

Investigation: Schools accused of fudging sport premium funding

John Dickens

Fri 5th Oct 2018, 7.00



The government has been urged to plug the holes in its sport premium cash scheme, with teachers claiming schools are fudging their funding.

The call comes as the education secretary Damian Hinds announced this week a new “school sport action plan” to get more pupils to play competitive sport.

National sports organisations, including the Premier League, the Football Association, England Netball and the Rugby Football Union, will contribute to the plan. It will be published next spring.

But school sport experts have called on the government to instead concentrate on implementing its current strategies to boost school sport and tackle childhood obesity.

Teachers claim PE and sport premium funding – introduced in 2013 as part of the London 2012 Olympic legacy – is being misused. This year the government

doubled the amount it gives to primary schools each year to £320 million, with schools receiving up to £27,510 each.

Schools must use the ring-fenced cash to make “additional and sustainable” improvements to the quality of PE and sport.

But in comments submitted to the Active Matters website and shared with *Schools Week*, one teacher said the funding was a “Wild West” where “anything goes on and you can spend your money on whatever you want”.

School leaders are expected to publish details online of how the money is spent. Ofsted will check this during inspections.

One teacher told Active Matters: **“My last headteacher went for copying and pasting last summer term’s report from an older year. Totally gobsmacked by her brazenness. However HMI didn’t spot it.”**

Another said the online plan was a **“complete work of fiction on our website. The money has [instead] been used to prop up TA salaries”**.

An analysis of 86 primary schools in the London borough of Croydon, seen by *Schools Week*, found a quarter had no evidence online for how the funding was spent last year.

Four in five of the schools (79 per cent) had yet to provide the completed statutory performance report.

A report by the all-party parliamentary group on a fit and healthy childhood, published earlier this year, said a “lack of rigorous audit has increased the undesirable likelihood of the money being hijacked from its original purpose to ease shortfalls elsewhere in school budgets.

“The intention behind the premium is laudable, but its operation is in urgent need of close scrutiny and comprehensive, widespread evaluation.”

The Department for Education (DfE) has the power to recoup funding – or withhold future payments – should any school be found to have misused the cash.

But a freedom of information request earlier this year revealed the government has not docked funding from any school since 2013.

A spokesperson for the Active Matters website said this was despite findings from the parliamentary group, its members own meetings with MPs over funding misuse, and data evidence submitted to the DfE.

The site was still receiving “worrying feedback” over “extensive ongoing malpractice”.

A PE consultant, who did not want to be named, told Schools Week that misuse of funding was “regrettable, but understandable”, given funding pressures.

But he added that it was “short-sighted to not use the funding as it was designed”.

A government survey found 55.6 per cent of five to ten-year-olds took part in organised sport competitions in school last summer, down from 62.4 per cent in 2016.

An Ofsted spokesperson said it took the misuse of premium funding “seriously”. “If we find that funding is not being used for the right purposes we will make this clear in the school’s report and take it into account in coming to a judgment.”

The DfE said it trusts schools to decide how they spend the money, but added government officials check published details of premium spending through random samples of schools.

<https://schoolsweek.co.uk/investigation-schools-accused-of-fudging-sport-premium-funding/>

Noteworthy Readers’ Comments:

James Marshall

[October 23, 2018 at 9:50 am](#)

Once again physical education is being confused with competitive sport. This is typical of government ministers and they are not experts, so could be forgiven. However, schools should know better. |Unfortunately there has been a dearth of physical educators, so everything is outsourced. Obscene amounts of money are chucked at companies who come in and get kids to walk a mile. National Governing Bodies are interested in accessing kids at younger ages to boost their participation figures which secure yet more funding. The poor children at the mercy of all of this. I haven’t even touched on academies or free schools which input sports at the whim of the pointy elbowed parents who want to watch their children do golf or fencing in primary schools! Physical education is a wonderful thing if done properly. It really makes a difference to young people and can create life long movers. It is a travesty that companies are like sharks feeding in the water and head teachers are abdicating responsibility. Thank goodness I have been able to help the schools that my children attend make informed decisions.

Stuart Cowling

[February 10, 2019 at 11:00 am](#)

This unfortunately is a common problem that my company have been experiencing recently. We are professional sport specialists that specialise in the delivery of high quality PE Teaching in Primary schools.

The funding has been fantastic not only for my company but also for the majority of the schools that we work in as ability levels have improved and the overall numbers of children taking more of an interest in playing sport in general has increased hugely.

However, some schools are saying that they don't have the funding to use us which clearly isn't true. They are deciding to use the sports premium internally to pay TA's or people with little or no experience of teaching PE and therefore the overall standard of teaching declines. A cost cutting exercise basically.

The trouble seems to be that there isn't enough in depth analysis when schools receive an ofsted visit. Our teaching has only been observed once since the funding has been introduced. We encourage ofsted to observe us so they can see how the funding is being used and the impact it is having. For many, it seems that schools are just asked how it's used and how much is spent and the school receive a tick for this in their overall inspection.

I must stress this isn't all schools as some use the premium in fantastic ways and obviously want to see their children develop and progress in PE.

I sincerely hope the funding continues beyond 2020 as its a fantastic scheme. I just hope how it's being utilised is analysed in much greater detail so schools are using this in the most effective way.