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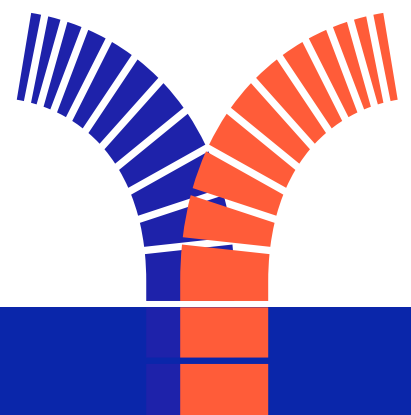
Creating a Movement Culture within Schools – *Summerhill Academy*

At a glance

Whole-School Shift: Over eight years, Summerhill Academy transformed PE from a stand-alone subject into a whole-school movement culture grounded in the 'Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds' philosophy.

Practical, Inclusive Changes: Initiatives such as an active uniform, daily movement breaks, inclusive PE lessons and playground zones have embedded movement into everyday routines and improved engagement for all pupils.

Sustained, Pupil-Centred Growth: Progress has been gradual and responsive shaped by pupil voice, clear values and small, sustained changes that continue to evolve and influence school culture.



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Context and starting point

Summerhill Academy is a two-form entry junior school for pupils in Years 3 to 6, with around 240 children on roll. When I first became PE Lead eight years ago, PE felt like a separate entity – disconnected from the wider curriculum.

Over time, we began to embed a culture of PE, health and physical activity throughout the school. It became an integral part of everyday life.

Our guiding principle has always been 'Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds'. We believe that if we can help children fall in love with movement at this stage of their lives, they will carry that mindset with them into adulthood. That's why we set out to strengthen the movement culture at Summerhill.



Approach to creating a movement culture

Over time, we began identifying opportunities to improve children's physical activity experiences:

- Upskilled teachers to improve PE lessons
- Designed a curriculum rooted in physical literacy rather than sporting prowess
- Introduced more movement into classroom lessons
- Reduced teacher talk in PE, maximising active learning time
- Brought in an active uniform so pupils could move freely throughout the day
- Scheduled a daily movement break for every class
- Created playground zones to boost lunchtime activity
- Launched a wide range of initiatives focused on fostering a love of movement.

These changes evolved organically over the past five to eight years, with the most recent addition, the playground zones, introduced this academic year. Next year, we plan to roll out Moki activity trackers to run class-based movement competitions and further encourage physical activity. Everything has been guided by our core belief: that physical activity boosts wellbeing, concentration and health and that it should be embedded throughout the school day.

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What it looks and feels like now

Physical activity no longer feels like a separate subject – it's part of our whole-school ethos.

Playground Zones: Introduced this year and well received. Using Moki trackers, we measured activity levels before and after implementation – and saw a clear rise in physical activity at lunchtime.

Active Uniform: Now fully embedded. It has reduced wasted time in PE, enabled children to be active at any time and helped them feel more comfortable and focused in class. It's also affordable and practical – no extra kits or expensive shoes required.

Inclusive PE: Lessons are designed to keep all children engaged and moving. We work with Bristol Sport Foundation, whose values around physical literacy and inclusive teaching mirror our own. Sports are taught through transferable skills, giving pupils the confidence to try anything.

Children feel comfortable, confident and fully involved in lessons. No one is left standing around.

Our PE curriculum is now something staff, pupils and the wider community are proud of – and it continues to grow.



Challenges and what you learned

One of our biggest shifts, the introduction of an active uniform required time, consultation and patience. We asked for views from pupils, staff, parents and governors and phased in the change gradually over a couple of years. Affordability and accessibility were key, so we made sure the uniform consisted of items easily available in supermarkets. Some parents were initially confused, still sending children in with separate PE kits. But gentle reminders and a consistent message helped smooth this out.

The benefits have far outweighed any challenges:

- More affordable than traditional uniform
- Comfortable and practical for learning and play
- Supports spontaneous movement and active learning
- Keeps children focused and ready to move – all day.

There are no cons! It's cheaper, smarter and let kids be kids – active and engaged.

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Advice for others

Start small. Focus on one thing at a time and embed it before moving on.

Expect obstacles. This has been an eight year journey – with plenty of twists along the way (COVID being one of them).

Keep evolving. There's no finish line. We're already looking to build stronger community links and help children stay active at home too.

Listen to the children. They're the most important voices in the room – if you involve them in shaping your offer, the impact will always be greater.

Don't fear setbacks. If something doesn't go to plan, rethink it and try again.

Talk to the children. Find out what they want and give them a voice in shaping their experience.



Final thoughts

Creating a movement culture at Summerhill Academy has been a slow, thoughtful process rooted in the belief that physical activity supports both physical and mental wellbeing.

By embedding movement into every part of school life – from active uniforms to inclusive PE lessons and playground innovations – we've seen a real shift in how children view and value being active.

This isn't a finished project. It's an evolving commitment to helping children love movement, feel included and carry those positive habits into life beyond school.

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