

# Fit Kids: Fit for Learning and Fit for Life!

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It is alarming to realise that many health related issues in adults result from a simple lack of exercise; a recent article in Time magazine suggests that, *'physical inactivity has become a global pandemic!'* In Australia, increasing numbers of children under 12 years of age are obese, setting them up for a life time of ill health, limited engagement and low self esteem. Even more alarming is the number of students who do not actively engage in sporting events or teams or access a full Health and Physical Education (HPE) curriculum.

*'...low levels of physical activity are a major risk factor for ill health and mortality from all causes. Children and adults who do not do sufficient physical activity have a greater risk of cardiovascular disease, colon and some cancers, Type 2 Diabetes and osteoporosis.'* (The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare)

## So, what is our school doing about it?

Para Hills School P-7 made the decision in 2012 to appoint a specialised HPE teacher to better address the physical health and wellbeing needs of our students from the start of their schooling. Prior to appointing a specialist teacher, PE was left to individual staff and whole school events were organised by a classroom teacher. The classroom teacher took on South Australian Primary Schools Amateur Sports Association (SAPSASA) sports clinics (focused on years 6/7), as well as sports day duties and found it hard to engage other staff members to assist. PE had a low profile in the school and many students did not access a regular or balanced program of sports, fitness, skill development and games. Health programs tended to be integrated within other units and were non specific.





With a specialised HPE teacher and full support of leadership and staff, our Health & Physical Education program now provides:

- *The ACARA H&PE curriculum where all students receive one lesson of Health and one lesson of PE a week teaching the skills and understandings appropriate to their age and developmental level*
- *Inclusion of our Special Education Unit students in all of our school PE activities and a specialised Gross Motor Skill room for development of our Autistic and Asperger spectrum students*
- *100% participation and success rate in the Premier's 'Be Active' program each year*
- *SAPSASA sports (for all upper primary girls and boys) including Athletics, Cross Country, Soccer, Netball, Football and Tag Rugby*
- *Leadership in the 'Active After School' Government funded Sporting Schools project*
- *Friday Fitness during terms 3 and 4 in which each class engages in a circuit for 30 minutes*
- *A highly successful Wednesday and Friday morning whole school running club*
- *Regular Sports Clinics provided by expert sporting agencies*
- *Hosting Year 4/5 Tackle Rugby carnivals for the past two years with SA Rugby League*
- *An in-school Duathlon series in which we are looking to involve other schools*
- *One of the first schools to introduce 'HotShots' tennis for Primary Schools through Tennis Australia*
- *The first school to introduce 'Cardio Tennis' into Primary Schools through Tennis Australia*
- *Introduction of 'MYGolf' program to the PE Curriculum, funded through Golf SA*
- *Students involved in outside events such as, Weetbix TRYathlon Series, Duathlon SA series and the City to Bay.*

Like most schools, we see a range of parenting abilities and family dynamics for our children. A number of our children arrive at school, often for reasons beyond their control, without breakfast. Our health education program has a strong focus on nutrition and being ready to learn. To complement this we:

- *Run a very successful Breakfast Club, supported by the award winning 'Kickstart for Kids' program*

- *Through our sustainability focus, are developing a whole school garden to reinforce healthy eating and food preparation*
- *Through the commitment and massive hearts of our staff, ensure that all students are set up for the best start each day.*

### **A lot more than chasey....**

At Para Hills School P-7, HPE is about a lot more than games and fitness. We encourage students to develop positive attitudes towards physical activity and lifelong habits of participation. Just like letters and numbers are needed throughout life, physical activity must be embedded from the early years to increase the likelihood of a healthy mind and body in the later years.

We challenge our students to master the Fundamental Movement Skills (throwing, running, catching etc), foster their active engagement rather than participation and assist them to set challenging goals. Our HPE lessons incorporate cross curriculum perspectives including numeracy and literacy.



For example, our HPE word wall in both our gym and health room reinforces physical literacy and we are seeing this used in the student's classroom writing when recounting sporting events etc. Students are encouraged to use new vocabulary when asking questions or giving feedback to others and to add new words to the wall when they arise. This approach supports our Site Improvement Plan goals, where we are increasing our literacy focus, in particular in HPE.

*Pill (2010) states that ‘...focusing teaching around sport literacy, the aspects of learning in, through, and about movement, is designed to improve the core learning experiences of all students in physical education, occurring through valid and effective teaching of sport in physical education.’*

The DECD TfEL Framework provides great support with the planning and pedagogy for the HPE curriculum. Working through the domains of ‘*Create safe conditions for rigorous learning*’, ‘*Develop expert learners*’ and ‘*Personalise and connect learning*’ means that we create learning opportunities with students. Students set goals, take risks, challenge themselves, talk about their learning, provide feedback to others and develop skills across a range of sports and activities for life.

### **Talk the talk then run the walk**

Since we have introduced a specialist Health and PE program, we have observed that through the increased opportunities and explicit focus on healthy habits, physical activity and a variety of sports, our students are now more aware of their fitness and are developing greater confidence to have a go. This in turn has had a positive impact on students' behaviour and mental wellbeing.

The best indication that our students are embracing what they are being taught is in the number of parents who tell me that they are being told by their children about the right foods to eat and more importantly, *WHY!*

Participation and activity rates of students have increased in H&PE lessons and whole school events. More importantly, our students are joining sports clubs other than just soccer and AFL. These skills and abilities all play a part in developing lifelong learning for our students, ensuring them a happy and healthy future.

***‘Set goals... take risks...challenge yourself’***

