



Early awareness of Fitness Development does matter

Building movement confidence. By **Charlie Blair**



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My years as a Head of PE in the secondary state sector were vibrant, challenging and immensely rewarding. Every day I worked with talented, athletic, and highly energetic teenagers. Yet alongside these confident young performers, there was a growing cohort who had already decided that movement “wasn’t for them”. The familiar refrains “I’m not sporty”, “My family hates exercise”, “running isn’t for me” were being voiced earlier and earlier.

For decades, school PE has leaned heavily towards sport-specific outcomes and short-term success. This has divided children into those who accumulate positive experiences and those who, often very early on, feel left behind. The limited emphasis on high-quality movement and core physical competencies at the primary age has contributed towards pupils arriving at secondary school without the physical literacy needed to access the curriculum confidently. By the time

their secondary PE journey begins, many have already disengaged or stopped believing they belong. This makes it all too easy for negative habits to persist into adulthood, perpetuating a cycle of inactivity, lowered confidence, and limited engagement with movement.

Determined to shift this narrative, I chose to place fitness awareness, and the stigma that often accompanies it, at the heart of a school improvement project. The aim was simple but ambitious: to equip all Key Stage 2 pupils with the awareness, skills and confidence to enjoy movement, both now and throughout their future PE experiences.

By embedding the Gymrun Programme we sought to accurately measure, analyse and meaningfully act on each child’s physical competency data. The wider goal was to nurture a positive, sustainable relationship with fitness, movement, and activity.

“Monitoring fitness sensitively can engage and motivate every child.”



Building a Culture of Movement

Competence is key

A central pillar of the project was the introduction of a whole-school, six-minute starter protocol delivered at the start of every PE and Games lesson. These routines targeted speed/agility, core stability, arm strength, leg power, and endurance, collectively known as the **Gymrun Skills**. Designed collaboratively by Gymrun, staff, and pupils, the starters were crafted to maximise impact with minimal disruption to existing curriculum structures. They became a consistent, progressive opportunity for pupils to practise, refine and take ownership of these core physical competencies.

In parallel, we established a targeted intervention group, the **Gymrun Pride**, developed with pupils, families and colleagues. This group focused specifically on closing physical competency gaps through tailored support, structured challenge, and sustained encouragement. The emphasis was on empowering pupils to recognise and celebrate their own physical fitness progress.

The Gymrun Philosophy

Mike Weeks (Director of Gymrun), powerfully articulates the rationale behind the programme.

PE is uniquely placed to stretch and challenge every child physically, yet its extensive subject breadth can make its impact on every child difficult to evidence. When we distil all of this into its most fundamental elements, we return to basic fitness and physical competence.

What if the PE Curriculum became a more explicit vehicle for developing better movers? We recognise the



value and importance of our subject in the holistic development of children. What if Games remained the arena for character development, teamwork and wider life skills, while the PE Curriculum sharpened its focus on fitness and wellbeing?

At the core of Gymrun is the principle that **assessment precedes improvement**. Its standardised framework enables schools to track physical progression consistently and meaningfully. Crucially, however, the educational value lies in assessment for learning: Data that sparks conversations, highlights personal growth, and motivates children through regular comparisons of “now”, “last time” and “next time”.

Assessment in this context is not about ranking pupils. It is about noticing improvement, building resilience and reframing physical challenge as a journey. Children learn

to push, pull, run, strive, fail and try again. They strengthen their bodies, but also their sense of determination. Every personal best counts.

In this safe, inclusive and trusted environment, monitoring fitness sensitively can **engage and motivate every child**. We can ignore low fitness in childhood and face the consequences later. Or we can carefully address it, celebrate progress, and empower pupils to take ownership of their physical development.

Gymrun weaves together physical fitness assessments, [movement curriculum design](#) and a motivational award badge system to ensure we “measure what we teach”. Its structured combination of data, movement exploration and fitness culture helps every child **move more and move well**, drawing on elements from fitness, gymnastics, athletics and yoga.



“Pupils enjoyed tracking the development of their physical ‘super powers!’”

Impact at Newton Prep

The outcomes of the Gymrun project were both encouraging and significant. Over two terms, pupils’ average physical competency scores rose by **10.37%**, indicating consistent improvement across the cohort. The number of pupils achieving the school’s Key Stage 2 target level (5 Blue) increased by **14.33%**, meaning 70.8% of pupils in Key Stage 2 met or exceeded their year group benchmark target.

The targeted Gymrun Pride intervention group produced particularly impressive results. Pupils who attended regularly recorded attainment improvements between

17.29% and **25.39%**, a remarkable progression over a short period. In contrast, those who were invited but unable to attend improved by just **6.43%**, clearly demonstrating the value and effectiveness of the intervention.

Equally powerful was the voice of the children themselves. Pupil and parent feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Lesson protocols had become so embedded that pupils were confidently leading them. In surveys, **94%** of pupils reported that the Gymrun Skills programme had improved their health and fitness. Perhaps most importantly,

pupils looked forward to Gymrun assessments, reframed as “**challenge weeks**” and enjoyed tracking the development of their physical “**super powers**”.

What Gets Measured, Gets Valued

The success of this project reinforces a simple truth: when we measure something meaningfully, we elevate its importance. By shifting the focus towards physical competency, movement confidence and resilience, we are not simply helping children become better movers; we are giving them the tools to thrive physically, mentally and socially, long beyond their school years.



“Building a Culture of Movement Competence is key.”



Further recommendations:

- Book: Atomic Habits - James Clear
- Website: gymrun.co.uk
- Podcast: Little & Large. Two ex Directors of Sport
- Social media: [@neddbrockmann](https://twitter.com/neddbrockmann)



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