IRISH PRIMARY PHYSICAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION (IPPEA)
GUIDANCE STATEMENT ON PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS, DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic the IPPEA, based on Retuning to school: Curriculum guidance for primary school leaders and teachers (July 2020) and the European Physical Education Association Position Statement on Physical Education in Schools, During The Covid-19 Pandemic (June 2020), offer the following guidance statement to support members and those responsible for delivering quality Physical Education in Irish primary schools. The IPPEA recommends that school principals, Boards of Management, and teachers actively assure quality Physical Education (UNESCO Charter, 2015) during the Covid-19 crisis, despite the challenges it poses for the subject.

The IPPEA recommend that the following six principles be adopted:
1. Physical Education lessons and time allocated to Physical Education be maintained and protected in conjunction with the national health guidelines and curriculum allocation time.
2. Physical Education facilities, both indoors and outdoors, be reserved for the compulsory Physical Education lessons and physical activity during break times.
3. Physical Education lessons will offer children broad and balanced quality learning experiences during and after the Covid-19 situation to support pupils’ wellbeing at this difficult time.
4. Physical Education is taught by qualified primary teachers in an inclusive and safe setting. The class teacher knows the child and is critical in providing progressive opportunities to develop and apply the skills.
5. Any digital or online Physical Education used to supplement face to face lessons should have a strong emphasis on learning.
6. Teachers are provided with safe practice guidelines regarding sanitisation for children, spaces, and equipment during Physical Education lessons.

Specific Physical Education (PE) guidelines outlined in the Return to School Primary School Curriculum Guidance (Department of Education and Skills, July 2020; p.17-18).

Physical Education supports the development of skills and attributes such as physical movement and development, communication, self-esteem and confidence, all of which are particularly important as pupils return to school. Pupils will have had varying opportunities for movement and physical activity over the past months. As the new school year gets underway, movement and activity through timetabled PE lessons, along with activity throughout the day, will contribute positively to pupils’ wellbeing. The use of ‘pods’, the need for physical distancing, the cleaning and organisation of equipment, and the individual school environment will shape the PE learning experiences in the new school year.

Key messages for the teaching and learning of PE in 2020/21 (DES, July 2020):
• Pupils’ physical education is a central part of their wellbeing: it should form a significant component of timetabled programmes upon returning to school.
• Emphasise strands such as athletics or outdoor and adventure activities with particular focus on the strand units of running, jumping, throwing, and orienteering. ‘Games’ may also provide suitable learning experiences.
• Choose learning experiences where pupils can work individually or in small groups (for example, in their pods) with minimal equipment.
• Promote physical activity and movement of a non-contact nature. Opportunities for both indoor and outdoor activity should be exploited during break-times, transitions, play, PE lessons, and across curricular areas.
• During PE lessons, continue to ensure all pupils engage in aerobic activities as well as skill development, with an emphasis on fundamental movement skills.
• Many aspects of the six strands can be taught, reinforced and assessed by using online resources such as Move Well Move Often (PDST) and the Active School Flag resources. The PDST Beyond the Classroom materials build on the Move Well, Move Often physical literacy resources. New materials were released each week during the school closure period in both Irish and English. The Beyond the Classroom programme includes 92 video clips (46 in each language) and 30 Activity Packs (15 in each language), which are all available to access on https://www.scoilnet.ie/pdst/physlit/beyond/
• Actively encourage pupils to be creative, to cooperate with others, to create and modify games, to solve problems, make decisions, engage in peer and self-assessment, and to reflect as part of the planned physical education programme.

Please see overleaf, some practical suggestions from the IPPEA for your Physical Education lessons across the 6 strands of the curriculum.
Assess indoor and outdoor spaces available and evaluate in terms of physical distancing requirements. As per DES guidelines

EQUIPMENT

TEACHING SPACE

OUTDOOR AND ADVENTURE ACTIVITIES

• Individual or 2m paired orienteering around the school field to find controls or pictures
• Scavenger hunt with non-shared items (blade of grass, leaf, sharp stone, etc.
• Pin some controls/photos/images on other classrooms windows, and children can write down what is seen
• Biking, skating, or scooting in marked-out areas (on their own bikes or scooters they could bring from home, and park 2m apart. Make sure all children have non-shared helmets and protective gear)

GAMES

Non-contact games, individual or space pair/group skills practice are most suitable
• Playground games without equipment/minimal equipment (wall ball, hopscotch)
• Sending, receiving, travelling using personal piece of equipment (ball, hurling, unihoc stick)

AQUATICS

Available on: https://watersafety.ie/primary-school/

Ø Creative dance: This area lends itself almost fully to physical distancing rules as it involves individual movement without equipment
• Mirroring and matching/leading and following movements in pairs with suitable distancing
• Using songs and poems as stimuli for dances
• Using a dice to call travel actions, pathways and directions of movement
• Focus on developing dances and performances

Folk dance: Some dance elements of Irish and other folk dance could be taught and practised (1,2,3(side step) and some formations could take place without holding of hands/linking.

ATHLETICS

Walking: physically distanced follow the leader
‘funny walks’
Running: free running/running for stamina/distance/changing speeds
Sprints and relays out and back to a line (no baton passing)
Skipping: without ropes or with rope where individual rope used
Jumping: chalked activities that involve leaping, jumping or hopping on the ground
• Follow the chalk patterns
• Draw the numbers 1-20, leap from 1-20
• Hopscotch
• Leaping the ‘stream’—a marked out distance that they try to ‘jump’

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GYMNASTICS

• Task cards (attached to wall) for individual balances
• Travelling on feet with distance between pupils
• Where sanitised mats are available try simple rolls/sequences, keeping children in allocated pods
• Mirroring and matching in pairs with 2m distancing
• Consider using a dice to call balances on larger and small body parts, travel actions, pathways and directions of movement

AQUATICS

Using class based resource ‘PAWS’ (Primary Aquatic Water Safety)
Available on: https://watersafety.ie/primary-school/

Ø Consult with national guidelines regarding travel to swimming pools

REFERENCES

• Shape America School Re-entry Considerations K-12 Physical Education, Health Education, and Physical Activity https://www.shapeamerica.org/advocacy/Reentry/K-12_School_Re-entry_Considerations.aspx

Sample Strand Based Activities

Activities taking place in PE lessons should be non-contact/minimal contact. Individual activities would be best across all strands. Some ideas include:

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TEACHING SPACE

• Identify which pieces of equipment can be easily and effectively sanitised. Cloth or porous materials are more difficult to properly sanitise than vinyl or plastic materials.
• Minimal shared equipment (ideally one piece per child for the lesson(s).
• Could children bring in something from home which is ‘theirs,’ e.g. ball/rope?
• Clean/disinfect equipment before and after use/as per school policy.
• Avoid leaving equipment where it is accessible.

EQUIPMENT

• Children and teacher wash/sanitise hands before and after lesson.
• All children use individual water bottles which are clearly labelled with the child’s name.
• General hand and cough/sneezing hygiene applies in PE.
• Ensure clear system for use of bathroom during PE lessons.