**Controlled Schools’ Support Council (CSSC) Award for Excellence in Educational Research**

**Introduction**

The Controlled Schools’ Support Council (CSSC) has established a new Award for Excellence in Educational Research. This is awarded to the Stranmillis University College researcher who demonstrates the potential for their research to have a significant impact on learners or practice in controlled schools. The award recognises the positive contribution that research can make to school improvement.

A CSSC assessment panel reviewed seven nominated high attaining dissertations at Master’s level selecting one recipient to receive the award.

CSSC will be disseminating several articles over the coming months, sharing the learning from a selection of nominated students. The first article is entitled: **The Daily Mile - improving physical activity.**

The UK Chief Medical Officers’ Physical Activity Guidelines (2019) recommend that children should engage in activities which are moderate-to-vigorous in intensity for an average of at least 60 minutes per day. The Education and Training Inspectorate (2018) outlines the importance of schools having a long-term commitment to preventing obesity among our children and the need for a series of appropriate interventions. The Daily Mile initiative appeared to tick all the boxes as an intervention which would increase physical activity and encourage children to ‘breathe faster and feel warmer’ within school as well as the long list of other benefits to health, wellbeing, fitness and concentration within the classroom.

**What intervention did you implement?**

This small-scale research study examined young children’s exposure to physical activity from a parental perspective and the introduction of The Daily Mile as an intervention strategy to improve physical activity levels among children in their early years. Perspectives on children’s physical activity and The Daily Mile were sought from parents, the children taking part in the intervention, school staff and key stakeholders from the local trust.

The early years staff were asked to take the children out on a daily basis for 15 minutes of running/jogging at their own pace. It was anticipated that the children would benefit positively from The Daily Mile.

**What was the impact of the intervention?**

The study identified that while some children were meeting the recommended physical activity guidelines, most were not engaging in enough physical activity which encourages moderate to vigorous intensity. All the parents who responded believed that schools play an important role in encouraging physical activity, with 60% feeling that the most energetic activity takes place during school hours.

The Daily Mile is a simple and straightforward strategy to help meet physical activity guidelines by actively encouraging children to take part in daily physical activity which is moderate-to-vigorous in intensity at school. Within this study, school staff reported that the increased levels of physical activity had an impact on wellbeing, concentration, and behaviour within the classroom. From analysis of the focus group interviews with the children, The Daily Mile had a positive influence on their understanding, use of language and awareness of physical activity.

The research illustrates the importance parents place on physical activity being promoted within the school setting and how The Daily Mile had a ‘knock on effect’ as other children within the school wanted to take part. By the end of this small-scale study, all classes within the school were taking part in The Daily Mile.

**Advice for implementing in schools**

The Daily Mile Initiative can be easily introduced within schools across Northern Ireland. A wealth of information is available on The Daily Mile website.

To embed The Daily Mile effectively it is best that children are encouraged to run or jog on a daily basis. Where this is not possible, try for a minimum of three days per week, make a start! After a few weeks you will be able to see the multiple benefits and impact this intervention will have within your classroom.

Printed resource packs are available on request from the Health Improvement Department

**Further advice from Omagh County Primary School & Nursery**

The importance of being healthy and active has been introduced to all children, beginning in Nursery. There are themed days such as Healthy Heart Day, and resource packs that can be accessed through ‘Getting Ready to Learn’ which promote and encourage physical activity at home.

* At Foundation and Key Stage 1, children enjoy the benefits of increased physical activity through The Daily Mile and a weekly walk to ‘Forest School’ regardless of the weather.
* At Key Stage 2, pupils and staff also enjoy The Daily Mile. Other activities include a colour run through the local park.

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Research was carried out as part of the Master of Arts in Early Childhood Studies at Stranmillis University College.