

Why primary sport is important to us

You don't have to be a big school to have big sporting ambitions.

As a small school with only 114 pupils, Whitchurch Primary School in Reading, Berkshire, could be excused for believing that achieving success on a grand scale may be difficult.

But Whitchurch have managed to overcome their shortage of numbers by consistently achieving success year on year.

Over the last seven years, they have won forty tournaments across five different sports as PE co-ordinator Gavin Jones explains.

Why is sport in general so important in the life of a primary school?

At Whitchurch, we believe sport plays a vital part in children's development at this age. As well as the obvious health benefits, through sport, children learn so many skills - self-confidence, enthusiasm, teamwork, how to deal with success and failure, appreciating their own and others strengths and weaknesses, determination and

cooperation. Skills which they will use in every aspect of their life as they grow.

How important is competitive sport at the school?

Competitive sport is an essential aspect of our sports provision. To support this, we hold a weekly house sport competition which allows all pupils in the school the opportunity to not only practise the skills they have learned in PE lessons but to also earn points for their house teams. This runs alongside our packed inter-school sports programme where last academic year we competed in no fewer than fifty different sports events - ranging from local friendly matches to district and regional competitions.

In what ways has sports provision changed and improved at the school over



the years?

Over the last seven years, our sports provision has dramatically increased. In the 2004/5 academic year, Whitchurch provided only three opportunities a year for pupils to compete in sport against other schools, through three local football tournaments. Last year 94% of our pupils represented the school in competitive sport against another school, through netball, tag rugby, swimming, cricket, football, gymnastics, multi-skills, tennis or athletics. This has been achieved thanks to the support of all stakeholders in the school. Staff and governors see the benefits sport has for our pupils and support the ever increasing provision we offer. Parents welcome and much appreciate the many opportunities given and support the school by helping with many aspects from helping with transport to running after school sports clubs.

What are your biggest achievements in recent years?

It is in football we have achieved the most success and we are particularly proud of the

consistency of performance throughout the school in this sport. We have won tournaments throughout all age groups over a number of years and our U11s team has scored more than 350 goals in the last four seasons. We also played tag rugby at Twickenham, representing London Irish at the EDF Energy Cup final, in front of 60,000 people. We also represented South Oxfordshire in netball at the Oxfordshire Youth Games and our U11 girls reached the south east regional finals of the ASDA Kwik cricket tournament. Last academic year we won ten different competitions across five different sports. Our achievements are made even more remarkable when you consider that in the majority of events we compete in we are often the smallest school there and are competing against schools two, three, four even five times our size.

What are your sports facilities like at the school?

Being a small school, space is at a premium. Our gymnasium doubles up as a lunch and assembly hall. But thanks to the support and fundraising of our parent body and parents

association, we were able to install an astro turf sports pitch in August 2008. This facility has been crucial in our ability to provide pupils with a year round sports programme, as our previous sports pitch was practically unusable in the winter months. The new sports pitch has not only allowed us to run in school sports but also allowed us to increase our after school sports programme, as well as allowing the children copious space at playtimes to enjoy sport and play games. Our facilities have also been enhanced recently as we were fortunate enough to be awarded a grant through the BP Schools Link Awards for which we received £15,800. This has allowed us to purchase the latest gymnastics equipment and vastly improve our indoor PE provision, as well as purchase equipment and training for six other Olympic sports. This grant was awarded in no small part thanks to the work of our school council who took on numerous roles in the project including meeting with sports equipment suppliers and

presenting the project to parents at the school's AGM.

What sort of sports programmes do you run? How do you fund any extracurricular sports activities or projects?

As well as our weekly two hours high quality PE, pupils are also able to enjoy sport through our house sports programme and through our after school activities of football, judo and netball. This after-school provision is achieved through a mixture of fee-paying clubs from outside sports agencies and through parent-led clubs. We also offer a pupil run before school dance/wake up activity four days a week.

What difference does decent sports provision make to the children?

Providing children with a good



provision of sport allows them to not only learn all the life skills life has to offer but also feel proud in achieving success away from the classroom. Seeing the child who struggles to achieve success academically standing so proudly in front of the school, showing the medal or certificate they have gained through sport, brings a smile to the face of one and all. It also fosters a love for sport and allows children to go and access opportunities which would have otherwise not been possible. Two of our former pupils have earned much sort-after scholarships at Bradfield College through their ability in sport and others have gone on to be selected for Reading FC's academy teams.

What's the secret of your success?

We believe that success is cumulative. By allowing children to experience competing from an early age and giving them lots of opportunities to develop their skills through quality PE lessons, inter-house games and external matches, a belief that they can be winners is achieved. Once a child has seen the pride and joy shown by their peers in

achieving in PE, it makes them strive on to try harder and emulate that success themselves. We also ensure we celebrate everyone's achievements, ensuring that we recognise the important lessons that can be learnt from taking part in, and enjoying sporting activities.

How are the partnership cuts impacting on sport provision at the school? What's the most frustrating thing about primary school sport?

The biggest and most frustrating impact the cuts have had on schools is with the withdrawal of supply money. Up until last year, schools in our partnership were given a budget for supply cover funding, allowing staff in our partnership to receive numerous training opportunities throughout the year and to cover for staff members who attend different sporting events. Our staff structure allows us some flexibility, so we can still ensure we get involved in a wide range of activities, but other schools within the area are finding this much harder without the funding support.

