



The Irish Primary Physical Association (IPPEA) welcomes the report delivered by Senator Eamonn Coghlan on Wednesday 23rd November 2011 which highlighted that effective health awareness and physical activity programmes are essential for the overall well-being of children. Indeed our association was founded almost 10 years ago as a result of primary teachers' individual and collective concerns regarding quality PE and physical activity provision for children. However, while the association concurs with Senator Coghlan's overall aim to encourage a more concerted government effort to address childrens' learning, participation and understanding of fitness for life, the concept of 'physical fitness' is one which must be clearly separated from 'Physical Education (PE)'.

Physical fitness is a term which is primarily concerned with (a) muscular strength and endurance (b) cardiovascular endurance (c) flexibility and (d) body composition. While the association acknowledges how important these components are for all people, including young children, to reduce curriculum PE in primary schools to focus on these aspects alone would be detrimental. By narrowing childrens' experience to suit a 'fitness' agenda, we would be doing a great disservice to the other key skills which can be developed through quality PE programmes aligned with the curriculum: enhanced communication skills, leadership qualities, independent and team work, improved social skills, emotional well-being. Senator Coghlan's short –term goal of 15 minutes of physical fitness every day is reminiscent of a drill approach which, as research indicates, could be counterproductive in encouraging life-long habits and attitudes towards physical activity. Furthermore, the suggestion that fitness levels should be 'tested' in primary school may cause disaffection among children and run contrary to Senator Coghlan's ultimate goal: to encourage children to be physically active to recommended levels now, and into the future.

The association supports a debate on PE and physical activity for primary children and is in favour of ensuring that quality PE classes are taught and assessed regularly by teachers in primary schools, across the range of activity areas and that the Department of Education and Skills supports this through ongoing professional development of teachers. We recognise that PE lessons alone cannot, and should not, become the panacea for all physical activity and health concerns among children. Teachers, schools and parents must also commit to promoting physical opportunities every day as a community.