

Reader survey backs more sport in Europe's schools

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In an informal survey conducted by this website in November, we asked people what they thought about the amount of sport in school. It came in response to a report on school exercise by Hungarian MEP Pál Schmitt which called for there to be at least 3 sessions of physical exercise every week. Latest figures show that obesity in children is rising. All our readers who responded backed Pál Schmitt's call for 3 sessions and agreed that time spent on exercise in school is currently insufficient.

Angelika, an Italian mother of 3 who lives in South Tyrol in Italy, agrees that "sport is very important for the overall development". Over in Spain, Irene regrets that although "some years ago we played in the street, now children are losing some values such as competition spirit and team play, and thus present individualistic attitudes".

Reduction in physical education a worry

Jesús, a Director of the University of Granada PE (Physical Education) department, backs the Schmitt report saying "three PE lessons per week would be an important step".

The ever-decreasing amount of time devoted to the sport is a worry for Sonia, another PE in Spain. She told us that in her region there are only "two 50 minute lessons per week" and, under a new law "15-16 years old teenagers will reduce their physical activities to only one lesson of 50 min per week".

In the Netherlands Jan says that "in primary schools it was agreed that there would be PE 5 times per week, but so far 2 times is the reality". For Lefteris from Greece the issue is a moral one "what right do we limit our children to 2 hours of PE per week?" he asks.

Remi, a French student who is studying to be a French PE teacher, told us that the subject had been neglected at a political level since 1945.

Matthijs from Holland attributes the lack of physical activity to "the new technologies and tools, which enable us to see the world from our chair". Although 78 years old, he confesses that if he had to write a normal letter rather than an e-mail, he "would use his bike to get to the mailbox, which is 1.5 km away".

Kids bored by PE?

For many of those who replied the way that PE is taught at school way part of the problem.

Eva fears that, in Greece, "the intervention of the PE teacher is limited to 10-15 min of warming up, without further guidance" so "many pupils are too bored to do sports".

According to José Mário in Portugal "resistance within and outside the system are still enormous, and they do not allow a change of behaviour, procedures and organisation methods in schools".

Social benefits of sports stressed

Rosa in Spain thinks that "most people forget the role of PE in improving mental balance and contributing to the personality formation. The human body should be used as an educative tool because we express our feelings through it". Alex in Greece thinks that PE helps pupils "develop a positive attitude towards life".

Finally, Paz in Spain stresses the relaxing aspects of sport: "when we practice sports, we release endorphins, which produce a pleasant sensation, and it is easier for us to relax and rest".

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