

Incidents of anti-social behaviour that led to pupils being taken off the playground fell. The number of anti-social incidents logged fell by two-thirds. At the same time, the number of pupils involved in purposeful physical activity increased significantly. The range of activities available to pupils became much broader and met a wider variety of needs: football no longer dominated the playground.

SMSAs were under less stress and described their work as more fulfilling and rewarding. As a result, the school had a waiting list of people wanting to be SMSAs.

Attendance rates improved significantly, particularly among more vulnerable pupils.

Teachers reported that the climate for learning in the classroom improved and pupils approached tasks with more confidence and concentration. Their enhanced ability to work cooperatively and purposefully with each other generated more on-task time, while minimising distraction.

# Better games skills: better behaviour

**The school:** Hadrian School, a primary school in Newcastle-upon-Tyne that caters for 130 pupils with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties

**The objective:** To improve year 4 and 5 pupils' behaviour and develop their games skills

## The starting point

Playtimes are often difficult to staff and organise in a special school due to the vulnerability of the pupils and the potential for inappropriate behaviour to escalate in a less structured setting. Hadrian School decided to tackle this by providing more opportunities for pupils to be physically active at playtimes.

## Action

The school decided to focus on games skills acquisition as, in many respects, this underpins its PE curriculum. It helps to promote teamwork, cooperative skills, listening skills, physical dexterity, concentration and appropriate behaviour. It is also the area in which Hadrian's pupils have most success.

The school looked closely at providing the best setting to enhance physical activity for year 4 and 5 pupils. It rearranged break and lunchtime provision so that the group had access to an internal quadrangle where they could choose to play with a range of games equipment. On Fridays the pupils had a break from games and played in the adventure playground.

The games equipment on offer was linked to core PE games lessons to consolidate teaching and learning. Equipment was changed each week, which helped to sustain pupils' interest and broadened their opportunities to acquire skills. However, it was made clear to staff supervising the year 4 and 5 pupils that this was their playtime and that they should be encouraged, but not coerced, into playing with the equipment. The staff had the opportunity to work alongside teaching colleagues, modelling games activities and taking pointers for behaviour management and group organisation.

## Impact

There was an overall improvement in pupils' behaviour during breaks and at lunchtimes and they responded well to the new structure and direction they received. In the past staff tended to be more passive at playtimes and gave the pupils space to express their needs and energy, often inappropriately. Now this energy is directed in a more productive fashion through games-related skills that are also fun.

With time to practise games on a daily basis, the pupils' skills improved: the tried and tested maxim 'little and often' is certainly true for pupils at Hadrian. Their confidence and self-esteem grew as they felt more successful. Staff began to have higher expectations of pupils, particularly in games activities.

Interestingly, there was also a notable improvement in the pupils' handwriting skills – possibly a consequence of their improved gross motor skills.

# Investing in lunchtime at secondary level

**The school:** Hailsham Community College, a comprehensive and specialist sports college in East Sussex with over 1,400 pupils aged 11 to 18

**The objective:** To improve pupils' behaviour at lunchtime and in afternoon lessons

## The starting point

The school recognised that pupils had little opportunity to take part in physical activities at lunchtimes and felt that this was causing issues with behaviour during the lunch break and in afternoon lessons. In particular, it recognised that some pupils showed lack of respect for rooms, personal property and other pupils inside the school building during lunchtimes.

## Action

The school installed six basketball rings for pupils to use at break and lunchtimes. It opened the gym so that Junior Sports Leader Award pupils could coordinate a lunchtime activities programme and run sessions. It also opened up the all-weather pitch for pupils to use, supervised by PE staff. Over time, these measures were supplemented by a range of clubs and supervised activities, such as table tennis, dance and a booster trampoline class for GCSE pupils. Two members of staff who were not in the PE department supervised an area of the school with basketball courts.

As the lunch break is fairly short, pupils did not have to wear kit and were allowed to put on trainers to take part in the activities. Pupils signed out equipment at the start of lunchtime and returned it at the end of the break, with the person who signed out the equipment responsible for its safe return.

The school brought in a rule to stop pupils being indoors during lunchtime unless they were involved in a specific activity supervised or run by a teacher. Any teacher who ran or supervised an activity was paid to do so from the lunchtime supervisory budget. The school also reorganised where pupils ate lunch so that those with packed lunches could eat them in an area away from the dining hall. The dining-hall area was redesigned to make it more suitable for those taking dinners.

## Impact

As a result of the new facilities and activities on offer, more pupils took part in physical activity at lunchtimes. Behaviour improved and there was very little negative behaviour at lunchtimes. Rooms were left tidy and ready for afternoon lessons, displays and equipment were no longer damaged and litter was reduced. Different year groups played games together and interacted more. Pupils settled to work more quickly after doing physical activity and afternoon lessons became much more purposeful, with fewer incidents of disruption or poor behaviour.

Pupils' activity levels rose. About 200 boys took part in football on areas set aside on the Astroturf each day in the winter. Twenty to 30 girls played netball on another area of the Astroturf. In the summer, much of the Astroturf area was used for tennis. Twenty-five pupils each day collected passes at break and attended the table-tennis club (there are only four tables so no space for more). The dance club attracted about 30 pupils each day. The basketball area was always full of pupils practising and organising their own games. In total, about a third of the whole school was involved in PE-related activities.

# Inspiring boys through dance

**The school:** Looe Community School, a comprehensive school involved in the PESS investigation as part of the Cornwall LEA Strategic Partnership

**The objective:** To improve the attitudes to learning of a group of disaffected year 8 boys

## The starting point

The school identified a group of disaffected year 8 boys who had the ability to change opinions and attitudes in their peer group (known as 'cultural architects' by sports psychologists). The aim was to encourage young minds full of potential to choose a positive direction.

## Action

The project took place over six weeks and involved the boys taking part in a dance project using new technology alongside innovative, cutting-edge performance elements. They worked with two film-makers who usually film documentaries for Channel 4, a local VJ (visual jockey), two dancers (one male and one female) and a visual artist. All the staff involved met regularly, shared in planning sessions and gave each other honest feedback as the project progressed.

A massive square screen was erected with football benches on either side where the boys sat between performing. The film-makers filmed the boys talking about their dreams for the future, mixing images of their heroes with images from their own lives. This film formed the basis for the performance and provided a backdrop for the dance. For example, when asked which animal he would like to be, one boy conjured up the image of a bird. Inspired by this, the boys created dance sequences about flying and its associations with freedom, aspirations and imagination.

All the staff involved took care to listen to the boys and give them ownership of the work. Many of the pupils saw for the first time that by working hard together, you can achieve incredible results that simply aren't possible on your own. The only male PE teacher in the school was pivotal in driving the boys to run faster and push harder.

At the end of the project, the boys staged performances for local feeder primary schools, parents and their peers. Even selling tickets proved a new experience. When asked to sell tickets, most of the boys said they couldn't, or

didn't want to. However, after their PE teacher suggested that they could spend the income on an activity of their own choice, the boys sold the lot in a day.

## Impact

The boys developed a sense that they belonged to something worthwhile – some of them for the first time. The group forged a strong identity, their communication skills improved and they worked together brilliantly as a team.

One of the factors that made a big difference to the success of this project was listening to pupils' views. The boys took ownership of the work and, as a result, showed exceptional commitment to, and enthusiasm for, the project. This had a knock-on effect on their attendance and attitudes to learning across the curriculum. On project days, the boys involved achieved 99% attendance – a reflection of their commitment to the work. Teachers commented informally on the fact that some of the pupils had a better attitude to school as a result of the project and started to concentrate better in class.

The work was based on aspirations and it challenged the pupils to 'aspire' to great things. The boys' self-esteem soared as they reached inside themselves to achieve new levels of confidence. The final performances gave them an opportunity to gain recognition for their dance and they revelled in the success. The school reinforced this by promoting and celebrating their achievements (each boy was presented with a laminated programme in the end-of-year school achievement assembly).

Working with experts from outside school gave the boys role models, raised the status of the project and gave teachers new insight that had an impact across the PE curriculum. Similarly, using new technology inspired the boys and increased the value of the work in their eyes.

At the end of the project, three boys took up GCSE Dance; one continued to work with primary schools; and one carried on working with the professional company.

# Improving year 9 pupils' motivation

**The school:** Southfields Community College, a mixed comprehensive and specialist sports college in London with 1,310 pupils aged 11 to 18

**The objective:** To improve disaffected year 9 pupils' motivation, behaviour and leadership skills

## The starting point

The school identified 12 year 9 boys with a history of poor behaviour and low motivation. It decided to try to tackle these issues by giving them responsibility for managing out-of-hours activities.

## Action

The school ran a two-day conference for the pupils. Twenty-four came in total – 12 boys from Southfields and 6 boys and 6 girls from Whitefield School (a partner school). On the first day the pupils took part in a series of workshops on leadership skills, team building and Sport Education using a modified version of the Sport Education model. They also spent time talking through what they should be doing and what they wanted to do. The day concluded with a commitment to leading activities for the lower years at break times.

Day two was spent planning and working out how to manage the project. The boys from Southfields decided to plan a six-week inter-form caged football tournament for years 7 and 9. Four five-a-side games were played each day – two in each of the half-hour breaks. Year 7 pupils played on Mondays and year 9 on Wednesdays.

The year 9 leaders organised and refereed the games, wearing kit designed for PESS activity leaders. They got the tutor groups involved and spoke to the year groups in assemblies. Over 65% of each year group volunteered to be involved. The PESS pupils arranged two pools into a quarter final, semi-final and final.

Attendance at the matches was really high – those who weren't playing came along to watch. In fact, the tournaments were so successful that other year groups started showing interest. As a result, the year 9 pupils went on to run a tournament for year 8, started one for year 10 (which lasted until their mock exams) and facilitated year 11 games.

## Impact

The school tested the boys' levels of motivation and self-esteem both before and after the leadership project, using the Harter self-esteem inventory. This showed that over the course of the project there was a 100% improvement in their attitudes and confidence.

Teachers were asked to rate the pupils' behaviour and attitudes using the Likert scale:

- 53% reported an improvement in behaviour
- 52% reported an improvement in attitude
- 44% reported an improvement in punctuality
- 44% reported an improvement in attainment
- 40% reported an improvement in working with others.

Conversely:

- 18% reported that behaviour had worsened
- 15% reported that attitudes had worsened
- 11% reported that punctuality had worsened
- 12% reported that attainment had decreased
- 8% reported that working with others had worsened.

General comments from teachers included:

- 'I've noticed improvements in his work and attitude.'
- 'He appears a lot calmer.'
- 'He's less aggressive and able to manage his work and relationships with improved maturity.'