

USING PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND MOVEMENT TO SUPPORT WELLBEING, INCLUSION AND ENRICHMENT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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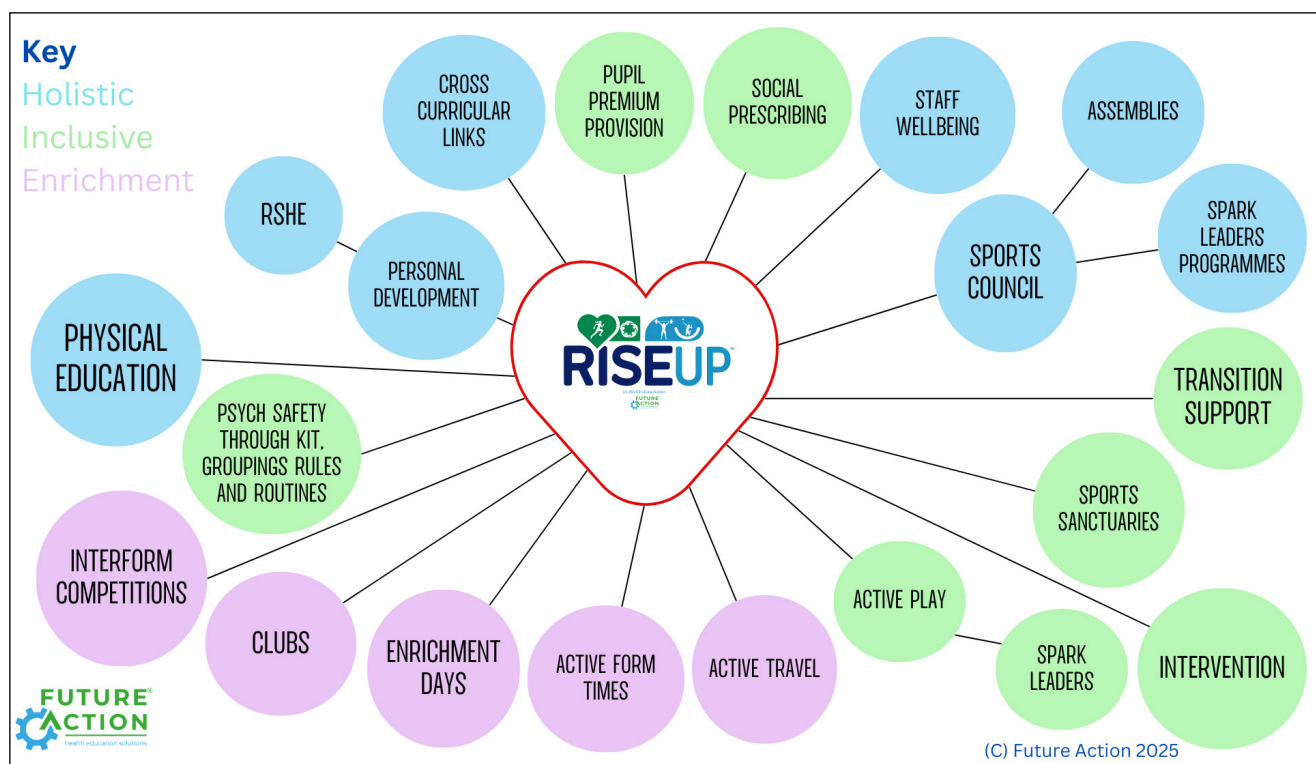
Across primary schools, colleagues are increasingly recognising that children’s readiness to learn is shaped not only by curriculum content but by how safe, connected and regulated children feel as they move through the school day. In the years following the pandemic, many schools have reported heightened anxiety, emotional dysregulation and reduced confidence, alongside ongoing challenges with attendance, behaviour and engagement. These challenges are often felt most acutely by children who have experienced adversity or disruption earlier in life.

Within this context, physical education, physical activity and play are being re-examined. Rather than being viewed solely as curriculum subjects or opportunities for performance and fitness, they are increasingly recognised as powerful spaces for connection, regulation and belonging. When designed

intentionally, movement provides a developmentally appropriate way for children to release stress, build relationships and practise emotional regulation, while also supporting physical literacy and enjoyment of activity.

INTRODUCING THE RISE UP FRAMEWORK

The RISE Up framework emerged from practice rather than theory. It was developed in response to the real-world challenge of supporting children’s wellbeing within schools, at a time when access to external services was limited and pressure on staff was increasing. Rather than offering a single programme or intervention, RISE Up provides a framework to help schools to develop physical education and movement provision that is holistic, inclusive and enrichment led.



Over the past five years, the approach has been developed and refined in partnership with schools, virtual schools, active partnerships, public health teams and multi-academy trusts. What began in one school has since grown into a network of hundreds of schools nationally and internationally, spanning primary, secondary and specialist settings. Across these regional programmes, schools are reporting measurable improvements in teacher perceptions of pupil wellbeing and in the breadth and consistency of whole-school wellbeing provision.

THE RISE UP WELLBEING FORMULA

At the heart of every regional RISE Up programme is a shared wellbeing formula that guides how physical education, movement and relationships are intentionally developed within schools:

- Outstanding relationships +**
- Movement for regulation, belonging and mental wellbeing +**
- Play wrapped in care +**
- Educator agency +**
- Early intervention wellbeing programmes =**
- A transformational wellbeing teacher**

Relationships sit at the top of this formula for a reason. When children feel safe, known and connected to emotionally available adults, everything else becomes possible. In these conditions, movement becomes more than physical activity: it becomes a vehicle for regulation, connection and confidence.



Physical education and movement-rich spaces are deliberately used to strengthen connections between pupils and adults, recognising that children are more likely to engage, regulate and take positive risks in learning when they feel safe and known.

Educator agency is central. Rather than prescribing a one-size-fits-all model, the framework supports staff to adapt ideas to their own context, building on existing strengths and responding to the needs of their pupils. Early intervention wellbeing programmes then provide shared language and practical tools that help children to develop emotional awareness, self-regulation and resilience over time. Together, this formula supports schools to reimagine physical education and movement as integral contributors to wellbeing, inclusion and enrichment – not as add-ons, but as part of everyday school life.

A SHARED SET OF PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE

Although each school featured in this article developed its approach in response to its own context, several shared principles are evident across all three case studies.

First, **relationships come first**. Physical education and movement-rich spaces are deliberately used to strengthen connections between pupils and adults, recognising that children are more likely to engage, regulate and take positive risks in learning when they feel safe and known.

Second, movement is framed as a **tool for regulation**, not simply as exercise or reward. Pupils are supported to notice how different types of activity make them feel and to begin selecting strategies that help them to calm, energise or connect, depending on the situation.

Third, there is a strong emphasis on **inclusion and enrichment**. Activities are designed so that all pupils can participate meaningfully, particularly those who may struggle with traditional physical education formats, unstructured social times or the start of the school day. Enrichment opportunities before, during and after the school day play a key role in creating a sense of belonging.

Finally, **educator agency** is central. Rather than implementing a one-size-fits-all model, staff adapt ideas and strategies to fit their setting, building on existing strengths and responding to the needs of their pupils.

THREE CONTRASTING EXAMPLES FROM PRIMARY PRACTICE

The three case studies that follow illustrate how this framework has been applied in different ways within primary schools.

The first case study, from **St Patrick's Catholic Primary School** in Liverpool, demonstrates a whole-school approach in which physical education and movement are used to develop a shared language around wellbeing, strengthening an already relational school culture.

The second case study, from **Woodland View Junior School** in Norfolk, focuses on transition, showing how physical education and movement can support emotional readiness for secondary school through a combination of universal and targeted provision.

The third case study, from **Greenside Primary School** in Tameside, explores how before-school active play and enrichment opportunities can support belonging, attendance and engagement, particularly for pupils who find the start of the school day challenging.

LOOKING AHEAD

Together, these examples highlight the potential of physical education and movement to support wellbeing, inclusion and enrichment in primary schools when used intentionally and thoughtfully. They also form the first part of a wider series. Future articles will explore how the RISE Up framework has been applied in secondary schools and specialist settings, including alternative provision, where physical education continues to play a critical role in supporting belonging, engagement and life chances.

For readers interested in exploring how similar approaches might be developed within their own context, further information and case studies are available through the RISE Up regional programmes, which support schools to design provision that is sustainable, evidence-informed and responsive to local need.



REFLECTING ON YOUR OWN CONTEXT

The three case studies in this article highlight different ways physical education, movement and enrichment can be used to support wellbeing, inclusion and belonging. As you reflect on your own setting, you may wish to consider:

- How intentionally is physical education currently used to support emotional regulation, belonging and readiness to learn in your school?
- Which pupils might benefit most from more inclusive, movement-rich or enrichment-led opportunities across the school day?
- Where could small, low-cost changes in physical education, active play or enrichment have the greatest impact?

For colleagues who would like to take a first step, the **School Wellbeing Scorecard** offers a quick, practical way to reflect on current provision and identify priority areas for development. The scorecard takes around three minutes to complete and generates a personalised report to support discussion and planning within your school. Find it at <https://bit.ly/FASWS>

For more information, visit <https://www.futureaction.net/> or contact info@futureaction.co.uk

Further examples from secondary schools and specialist settings, including alternative provision, will be shared in a future edition of *Physical Education Matters*. ■

Neil Moggan is the founder of Future Action and the creator of the RISE Up framework. He is a former Director of Sport, Health and RSHE in an inner-city secondary school where he first developed trauma-informed physical education practices.



CASE STUDY 1: ST PATRICK'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL, LIVERPOOL

A whole-school approach to wellbeing through physical education and movement.

CONTEXT

St Patrick's Catholic Primary School is an inner-city primary school in Toxteth, Liverpool, which serves a diverse community. The school has a long-standing commitment to relationships, care and inclusion and is part of the Liverpool Hearts Project, supporting attachment- and trauma-informed practice. While pupil engagement in physical education was already strong, staff identified a need to develop a more explicit, shared approach to mental wellbeing, helping children to understand their emotions and learn practical strategies to regulate themselves throughout the school day.

INTENT

As PE lead Katie O'Callaghan explains, the aim was not to introduce something new, but to build on existing strengths:

"We wanted a whole-school approach to mental wellbeing, building on the positive relationships we already have with our children and families. Our aim was to give children the understanding, vocabulary and strategies to self-regulate and support their mental health."

The focus was, therefore, on equipping children with language and tools they could use independently, particularly through physical education, movement and play.

IMPLEMENTATION: embedding wellbeing through physical education and movement

Physical education became a key vehicle for developing a shared understanding of wellbeing through assemblies, lessons and playtimes. Short movement breaks were embedded across the school day, particularly in Key Stage 1, with staff modelling how and why different activities could support focus, calm or connection. Targeted provision, including an after-school confidence-building club and the introduction of Kindness Cards, strengthened peer relationships, while inclusive playtime activities ensured all pupils could participate meaningfully.

IMPACT

Teacher perceptions of pupil wellbeing, measured using an adapted version of the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS), improved across almost all of the areas that were assessed. The School Wellbeing Scorecard showed a substantial increase in provision, rising from 49 per cent to 88 per cent over a five-month period. This 39 per cent improvement reflected stronger consistency, shared language and alignment between physical education, movement and wider pastoral practice.

REFLECTION AND NEXT STEPS

This case study highlights the importance of intentional movement, emotionally available adults and consistency during periods of transition.

Read the full case study at: [St. Patrick's Catholic Primary School Case Study – A Whole School Approach](#)



CASE STUDY 2: WOODLAND VIEW JUNIOR SCHOOL, NORFOLK

Supporting wellbeing and readiness through transition, movement and relationships.

CONTEXT

Woodland View Junior School, part of the CARE Federation, receives pupils from multiple feeder primary schools. Following the disruption of lockdowns, staff identified increased anxiety and emotional need, particularly for pupils preparing to transition to secondary school.

INTENT

PE lead Sam White explains:

“Our main goal was to make the transition from primary to secondary school smoother for our Year 6 pupils, equipping them with the confidence and resilience they need for this big step.”

IMPLEMENTATION: movement embedded into everyday practice

Movement was integrated into weekly PSHE sessions, supported by reflective use of the Daily Mile and targeted lunchtime provision. One-to-one movement-based conversations, led by the pastoral team, provided additional support for pupils experiencing heightened anxiety.

IMPACT

Teacher-reported WEMWBS data showed a 41.67 per cent improvement in perceived pupil wellbeing, with gains across confidence, emotional vocabulary and self-awareness. The School Wellbeing Scorecard also improved, rising from 82 per cent to 90 per cent, an 8 per cent increase, despite an already high baseline. Staff also reported reduced workload as pupils became more independent in managing their own regulation.

REFLECTION

This case study highlights the importance of intentional movement, emotionally available adults and consistency during periods of transition.

Read the full case study at: [Woodland View Junior School Case Study – Supporting Student Wellbeing Through Transition](#)

CASE STUDY 3: GREENSIDE PRIMARY SCHOOL, TAMESIDE

Building belonging and readiness through active play before the school day.

CONTEXT

Greenside Primary School identified a group of pupils who struggled with morning routines, attendance and confidence. Staff wanted to create a welcoming, inclusive start to the school day through active play and connection.

IMPLEMENTATION

A twice-weekly before-school active play provision combined inclusive movement activities with breakfast and group check-ins. Clear routines balanced nurture and structure, while older pupils acted as role models and *Wellbeing Warriors*, supporting a strong sense of ownership.

IMPACT

Teacher-reported WEMWBS scores showed a 37.5 per cent improvement in perceived pupil wellbeing, with the largest gains in pupils' sense of connection with others. The School Wellbeing Scorecard increased from 49 per cent to 77 per cent, a 28 per cent improvement, suggesting that the impact extended beyond the immediate group and strengthened whole-school culture.

REFLECTION

By prioritising belonging before learning, Greenside created a calmer, more positive start to the school day, benefiting both pupils and staff.

Read the full case study at: [Building Belonging Before the Bell: Greenside's RISE Up Journey](#)