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SUBJECTS

This survey was restricted to Secondary Schools in Dublin city and the Greater Dublin Area. Subjects were recruited through the Department of Education's school database. Descriptive research was employed in the form of a questionnaire. This detailed questionnaire was designed to collect information regarding the nature, range, quantity and quality of physical activity opportunities within secondary schools in Dublin.

A total of 186 schools were contacted by means of a written letter that was posted directly to the Principal of the School (Appendix 1). A participant information sheet was also enclosed which outlined the purpose of the study and included questions and answers relating to the survey to provide the schools with additional information (Appendix 2). Letters were addressed to the Principals of the schools and it was requested that the questionnaire be forwarded the school's Physical Activity Co-ordinator or senior physical education teacher for completion. In the absence of the senior PE teacher, it was requested that the Principal complete the questionnaire (Appendix 3). Schools who had not returned their questionnaires by Friday September 29th 2006 were sent a follow up letter, however none of these were returned.

A total of 75 questionnaires were returned however 19 of these were incomplete and could not be used in the study. 8 of these were returned blank whilst the remainder had been completed insufficiently.

The questionnaires were printed double sided on A4 paper however 11 respondents made the error of completing only one side on each page.

In the end a sample of 56 schools was used in the survey. Ethical approval to conduct this study was obtained from the Faculty of Applied Health Science Research and Ethics committee at the University of Chester (Appendix 4).

Due to the large amount of data gathered, only the most relevant findings are selected and presented.

DESIGN

The study design was questionnaire based, whereby all participants involved in the study were required to complete and return an identical questionnaire.(See Appendix 3). The questionnaire was adopted and modified from a recent survey conducted by Sharkey in 2006 on the promotion of physical activity in Dublin Primary schools and a similar study conducted by Sparks in post primary schools in Chester, 2005.

The method of this survey employed descriptive data which obtained a vast amount of information on physical activity promotion within each of the schools. The questionnaire was divided into sections as follows, to gather sufficient data for the purpose of this study:

1. General Information on School (i.e Number of pupils, gender etc)
2. General Information on Physical Education Department
3. The Physical Education Curriculum
4. Extra-curricular Activities promoted within the school
5. Physical Activity facilities within the school.
6. Staff training, Support and Expertise
7. School Policies and Ethos on physical activity.
8. Partnerships and Community links.

Procedure

A letter of introduction outlining the purpose of the research was posted to all Post Primary schools in the Dublin region. Enclosed with the letter was a detailed questionnaire and a prepaid envelope for participants to return their completed questionnaire.

In addition, a participant information sheet to read prior to completing the questionnaire was also included (See Appendix 2). This information sheet included details of the purpose of the study, requirements from the participants, confidentiality and an opportunity for participants to receive an update on the results of the study. Correspondence was directed to the School Principal with a request to forward the information to the appropriate person responsible for the promotion of physical activity within the school. In the event that the school did not have a specific individual assigned for this role, the School Principal was asked to complete the questionnaire.

It was requested in the covering letter that questionnaires be completed and returned by a specified date. Those who did not respond by the specified date received a follow up letter. Questionnaires were coded for tracking purposes to ensure an efficient follow up.

Statistical Analyses

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data using SPSS version 16.0 for Macintosh.