

A school-based intervention ('Girls Active') to increase physical activity levels among 11- to 14-year-old girls: cluster RCT

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Plain English summary

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Plain English summary

Young people are not as active as they should be, and girls are less active than boys at all ages. The Girls Active programme has been created by the Youth Sport Trust to help schools to get girls to become more active. In this programme, teachers are given training, resources and support to make changes in their school and to identify and work with a group of female pupils to act as leaders and to encourage girls to be more active. To test whether or not Girls Active increases activity levels and is good value for money, we recruited 20 secondary schools (1752 girls aged 11–14 years) within the Midlands region of the UK; 10 schools used the Girls Active programme and 10 did not – these were used as a comparison group. We measured activity levels of girls using a wrist monitor and asked girls to complete questions about their feelings towards activity, sport and physical education and about the support they received from teachers, family and friends for taking part in physical activity. We also collected information on the amount of time and money that each school spent on Girls Active, which was used to calculate the cost of delivering the programme as part of the economic analysis. We spoke to the teachers and pupils to find out what they thought about Girls Active. There was a small difference in physical activity levels in the short term (7 months), but not in the longer term (14 months). The teachers enjoyed Girls Active but did not change as much as they wanted to in their school because of their workload; however, they felt that what they had done was making a positive difference. The peer leaders also enjoyed being involved and learned new skills. Teachers suggested that they needed more support straight after their training, guidance on timelines and help from other staff at their school in delivering Girls Active.

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