

## Sports participation

Low impact for moderate cost based on limited evidence.



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Sport participation is engaging in sports as a means to increase educational engagement and attainment. This might be through organised after school activities or as an organised programme by a local sporting club or association. Sometimes sporting activity is used to encourage young people to engage in additional learning activities, such as football training at a local football club combined with study skills, ICT, literacy or mathematics lessons.

### How effective is it?

The overall impact of sports participation on academic achievement tends to be low (less than one additional month's progress), though there is recent evidence from the UK that sports and learning participation can have a more dramatic effect on, for example, mathematics learning as assessed by standardised tests when combined with a structured numeracy programme (with one study showing an impact of up to 10 months' additional progress). In this circumstance the 'participation' acted as an enticement to undertake additional instruction.

The variability in effects suggests that the quality of the programme and the emphasis on or connection with academic learning may make more difference than the specific type of approach or activities involved.

### How secure is the evidence?

There have been a number of reviews linking the benefits of participation in sport with academic benefits. There is, however, considerable variation in impact, including some studies which show negative effects.

In England, a 2010 systematic review for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport explored the impact of sport on learning, but did not find any high quality studies conducted in the UK.

### What are the costs?

Cost estimates are hard to identify in terms of costs of participation in specific activities (such as a football coaching club, linked with after school study), but are estimated here at up to about £400 per year excluding clothing and equipment. These costs vary according to equipment and venue. Costs are therefore estimated as moderate.

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### What should I consider?

*Before you implement this strategy in your learning environment, consider the following:*

1. Being involved in extra-curricular sporting activities may increase attendance and retention.
2. Participation in sports does not straightforwardly transfer to academic learning.
3. Planned extra-curricular activities which include short, regular and structured teaching in literacy and mathematics (either tutoring or group teaching) as part of a sports programme, such as an after school club or summer school, are much more likely to offer academic benefits.
4. If you are considering sports participation as an approach to improve attendance, engagement and attainment, have you considered how you will evaluate the impact?