
PLAYING FOR SUCCESS

AN EVALUATION OF THE FOURTH YEAR

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Playing for Success is a national initiative, established by the DfES in partnership with the FA Premier League, the Nationwide League and their clubs, and LEAs. It aims to contribute to raising educational standards, especially in urban areas, by setting up Study Support Centres in professional football clubs and other sports venues. Centres are managed by experienced teachers. They use the medium and environment of sport to support work in literacy, numeracy and ICT. With a focus on addressing the needs of underachieving young people, mainly in Years 6 to 9, the initiative places a strong emphasis on improving pupils' attitudes and motivation to learn.

Key Findings

- The evaluation demonstrates that *Playing for Success* is continuing to make a real impact on the pupils who attend
- *Playing for Success* has reached its target group of underachieving young people
- The 58 Study Support Centres took over 18500 pupils from 1103 schools during 2001-2
- On average, the young people who participated made significant progress in basic skills. This was particularly evident in numeracy and ICT
- At least 88 per cent of pupils considered the Centre to be 'fun', 'interesting' and 'a good idea for me'
- Despite sessions being held after school, most pupils attended for 80 per cent or more of the course
- Parents had very positive views about their children's participation in *Playing for Success*. All responding parents said they were pleased/very pleased that their child had taken part
- Teachers rated the Centres' organisation highly. All responding schools wanted another opportunity to take part.

The initiative has contributed to improved achievement

- Pupils made substantial and significant progress in numeracy. On average, primary pupils improved their numeracy scores by about 17 months and secondary pupils by about 24 months.
- Gains in numeracy brought the performance of these under-achieving young people much closer to the level expected for their age-group, especially at KS2.
- Performance in reading comprehension improved during the pupils' time at the Centres, although the progress of primary pupils did not quite reach statistical significance when compared with last year's control group. Secondary pupils' reading comprehension scores improved significantly, by the equivalent of about eight months.
- Pupils' ICT skills improved significantly during their time at the Centres. Their ability to operate a computer, carry out word processing tasks, use e-mail and navigate the Internet improved markedly.
- Pupils' attitudes showed evidence of significant improvement in several respects. Compared with the control group, the changes of greatest educational significance were evident in pupils' independent study skills (for both key stages) and self-image (KS2 pupils only).
- Teachers and parents noticed particular improvements in pupils' self-confidence and ICT skills.

Playing for Success has reached its target group of underachieving pupils

- The initial numeracy and reading comprehension scores of participating pupils were well below the level expected for their age.
- Sixteen per cent of pupils were eligible for free school meals.

- Just over half (54 per cent) of the pupils attending the Centres were boys. A quarter of pupils were from ethnic minority backgrounds, including Pakistani, Indian, Black Caribbean and Black African groups.
- The initiative benefited pupils, regardless of gender, deprivation, ethnicity or their fluency in English. However, there was some evidence that pupils with special needs did not make as much progress as others in self-confidence and basic skills.

What contributed to the Centres' success?

Despite the fact that the initiative has expanded rapidly, the findings are very consistent over the four years of evaluation studies. They demonstrate that the Centres have achieved a great deal. Gains in numeracy are particularly impressive, given the relatively short periods of time for which pupils attend (most pupils attended for less than 20 hours this year).

The football/sports club setting proved attractive to pupils, and was a strong element in motivating pupils to become involved in *Playing for Success*. They felt privileged to be selected, rather than singled out as in need of extra help.

Once at the Centres, pupils responded positively to many aspects of the initiative, especially using computers and the Internet. They enjoyed the work, felt they had made progress and were grateful for the help they received. They also benefited from the opportunity to meet people and make new friends.

Attending an educational setting other than school gave underachieving youngsters the opportunity to make a 'fresh start'. Student mentors were available to provide advice and support, and the high ratio of staff to pupils enabled pupils to get immediate help and to make progress in their learning.

The Centres provided some of the key elements in supporting independent learning. Centres used a target-setting process, whereby pupils identified their areas of difficulty and were given appropriate tasks. Centre staff and mentors encouraged pupils to become more self-reliant and persistent in their learning. Pupils received feedback on their progress. There were opportunities for pupils to make choices and to develop independent study skills. All these elements contributed to pupils' progress and sense of achievement.

About the evaluation

This evaluation was carried out for the DfES by a team of researchers based at the National Foundation for Educational Research. All 58 Centres returned information about their aims and operation. The team gathered pupil outcome data from 12 Centres (a mixture of new and more established Centres) during the Spring term, 2002.

One thousand one hundred and thirty two pupils, 351 parents and 91 teachers took part in the evaluation this year. The views of pupils, parents and schools were gathered by means of questionnaires. Pupils' attitudes were captured at the beginning and end of their time at the Centre. ICT skills were measured by a self-report questionnaire. Nationally standardised tests of numeracy and reading comprehension, specially designed for the evaluation, were used to assess pupils' progress. For each measure, the progress of pupils attending *Playing for Success* was compared with that of last year's control group (a group of similar pupils who did not attend). The research used statistical techniques to assess whether the pupils attending *Playing for Success* had significantly out-performed the control group and to discover whether key characteristics were related to performance and progress.

Although *Playing for Success* began as a football initiative, it has recently been extended to include other sports. Nine of the 12 Centres included in this year's outcome evaluation were associated with football clubs.

Additional Information

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