Case for improving the promotion, delivery and evaluation of Early Years Physical Development, Physical Activity, Health and Wellbeing

Summary

1. Currently , in England and the UK there are three separate frameworks (spanning the Departments for Health and Education) that support Early Years Physical Development, Physical Activity, Health and Wellbeing
2. Their contrasting remits have resulted in confusion and inconsistent promotion, delivery and evaluation of Early Years (EY) Physical Development (PD), Physical Activity (PA) Health and Wellbeing
3. Training in this field is inconsistent and urgently requires a mechanism for quality assurance
4. Recommendations to support/improve best practice in EY PD/PA include:
    - Review the PD component of the EYFS, CMO physical activity guidelines and relevant elements of the CIF to ensure alignment of purpose
    - Review the Ofsted inspection requirements for EY PD/PA
    - Create National Quality Guidelines for EY PD/PA
    - Develop quality training opportunities for the EY workforce to ensure their inclusion and effective participation in the PHE 'wider workforce' initiative
    - Designate a PD/PA co ordinator/champion in every EY setting – supported by Healthy Early Years schemes
    - Review the concept of 'School Readiness'
    - Review DfE KS1 PE curriculum to align with the EYFS PD component
    - Create a professional body/organisation to support EY PD/PA professionals
    - Establish an EY PD/PA task force to inform and drive policy/practice in this field

The case

There are three frameworks in use that support Early Years Physical Development (PD) /Physical Activity (PA) /Health and Wellbeing.

1) The Early Years Statutory Framework (2012) designed by the DfE and therefore under the remit of Ofsted - sets out the Learning and Development requirements for EY practice (the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum) – and the Safeguarding and Welfare requirements.

   Within the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) – Physical Development is one of the three 'Prime Areas' of learning. There are two components: Moving and Handling – Health and Self Care.

   Under 'Moving and Handling' – 'Children show good control and co -ordination in large and small movements. They move confidently in a range of ways, safely negotiating space. They handle equipment and tools effectively – including pencils for writing.'

   Under 'Health and Self- Care' – 'Children know the importance for good health of physical exercise and a healthy diet. They talk about ways to keep healthy and safe. They manage their own basic hygiene and personal needs successfully.'

   Under the Safeguarding and Welfare requirements – 'Children learn best when they are healthy, safe and secure. The provider must promote the good health of children attending the setting.'

2) The UK Chief Medical Officers (CMO) Physical Activity Guidelines (2011) for Early Years were designed by the DoH and state the following:

   - Physical activity should be encouraged from birth – particularly through floor-based play and water based activities in safe environments
   - Children of pre-school age who are capable of walking unaided should be physically active for 180 minutes (3 hours) spread throughout the day
   - All under 5's should minimise the amount of time being sedentary (being restrained or sitting' for extended periods of time – except while sleeping

3) Recently (2015) – EY has been included in the Common Inspection Framework (CIF) designed by Ofsted to simplify the inspection process across all age groups.

   - Under 'Personal development, behaviour and welfare' it states that Inspectors will make a judgement on this area by 'evaluating the extent to which the provision is successfully promoting children's : 'Knowledge of how to keep themselves healthy, both emotionally and physically, including through exercise and healthy eating.' The EYFS is well able to respond to this – with PD designated a 'Prime Area.'

PD is also of relevance to the three other areas of the CIF – although there is no clear plan as yet how they may be implemented to better support PD/PA in settings and the wider community.

- Effectiveness of Leadership and Management : this may include the responsibility by management for the setting's approach to PD/PA – how the environment (inside/outside) supports children's development and activity levels. It may also encompass relevant training for staff and liaising with parents/communities to support healthy lifestyles
- Quality of Teaching/Learning/Assessment : whatever approach to PD/PA settings adopt – there should be clear evidence of 'relevant subject knowledge' reflected in a high standard of planning, delivery and assessment that fully supports inclusive practice
- Outcomes for Children and other Learners : the CIF states that children will be evaluated on the extent to which they 'progress well from different starting points and achieve or exceed standards expected for their age.' This is particularly relevant for PD as it underpins and informs all other areas of development – awareness of this is critical if parents/practitioners are to take this field more seriously and that this is reflected in daily PA provision for children

Despite having three supporting mechanisms that ostensibly support young children's physical development/activity – their differing remits has led to a state of confusion and inertia in terms of promoting, delivering and evaluating good practice in this field.

Why?

- The Physical Development component of the EYFS is firmly based on the belief that physical/movement skills underpin and inform all *learning*. They support development across ALL domains (cognitive, social/emotional/spiritual) and not exclusively – the physical
- The CMO guidelines are primarily concerned with physical *activity* for *health* reasons – eg. obesity prevention
- The CIF presents a generalised view that physical activity leads to greater *understanding* of health and self-care – that encouraging personal responsibility leads to enhanced citizenship
- Neither the EYFS nor the CIF even mention the CMO guidelines for physical activity
- Inevitably – this leads to conflicting sets of data : 88% of children gained an 'expected' level of physical development (PHE /2013/14) – yet only 10% experience the recommended 180 mins daily (PHE/2015)
- Ofsted inspectors must make subjective value judgements regarding children's PD/PA : what is '**good** control and co ordination' – what does 'move **confidently**'

mean - what does 'handle equipment **effectively**' look like? On what basis are these judgements made – and is there a sufficient knowledge base for them to be relevant or effective?

How is the EY workforce trained to support PD/PA in practice?

Anecdotal evidence suggests that around 1% of EY practitioners receive specialist training in this field – despite PD being a 'Prime Area' of the EYFS. Only from September 2015 has it become mandatory that all learners following Level 3 training in EY Care and Education complete the module that covers physical development.

There is currently little funding available for practitioner CPD training that is not either mandatory (eg. Safeguarding/1st Aid) or free to access on-line (eg. Prevent).

EY settings end up 'muddling through' – doing just enough to pass their inspection in PD – or (if funds permit) finding outside providers that offer eg. ballet/yoga/tennis/football/music-movement. Rarely is any one person responsible for this provision (unlike literacy/numeracy – even health and safety) and rarely is this monitored, evaluated effectively or 'quality assured' – support networks are challenging to access and tend to be localised. Difficulties are prevalent in sorting cover for staff attending training – also family commitments often prevent attendance at twilight or weekend sessions.

What training options are available? This is not a comprehensive list – but will give an overview.

- Level 1 Diploma (CACHE) – **Caring for Children**. Looks at promoting activities through play – some scope for promoting physical development through physical activity – could be extended – aimed at younger learners
- Level 2 Award (CACHE) – **Introduction to the Early Years**. Includes PD and planning/delivery for PA. This award is increasingly popular as Maths/English GCSE are not required to ensure access – all age groups
- Independent bodies/companies offer specialist training at Level 2 eg. British Heart Foundation 'Early Movers' – 'Fit for Sport – Behaviour management and PA for children under5' – Real PE/Create Development Programme – 'Busy Feet' /STARTWELL programmes (Birmingham Community Nutrition)
- Level 3 Diploma (CACHE) – **Early Years Education and Care**. Theme 1 : Health and Wellbeing: Support healthy lifestyles for children through exercise/Promote the PD of children. All age groups but Maths/English GCSE required
- CACHE also support a range of independent Level 3 PD/PA courses under their 'Endorsed Learning Programme' eg. 'Activematters' Level 3 Certificate in Young Children's Physical Development – open to all learners working at Level 3 in any professional discipline related to young children

- 1st4Sport have recently created a Level 3 certificate in 'Supporting the delivery of PE and school sport' – aimed at EY practitioners
- Level 4 Advanced Practitioner Qualification (CACHE) – Unit 2 – 'Promote health and wellbeing through physical activity and nutrition coordination in EY.' This is aimed at learners who are entering the management field – with an emphasis on self-directed learning and research
- Two post-graduate qualifications are offered by CREC (Centre for Research in Early Childhood) – they may be followed as 'stand-alone' courses – or as part of an MA in Education (EY) – 'Outdoor Play and Learning' and 'Physical Activity in Early Childhood.' One year courses for those with a specific interest in the field
- For SEN/PD/PA practice – TPD Education offer a range of specialist courses at Level 2/3 – mainly aimed at older children on the autistic spectrum – but useful for EY staff with a special interest
- A wide range of training opportunities are also provided by commercial enterprises in specific disciplines eg: Yoga (Yogabugs/Tatty-Bumpkins) , Gymnastics (Tumbletots), Movement –play (Jabadao), Tennis (Teddy's Tennis), Football (Little Kickers)

Recommendations to support/promote best practice in EY/PD/PA

- Review the PD component of the EYFS to reflect the demands of the CMO guidelines and to ensure a focus on gross-motor skills in both indoor and outdoor environments
- Ofsted may then respond by adapting the inspection process to account for *levels* of PA and provision for children indoors/outdoors in settings
- National Quality Guidelines should be created for EY/PD/PA – this will support Ofsted judgements more effectively, help deliver Public Health Outcomes and will give practitioners clear guidance for their practice in PD/PA
- Training should be provided (ideally centrally or locally funded) to support practitioners understanding of the importance of physical skills/play and to build on previous knowledge to design and deliver safe and effective active sessions
- There should be a designated PD/PD co -ordinator/champion responsible in every setting for this area of the EYFS who can liaise with staff/parents/families/communities linked to Healthy Early Years Schemes
- The profession should review the concept of 'School-Readiness' – this may be an effective way of encouraging practitioner understanding of the importance of physical skills to ensuring children's smooth overall development – and encouraging parental support for children's physical play
- DfE should review the requirements of the KS1 curriculum for PE to align with the EYFS PD component. This is a critical time of transition but, currently, there is a worrying disconnect between teaching provision at this stage (much more

structured) and children's level of experience and ability. There needs to be dialogue between relevant bodies to ensure that all children are well prepared for the demands placed on them – both physically and emotionally- and that the behaviours/dispositions toward lifelong engagement with PA are well embedded

- A professional body or organisation should be developed as an 'umbrella' organisation to support EY PD/PA professionals
- Establish an EY PD/PA taskforce to inform and drive policy and practice in this field

References:

Ofsted (2015) *Early Years Inspection Handbook*

Ofsted (2014) *Children's Centre Inspection Handbook*

DfE (2014) *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

DfE (2015) *Keeping Children Safe in Education*

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