

Kids Run Free and Loughborough University

Kids Run Free and researchers from the National Centre for Sport and Exercise Medicine at Loughborough University formed a partnership to evaluate the Marathon Kids programme.

The aims of the evaluation were to inform a strategic approach to the growth and development of Marathon Kids with specific attention being given to how schools can effectively implement the programme and ensure sustained participation.

What difference will it make to schools?

The evaluation has helped to identify how, why, for whom, and in what circumstances Marathon Kids does or doesn't work. In doing so, it has allowed the development of a set of portable principles which schools can use to help plan how they will deliver the Marathon Kids effectively. Furthermore, findings have contributed more generally to our understanding of implementing physical activity programmes within school settings and has been of great interest and relevance to inform national strategies to support quality implementation.

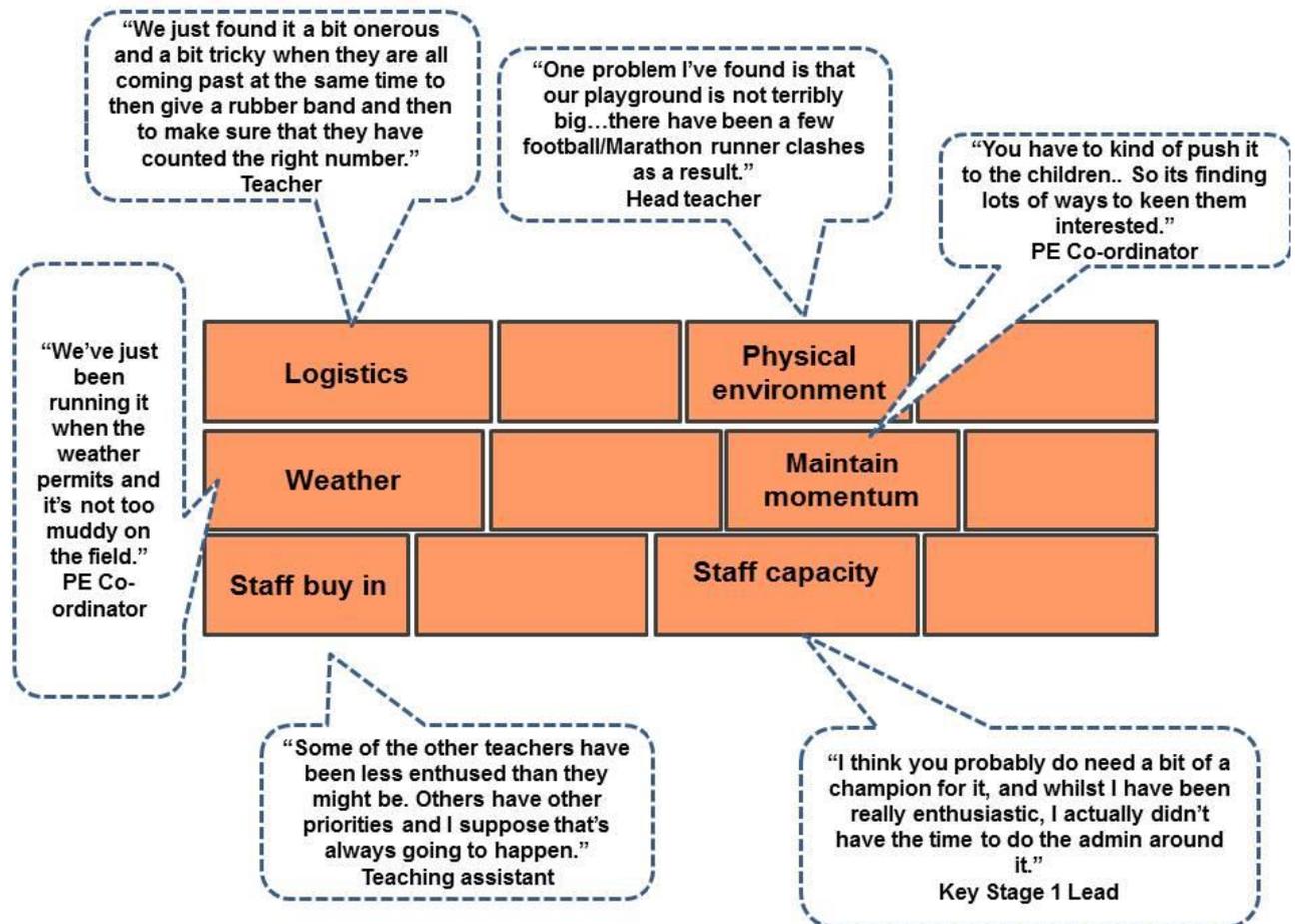
What is being done?

Work began in 2016 to retrospectively review the experiences of teachers and pupils who had participated in the programme since the pilot in 2013. We interviewed 21 members of staff from 20 schools and conducted nine focus groups with 55 pupils aged five to 10 to find out; what challenges teachers faced when delivering Marathon Kids in school, what facilitated their delivery, and the perceived effects of the programme on pupils.

What we found

- There was variability in how Marathon Kids was being implemented across different schools
- Multiple factors were identified as influencing implementation, many of these were felt to act as both facilitators and barriers across the different schools and were also described as being interrelated

Perceived barriers to implementing Marathon Kids



Perceived facilitators of the implementation of Marathon Kids

Programme resources

The tools, resources and support provided by the programme were highly valued by school staff, in particular the ability to monitor and reward pupil's participation which was important for recognising individual effort especially of those who did not traditionally engage in PE.

Ethos of Marathon Kids

Teachers believed that the programme appealed to a broad demographic of pupils due to its inclusive nature and focus on developing a sense of personal best, which allowed pupils choice and control over frequency and duration of participation.

Flexibility of the programme

The diversity of different school contexts is recognised and schools are encouraged to plan according to their individual needs and circumstances. For example, for some schools this meant individual class teachers taking responsibility for their own class' participation and using Marathon Kids during curriculum time as well as lunchtimes.

Use of young leaders

Engaging young leaders/sports ambassadors to assist with the administration of the programme, including the distribution of lap bands and recording and monitoring of data increased schools' capacity to deliver the programme.

Perceived outcomes of Marathon Kids

Pupils felt that they benefited from Marathon Kids in the following ways:

- ✓ Increase in physical activity, both at school and at home
- ✓ Sense of achievement
- ✓ Enjoyment and fun
- ✓ Increased stamina
- ✓ Motivation and confidence to try new activities
- ✓ Social cohesion within the school

Teachers felt that they benefited from Marathon Kids in the following ways:

- ✓ Perception that the school would be seen more favourably by the local community as a result of participating
- ✓ Ability to make use of outdoor space available
- ✓ Provide additional time for activity outside of PE
- ✓ Offer an inclusive activity opportunity by removing many of the barriers to participation
- ✓ Tracking and monitoring pupils' progress and ability to identify and target specific pupils
- ✓ Complimented the school's vision and values

Top Tips to manage a Marathon Kids programme

A number of factors should be taken into consideration relating to the school's readiness to implement. Based on the evaluation findings and feedback received from school staff and pupils, the following practical recommendations are provided below.

Stage of Implementation	Strategies
Preparation and planning of delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a brief consultation with staff, pupils and possibly parents to identify interest in a running programme and any potential barriers and strategies to negate or minimise their impact. • Identify a member of school staff who can fulfil the role of programme Champion within school. The success of this role is more dependent on credibility, influence, willingness and capacity, rather than seniority. An interest in physical activity is desirable but not essential. • Establish the type of support available to help the Champion deliver the programme. For example, the use of young leaders and peer champions can be very effective and help to engage pupils and sustain their participation. • Identify clear, school specific, aims and priorities for the programme including what success means for the school and how the programme could be sustained and embedded into practice. In doing so it is important to also identify any potential unintended outcomes e.g. a compensatory reduction in attendance at after school clubs. • Consider how the programme will interact with current practice and interests within the school e.g. by complementing or reinforcing existing practice and/or driving change.
Early stages of delivery and transfer of the Marathon Kids into day to day practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where possible, secure the tangible support of senior members of staff e.g. by encouraging their participation in the activity itself or visibility in the playground while the programme is underway. This is particularly useful during early delivery but can also be beneficial in sustaining motivation for, and interest in, participation. • Make sure the multiple benefits of participating in the programme are communicated and reinforced to pupils, with a particular focus on the more immediate short-term benefits e.g. fun, opportunity to get some fresh air and

	spend time with friends.
Adaptation and evolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with pupils to review the programme on an ongoing basis to ensure it continues to meet their developmental needs, and adapt and tailor it accordingly. Ensure that any adaptations are communicated clearly to pupils and are applied consistently and monitored in order to limit the amount of unwarranted adaptation. Evaluate the delivery of the programme and what impact it is having e.g. in line with the agreed programme aims for the school. Discuss possible adaptations with other members of staff within the school and the programme organisers/ support team.

Next steps

Evaluation of the implementation of Marathon Kids is ongoing. Selected schools across Leicestershire, which have been delivering Marathon Kids for the first time, have been participating in the research since the beginning of the 2016/17 academic year. By studying the implementation of Marathon Kids in real time over a two year period, it will be possible to evaluate the sustainability of implementation and provide rich data on the translation of school based physical activity programme into practice.