

National child measurement programme

briefing for elected members

Foreword

Every year more than 1 million children are weighed and measured at school as part of the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP). The exercise – one of the biggest programmes of its kind in the world – provides England with a record of just how many children are overweight and obese. Currently, over one in five reception year children (22.4 per cent) and over one in three Year 6 pupils (34.3 per cent) are overweight or obese. But it is more than just a simple data collection exercise. It also provides a valuable opportunity to engage children, schools, parents and other partners in tackling health inequalities. Since councils took on responsibility for the programme in 2013, many have been doing just that – as this report documents clearly.

In Solihull the council has worked hard to engage and target schools in healthy lifestyle programmes, stressing the academic benefits as well as the health ones.

In another area a council has employed a specialist healthy weight school nurse to work with particularly complex cases, providing a bespoke service to families and their children in the process.

There are plenty of other examples too, including councils exploring new technologies and working with a range of external agencies. And we must not forget the underweight too. In Swindon, the public health team works closely with local paediatricians and dieticians to make sure children falling into this category are getting the right support.

It is good practice like this that will make a difference to the health of children today – and shows why local government and NCMP are a perfect fit. We must build now on what has been achieved so far.

Councillor Ian Hudspeth

Chair, Community Wellbeing Board

Councillor Anntoinette Bramble

Chair, Children and Young People Board

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Case Studies

Calderdale Council: using NCMP to run a school 'health day'

For the last four years Calderdale Council has used the day their staff carry out the NCMP weighing and measuring to deliver important healthy lifestyle messages to the whole school community.

The 'health days' are run by the Better Living Calderdale service. They normally start with an interactive assembly and then staff run classroom sessions, while other members of the team carry out the measurements for reception and year six children. There is a menu of 10 different sessions schools can choose from. The topics covered include everything from breakfast and snacking to sleep.

Gaynor Scholefield, Deputy Head of Health Improvement in the public health team, said: "When public health shifted to local government in 2013, we brought together three separately commissioned health improvement services under the same banner. Previously the NCMP, weight management and physical activity services were all delivered by different organisations.

"By forming an integrated health and wellbeing service we realised the potential for doing more with the NCMP. Before 'health days', the NCMP was a routine activity undertaken in schools with little or no interaction other than measuring. We quickly realised the potential for introducing fun food and physical activity sessions.

"The feedback from schools has been excellent. We've found that the children, parents/carers and staff really enjoy the day and it gets them thinking about what food they're eating and how active they are. Some schools have embraced the concept and run 'health weeks'."

But Calderdale is now looking to develop its work further. Alongside the NCMP, the council also carries out a children and young people's lifestyle survey, the Electronic Health

Needs Assessment (eHNA), which is targeted at the last two years of primary school as well as some secondary school year groups.

Lisa Garland, the Schools and Families Manager for the Better Living Calderdale service, said: "Between them, they provide us with a lead into schools and help us to target support accordingly. It got us thinking about what more we could do and in September we started piloting a new offer. We are now targeting more intensive support at about a quarter of our schools aimed at both staff and parents as well as children."

So far this has involved training for staff, including lunchtime supervisors, about how to deliver healthy messages and encourage active play and workshops too for parents who are key to influencing lifetime habits.

Ms Scholefield added: "Our latest NCMP data for 2017/18 is very concerning. Excess weight in four-year-olds is now significantly higher than previous measurement years, with for the first time, one in four (25.3 per cent)¹ rather than around one in five carrying excess weight. We clearly need to do more to reach children earlier and are considering how we might expand this work to early years settings and maternity services.

"We're also looking at how best we can influence eating and physical activity amongst secondary school aged young people. This is truly an iterative process led by a rich source of local data."

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¹ Based on postcode of child.

Camden and Islington: managing demand

The London Boroughs of Islington and Camden run a successful child weight management programme called the Healthy Living Practitioner Service that offers one-to-one support from a nutritionist attached to the school nursing teams.

But, similar to other areas, each year high numbers of children are being identified as overweight and so the councils decided to direct resources towards those that needed them the most.

Over the past year the service has piloted a different offer. Now all children who are overweight, but do not fall into the very overweight category, are firstly referred to a universal service (tier one²) called Families for Life.

It is a group-based scheme for children and their families, which focuses on healthy eating, cooking and increasing physical activity levels and is open to anyone interested in learning more about healthy lifestyles, regardless of weight status. The programmes are hosted in early years' settings, local schools and community venues and run for four to six weeks.

The two boroughs have also launched an Enhanced Healthy Living Practitioner Service that provides additional input from psychologists to offer family and one-to-one therapy. Training and consultation is also provided to other professionals to help with the most complex cases. The pilot is exploring different ways to engage and support children and their families with complex needs.

The Families for Life service and the Healthy Living Practitioner Service are promoted in the letters sent out with the NCMP result and all referrals into the enhanced service are triaged via a new multi-disciplinary team meeting.

Follow-up calls are made by school nurses and the Families for Life team to see if the families want to join an open day to hear about the service on offer or sign up to one of the programmes. Three-quarters of families offered the 'Families for Life' service have taken up the offer.

It is still early days, but already there are signs the changes are having an impact. The 'Families for Life' is proving popular, which in turn is helping the Healthy Living Practitioner Service target more intensive support on the children who need it the most.

And this year the councils are looking to make another change to the way they handle the results of the NCMP. When letters are sent out to parents, the plan is to send trained volunteers and staff to a selection of school gates to make themselves available to parents.

Camden and Islington Public Health Strategist Julie Edgecombe said: "There's a real opportunity here to engage with parents. The school gate is an important part of the school community and when the letters are sent, parents tend to have all sorts of questions. By making some staff available we will be able to answer them and hopefully encourage them to make use of the services and support we have on offer."

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² Different tiers of weight management services cover different activities. Definitions vary locally but usually tier 1 covers universal services offered to the whole community (such as the Daily Mile); tier 2 is community-based services that take a 'lifestyle' approach to helping children with excess weight manage their weight (usually in groups designed to support the whole family); tier 3 covers specialist weight management services, offered to children who have higher degrees of excess weight or excess weight with associated comorbidities, commonly delivered by specialist multidisciplinary teams.

Dorset County Council: a school fund to boost activity and wellbeing

Getting children active is vital for their wider health and wellbeing – as well as reducing obesity rates. But many children can find themselves put off by traditional sports such as football and netball.

Dorset County Council's public health team and local head teacher alliance worked together to launch a project using data from NCMP, aimed at encouraging low impact physical activity in schools that was aimed at improving both physical and emotional health. They successfully applied to the Health and Wellbeing Board for funding and a pot of money has been set aside.

Council Health Programme Adviser Vicky Abbott said: "We want to encourage projects that are sustainable and are as much focused on emotional health as well as physical activity. There are always plenty of opportunities to play netball or football, but to get people active and tackle obesity requires building self-esteem and offering alternatives. So we have asked schools to come up with some different ideas that can be aimed at parents and teachers as well as pupils and are sustainable in the long-term.

"Our requirement is that they also have an element aimed at emotional health. It may be something that helps with exam stress or transition from key stage two to three or simply contributes to creating an environment that promotes good mental health. That could include things to get the Daily Mile off the ground by creating a sensory element to the trail or introducing a yoga class or outdoor gym." The Daily Mile³ encourages nurseries and primary schools to take children for 15 minutes of jogging or running every day.

Local schools were invited to bid for money in September. So far nearly one in five have put in bids with 64 applications made in total. The successful ones are due to be notified at the turn of the year to get the schemes going in early 2019.

Ms Abbott said: "We have had a very positive response and hopefully once we get these projects up-and-running we will see a positive impact on the mental wellbeing of children as well as an improvement in NCMP results."

The work complements another initiative that has been running for a number of years that has seen a local GP seconded to public health for one day a week to promote the Daily Mile. She works closely with school PE and sports coordinators and carries out school visits to get as many as possible taking part.

"Daily Mile is a great initiative. It is a perfect example of a scheme that is inclusive and accessible in that it gets everyone taking part, which is why we are so keen to promote it," added Ms Abbott.

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3 <https://thedailymile.co.uk>

Lambeth Council: the benefits of a healthy weight school nurse

Lambeth Council has been implementing a healthy weight programme to address child obesity – and as part of that a specialist healthy weight school nurse post has been created.

The full-time role works with those children identified as being obese and particularly vulnerable during the NCMP process in the London borough. The nurse tailors support around the specific needs of the individual child, parent and family.

Council Public Health Consultant Bimpe Oki said: “We have a number of weight intervention programmes, spanning both preventative as well as treatment services, but for some children it might not be as simple as making a referral.

“For example, we had a recent case of a boy who was looked after by a single dad. His dad worked so his gran would pick him up from school and look after him. She didn’t want to feed him his evening meal because the family thought it was important that the dad and son ate together. So she gave him snacks.

“If we had referred him on to a weight management course he would not have gone as his gran needed to care for the boy’s granddad. The nurse worked with the family and they started changing their habits, going to the park after school and cutting back on the high sugar snacks. It made a big difference.”

Around 500 children are identified as being in this at-risk group each year, although the specialist nurse is only able to work with about half of them. The other school nurses feed into the process. If they are aware of someone with particular vulnerabilities, such as other health conditions or family difficulties such as a bereavement or domestic violence, they flag that up to the specialist nurse.

The specialist nurse also goes into schools and meets with parents at coffee mornings and parents evenings to promote the work she does. Ms Oki said: “It has worked really well over the years. I think what it recognises is that one-size does not fit all. You have to tailor your approach for some children and families and the specialist nurse role allows us to do just that. Without that we would see lots more families slip through the gaps. If we had the funding we would like to help more children like this.” Those not supported by the specialist nurse can be referred on to the healthy weight management programmes. Lambeth runs a tier one, two and three service. The tier three service is for children with complex social and/or medical needs works one-on-one with them and their families

“It takes a holistic and family-centred approach. They really get to know the families and some of the complexities which can lead to an unhealthy weight. Often the obesity is just a symptom of something else. A lot of the work is done in the first 12 weeks, but the support can go on for much longer,” added Ms Oki.

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Oxfordshire County Council: proactive targeting of schools

Oxfordshire County Council's public health team has joined forces with the local sports partnership, 'Active Oxfordshire', to help target schools that may need a little extra support.

Active Oxfordshire run a well-established school games movement. Last year over 90 per cent of primary schools took part in the year-round event. Together they have combined data from the NCMP and the school games and cross-referenced that with other information to identify the schools that could benefit. The other sources of data include researching what schools were doing with the PE and sport premium and the healthy pupils capital fund, a pot paid for through the sugar levy which can be used for things such as improvements to kitchens and dining facilities, playgrounds and smaller scale projects to increase mental wellbeing.

Figures on which schools received targeted healthy weight promotion sessions delivered by Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust, the provider of NCMP, were also included. Those schools that have high rates of obesity and are not active in the other areas are being supported. Since the work started in spring 2018, around one in 10 primary schools in the county have been identified as falling into this category.

Health Improvement practitioner Sal Culmer said: "We realised we had all this data to hand and thought if we combined it all it would give us a rich picture of how schools could benefit. There was quite a bit of work to do to combine the datasets. We set up a shared file that we could both work from, but we got there in the end."

A conference for Primary School PE leads was held by Active Oxfordshire in November at which the schools identified in the analysis were subtly approached and options discussed. The opportunity was also used to explore what other strategies they may have in place. For schools not already involved in the School Games, this was promoted. Suggestions were also made for how to use the PE and sports premium and the healthy pupils capital project.

The WOW project, delivered by walking charity Living Streets and initially funded by public health, to encourage walking to school was pushed as well. Currently 19 schools have signed up and data from them show it has increased active travel by a third.

Ms Culmer said: "None of these will tackle obesity on their own, but we believe as part of a whole systems approach to healthy weight, they are useful in creating a cultural shift towards everyday activity."

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Slough Borough Council: using NCMP to engage schools

NCMP is an essential source of reference for schools and local authorities when it comes to the health of children. But Slough Borough Council has also recognised it can be an important opportunity in which to engage schools with health promotion programmes.

Like many areas, the results are fed back to schools via email and hard copies sent through the post. But two years ago the council decided to do more to link it in with the healthy weight programmes they were beginning to run.

Physical Activity and Obesity Public Health Programme Officer Tim Howells now delivers presentations at quarterly council meetings with heads and PE leads. As well as talking about the results, Mr Howells also covers the programmes run by the public health team. These include the national Daily Mile, a tier one health promotion scheme called Active Movement and Let's Get Going, the 12-week local tier two weight management scheme.

Active Movement is offered to all schools and is based on nudge-theory. Schools enrolled on it are given help and advice about how to change the culture in schools. It encourages teachers to get pupils to stand up when answering questions and move round the classroom. It was only launched just over a year ago and is already in five schools with another 15 due to join soon, meaning it will reach 10,000 pupils.

Clare Beynon, Headteacher of Castlevue Primary School, which has been involved, said: "Active Movement has shifted the mind set of our staff and parents. It is amazing how making such small and simple changes alters habits and makes children and adults more active and ultimately healthier individuals."

Meanwhile, the Daily Mile, which was launched at the start of 2017, is in 12 of the 29 primary schools, with 6,500 children taking part. Let's Get Going is targeted at three schools a year with the results of the NCMP used to decide where to offer it.

Mr Howells said he has found it very effective to link improvements in health with academic results to get the attention of schools. "There is strong evidence that the healthier and fitter children are the better they learn. They are more alert in class.

"Schools are busy and you have to make sure you get their attention. By stressing this side of it as well we have been able to ensure we engage with as many schools as possible. There are some that have not yet engaged. We would hope to get them involved in the future so will keep working at it."

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Solihull Council: intervening earlier

Like many areas, Solihull has a comprehensive support programme in place for children identified as overweight and obese through NCMP. But with over 18 per cent of local children with overweight or with obesity in reception year, the programme has also prompted the council to start considering what can be done to support children pre-school.

Senior Solihull Active Officer Sadie Walker said: "If we can spot who is overweight earlier we may be more effective at tackling the issue. It has got us thinking about what support is in place and what training is available for staff. We commissioned Warwick University to carry out some research for us, which showed that health staff, such as health visitors, GPs and school nurses were not that confident about raising the issue of weight."

In response to this, the public health team organised a training session, *Why Raise the Issue of Weight?*, last summer. It was delivered by a dietician and was based around behavioural change techniques, teaching participants to ask open questions and engage parents. Nearly 40 health visitors and schools nurses attended with an evaluation showing it increased their confidence and ability to ask open questions by a third.

Ms Walker said: "It was just a half-day session, but it really seemed to have an impact. We are now thinking about running it again with other early years workforce, and we are keen to get GPs engaged. We have a number of public health champions in GP practices, mainly practice nurses and front-of-house staff, so we will look to promote it to them at our regular events."

Alongside this, talks are under way with health visitors to introduce a BMI check at the two-and-a-half-year check-up. But, if this is rolled out, there is a recognition that there will need to be a support offer in place for families where children are identified as overweight.

Currently the council runs a 12-week programme called *Eat Well, Move More*, but it is aimed at children over the age of four. It is offered to schools based on the results of NCMP data. Last year 17 programmes of up to 20 children each were run

There are also a number of community programmes for children who do not have access to a school-based programme, while one-to-one support is also available if a community scheme is not within easy reach. One option would be to offer a bespoke version of this to younger children.

But as well as exploring that, Solihull is looking at how it can increase uptake of the community programmes. It plans to run a pilot in 2019, which will see health trainers contact parents via mobile phones. Currently, those with overweight and obese children receive letters inviting them to take part.

"We have the phone numbers in the system so thought we should try using them. It might just help us engage with parents in another way," added Ms Walker.

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Swindon Borough Council: keeping an eye out for the very underweight

Like all areas, Swindon has a well-established range of support for children identified as overweight or obese during NCMP. The school nursing service will offer families an appointment to discuss concerns, give diet and physical activity advice and can refer them on to healthy weight programmes.

But the council has also made sure it has a system in place to act on children who are very underweight. For the last eight years, school nurses have been tasked with identifying children whose lack of weight is a medical concern. Any child who falls on or below the second BMI centile mark is classed as underweight. But the school nursing service reviews the NCMP data to identify all children who are 'very thin' and are on or below the 0.4th BMI centile.

Swindon Borough Council Public Health Programme Manager Fiona Dickens said the 0.4th threshold was chosen on the advice of local doctors and dieticians. "This is an indication of under nutrition, which could be related to a medical problem. We have been doing this since 2010. By choosing the 0.4th BMI centile, rather than the 2nd BMI centile we exclude many fussy eaters.

"Where children are on or below the 0.4th centile, the school nursing service reviews their records to see if they are under the care of a paediatrician, GP or nurse. Most are, but we are spotting a small minority each year who are not."

When a case is identified, the school nurses flag this to the paediatric service at the local Great Western Hospitals NHS Trust via secure NHS email. The paediatricians also check the NCMP raw data set to check for extremes of height to pick up abnormalities. Some of these cases that are not known about are simply to do with the fact that the family have just moved to the area.

But there are others where a medical condition has not yet been spotted or there is a case of neglect or abuse.

Ms Dickens said: "The paediatricians were surprised at first that we were able to identify cases they did not know about. It has proved a valuable source of information for them. We also provide a summary of the data each year to the hospital to help keep track of how things are going. NCMP can be really useful for our NHS colleagues too."

Consultant Paediatrician Dr Nikolaos Daskas said the information has proved invaluable. "It is very important to identify, treat and in some cases protect these children from an early stage, which is what the NCMP can deliver by providing robust surveillance data."

But Ms Dickens said the trained staff who carry out the weighing and measuring are also on alert to look out for other signs that there maybe problems. "We don't treat it as just a weighing and measuring process. Children may tell the staff something in confidence or they may notice something perhaps to do with what the child is wearing. They flag any concerns they have to the school nurses for them to investigate."

It forms part of a continuous process of self-improvement for the service. At the start of each year, the public health team and school nursing lead meet to review how NCMP has gone over the previous 12 months and any changes that could be introduced in the future. "It is such a valuable opportunity where we have contact with children. It is important to make the most of it," Ms Dickens added.

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For more information about the NCMP and current guidance from Public Health England on how the programme should be operated by local authorities, in line with the relevant legislation and best practice, go to: NCMP Operational Guidance.

www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-child-measurement-programme-operational-guidance



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