



OPENING SCHOOL FACILITIES FUND 2022/25

AUGUST 2026

**LONDON
SPORT**



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROJECT BACKGROUND

London Sport, on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE), distributed the Opening Schools Facilities (OSF) Fund across London from 2023-2025. The programme was designed to help schools open their existing sport facilities, including school swimming pools, for a broader range of young people and the wider community by partnering with sporting organisations to help deliver activities in these settings.

The programme has involved three funding rounds:

- Round 1: January 2023 – March 2023
- Round 2: April 2023 – March 2024
- Round 3: April 2024 – March 2025

ABOUT LONDON SPORT

London Sport is a not-for-profit organisation, part of a national network. We are a strategic leader, working to remove barriers to physical activity by facilitating policy, funding and delivery. Our vision is one where all Londoners live longer, healthier and happier lives through being active. However, in some parts of the capital, people live 12 years longer in good health than others.

With physical inactivity one of the leading risk factors for preventable ill health, we champion physical activity in London's most deprived communities. Collaborating with like-minded organisations, we strive to create fairer access to sport and physical activity across the capital.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key findings

In total across all three funding rounds in London, the OSF programme funded 195 schools, supporting a total of 1,048 projects to deliver a total of 24,064 sport and physical activity sessions.

The programme supported over 30,000 individual children and young people to take part in activities on just under 480,000 occasions, and, over 3,800 individual community users to take part in activities on over 36,000 occasions.

The main barriers to opening up school facilities were:

- Needing to purchase fixed equipment (e.g. fixed outdoor gym equipment or pitch re-surfacing) and not being able to (as per the funding guidance from the Department for Education).
- Making repairs to sport facilities (e.g. court markings).
- Making repairs to school facilities to aid opening sport facilities (e.g. to school infrastructure, fixing fences, providing more storage, or providing access systems).
- Buying additional sports and activity equipment (e.g. balls, moveable nets, bats).
- Staff capacity/resourcing (e.g. paying staff overtime - out of hours opening).
- Developing a stronger community offer.
- Being able to open school facilities after-school hours, in holidays, and at weekends.
- Viability: Costs vs profit (e.g. operational costs, staffing costs, business planning).

Schools found the funding beneficial to:

- Manage overheads, in particular paying for staff to open up/close sites or provide additional support to extra-curricular sessions outside of regular contracted hours.
- Adapt their sites to improve facility access (such as improving security or providing access keypads) and/or accessibility.
- Purchase additional sports equipment to expand the range of activities



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Schools struggled with:

- Developing a network of external contacts such as coaches or community organisations.
- Understanding the complexity of the DfE fund guidance.
- Uploading participant data monthly (as per the funding requirements).

Conclusions

- Opening school facilities for the wider community was regarded as more challenging due to concerns about:
- Adapting facilities to ensure security and accessibility.
- Ensuring appropriate safeguarding mechanisms were in place.
- Covering additional overheads (in particular staff time for delivery and/or administrative work and caretaking).
- The need for capital facility repairs.
- Whilst schools managed to form relationships with external organisational users of their facilities, many shared that these were not existing contacts, and they relied on searching online to develop their networks of coaches or other facility users.
- The complexity of the DfE fund guidance made it difficult for schools to understand what they could and could not apply for.
- Additional funding requirements around submitting data could have been simpler.

Recommendations

- **Funding schools to open their facilities create more opportunities to be physically active:** the programme did provide additional opportunities to children and young people and the wider community by providing more local sport and physical activity venues.
- **Funding could be targeted more strategically:** desk research could be conducted looking at the location of leisure facilities in each borough alongside schools to identify “gaps” where there are fewer opportunities for local residents to be active. Strategically targeting funding offers to schools in these locations to open their facilities to the wider community could address these gaps through additional local venues for residents and provide new physical activity opportunities.



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- **Schools welcome the opportunity to open facilities but need support to do so:** Schools are receptive to opening their facilities, but considerations need to be made when opening to the wider community such as security and accessibility. If opening school facilities to the public, it is important to consider if facilities have access to water and toilets, and how access can be provided to a facility without allowing access to the main school site.
- **Many settings need funding for capital repairs to open their facilities at all or provide much wider access:** many schools identified that a barrier with the funding restrictions was that they could not spend anything on capital repairs. Schools said making capital repairs to their facilities would have enabled them to open their facilities to a greater extent. Consideration should be given to adapting current funding arrangements to remove restrictions around capital spend. If this is not possible, then other fundraising opportunities (through grants, sponsors, and investors) could offer opportunities to fund capital repairs.
- **Schools need support to identify coaches and organisational users of their facilities which London Sport or Local Authorities could provide:** one of the main challenges schools identified in opening up their facilities externally was finding and building a network of contacts. There is an opportunity for local councils or other organisations like London Sport to act as a convenor to recommend and/or introduce local coaches or community organisations.
- **Administrative demands on schools opening facilities should be costed into future funding rounds:** opening school facilities can lead to additional administrative work for schools, if managed in-house. To cover the additional staffing overhead costs, programme funders should consider incorporating administrative costs into funding applications. External lettings organisations provide an alternative management system, but there are costs associated with these. This could be further supported by organisations such as London Sport to support schools who are managing their facilities in-house by providing a checklist of policies or best practice examples.
- **Future project management arrangements should allow more time for application review and invoice processing:** when project managing a large funding programme, some tasks such as processing invoices or reviewing applications, are time-consuming and process heavy. Building in additional time within the project plan around “pinch points” or areas of work that take a longer amount of time such as processing invoices or reviewing applications.



BACKGROUND

London Sport, on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE), distributed the Opening Schools Facilities (OSF) Fund across London from 2023-2025. The programme was designed to help schools to open their existing sport facilities, including school swimming pools, for a broader range of young people and the wider community by partnering with sporting organisations, who can help deliver activities in these settings.

The first funding round ran from January 2023 – March 2023 and supported schools in setting up their facilities for opening. Subsequent, second (April 2023 – March 2024) and third (April 2024 – March 2025) rounds supported project delivery in schools.

This report draws on learning from delivery across the three funding rounds of the programme reflecting on programme delivery up to March 2025.

The main programme objectives were to:

- Support schools to open their facilities outside of the normal school day to allow children & young people and the wider community to access more opportunities to be physically active.
- Open school swimming pools for swimming and water safety lessons both during and outside the school day for pupils at the school, pupils at other local schools and community members.
- Provide participants with a range of stimulating and enjoyable opportunities to take part in physical activity and sport.
- Signpost participants to take part in the same or similar activities in their local community, following the end of their participation in the programme.



BACKGROUND

Schools could use their funding on:

- Non-fixed equipment or storage
- Improving facility access (such as improving security or providing access keypads)
- Improving accessibility for young people with SEND (such as ramp access)
- Developing or improving systems (such as existing websites or facility management/booking systems)
- Providing CPD, training opportunities, or qualifications
- Paying for additional staff time to open/close their school outside of school hours and/or providing administration time
- Paying external deliverers (external clubs or coaches) to deliver sessions
- Website development
- For those schools that don't have an existing pool, providing top-up swimming lessons for secondary students or hiring a pool and swimming teacher
- For schools with an existing pool, to cover the costs to extend what the school currently offers (such as heating, lifeguards, equipment, or maintenance).

The OSF programme involved distributing three rounds of funding in London:

- Round 1 (January 2023 – March 2023): £1.9 million
- Round 2 (April 2023 – March 2024): £1.87 million
- Round 3 (April 2024 – March 2025): £1.9 million

In total across all three funding rounds in London OSF funded 195 schools. This included:

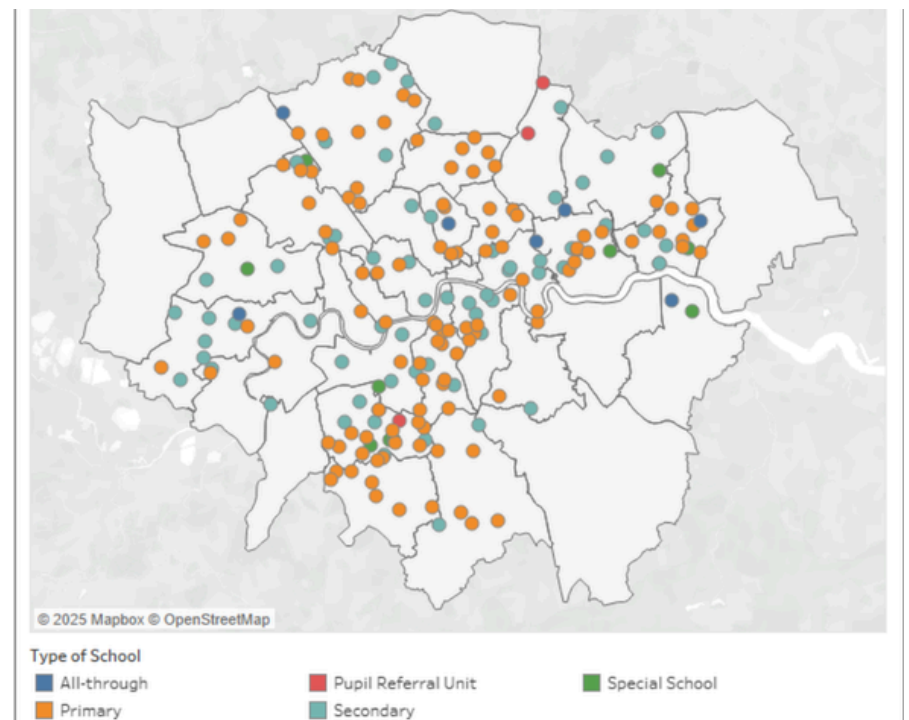
- 112 Primary schools
- 62 Secondary schools
- 7 All through schools
- 11 SEND schools
- 3 Pupil Referral Units

Schools from 29 boroughs were funded (see figure 1). Bromley, City of London, Havering, and Hillingdon were the only boroughs not to have any schools funded; this was due to a combination of factors – a lower number of applications from schools in these boroughs and lower quality of applications.



BACKGROUND

Figure 1: Map of schools funded through OSF



Source: OSF Programme data

Overall, £3,918,246.66 of funding was distributed to these schools to fund 1,048 projects.



METHODOLOGY

To get a better understanding of whether project objectives were met, to explore challenges and barriers of the fund, and to support programme learning, a variety of data collection methods were used:

- **Monitoring and Evaluation feedback forms** – as part of the project, funded schools applying for Round 3 funding were asked to complete a short survey at the start of the project to provide information on their current offer, their challenges in opening their facilities, and to also provide participation data.
- **Interviews with funded schools** – seven interviews were conducted with schools exploring how they have used their funding, any challenges they faced, sharing what has worked, and recommendations. These interviews took place in July 2024.
- **End of programme school survey** – out of the 171 schools that received OSF funding in the final year of funding, 72 (42%) completed the end of programme survey in March 2025.
- **Review session** - with the OSF project team at London Sport exploring whether project objectives were met, project processes, and recommendations for future work. Two reviews took place; one in July 2024 and one in March 2025.



FINDINGS

Barriers to opening facilities identified by schools

Schools funded by OSF were asked what they considered the main barriers were in opening their school facilities. The barriers could be split into two categories – barriers relating to the funding conditions, and general barriers to opening facilities.

Barriers relating to the funding conditions

The OSF fund had specific criteria for what could and could not be funded including capital expenditure, transport costs (except for swimming), and wraparound care, amongst others. The application forms showed that the main barriers schools themselves identified from a funding condition perspective were as follows:

Barrier	No. of times mentioned
Purchase fixed equipment (e.g. fixed outdoor gym equipment, fixed basketball hoops, pitch re-surfacing)	58
Make repairs to sport facilities (e.g. court markings)	48
Make repairs to school facilities to aid opening sport facilities (e.g. to school infrastructure, fix fences, provide more storage)	33
Pay for transport (e.g. bus to and from home for children after extra-curricular OSF activities)	15
Have more flexibility of how to spend budget due to being a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) school	5



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Generic barriers

The remaining barriers could be classed as more generic reasons for not opening school facilities:

Barrier	No. of times mentioned
Need to buy more sports and activity equipment (e.g. balls, moveable nets, bats etc.)	64
Investment in training or paying staff overtime to open the school facilities out of hours	55
Development of a community offer	55
Being unable to open school facilities for longer after school hours	39
Being unable to open school facilities in holidays	31
Being unable to open school facilities at weekends	33
Need to update / alter security systems (e.g. install cameras, lock pads)	13

Source: Round 3 OSF Applications (n=147)

In addition, there was also an open text option where schools could share additional information relating to barriers that were important context for their facility opening. Thematic analysis of these identified the is following main categories:

- Facility conditions: Schools need to repair or refurbish their facilities so that they can be used by communities, requiring capital spend. This is particularly relevant for community members with SEND, who might benefit from specific facility adaptations.
- Staff capacity and resource: Not having dedicated members of staff to manage lettings effectively; both admin and manning the facility (opening / closing).



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- Lack of equipment: Not having the necessary equipment to be able to offer lettings.
- Security and safeguarding: Having an access system that is trusted, having a way to vet the organisations and clubs that are using the school – this links to capacity too, as you need someone to organise this.
- Storage: Some clubs that hire out facilities need storage space (e.g. trampolining), and this can be difficult for schools to provide.
- Viability: Costs vs profit - operational costs, staffing costs, business planning.

Programme impact

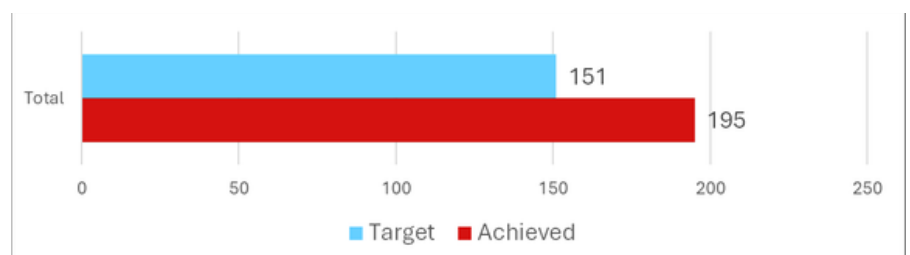
This section presents findings from monitoring and evaluation forms, interviews with schools, and reflections from the London Sport project team. We have broken down our findings against each programme objective:

1. Support schools to open their facilities outside of the normal school day to allow children & young people and the wider community to access more opportunities to be physically active
2. Open school swimming pools for swimming and water safety lessons both during and outside the school day for pupils at the school, pupils at other local schools and community members
3. Participants are provided with a range of stimulating and enjoyable opportunities to take part in physical activity and sport

Supporting schools to open their facilities outside of the normal school day to allow children & young people and the wider community to access more opportunities to be physically active
In total across all three funding rounds in London the OSF programme:

- Funded 195 schools (target was 151 schools, see figure 2)
- Supported a total of 1,048 projects (479 in Round 2 and 569 in Round 3)
- Delivered a total of 24,064 sport and physical activity sessions (11,951 in Round 2 and 12,113 in Round 3)

Figure 2: Breakdown of schools funded through the OSF programme



Source: OSF Programme data



FINDINGS

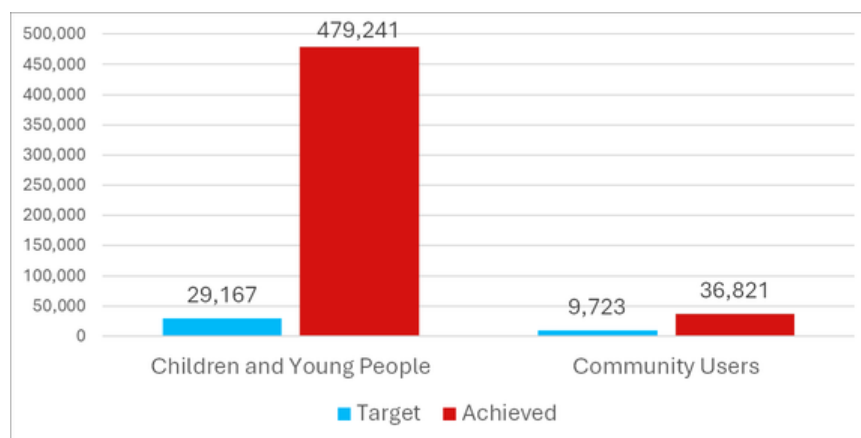
During the application process, many schools needed encouragement from the London Sport project team to develop community-focused initiatives. The London Sport project team attribute this to several factors:

- School staff naturally prioritised the benefits of physical activity for their pupils, especially given the existing constraints from on school budgets.
- The Department for Education's application questions were not specifically geared towards community use.
- Community engagement typically demands greater resources, including time for relationship-building, than pupil-focused projects.

Participation targets for children and young people in London were exceeded with 479,241 attendances (see figure 4). This is based on 30,605 individual pupils taking part in the programme.

Participation targets for community users in London were exceeded with 36,821 attendances (see figure 4). This is based on 3,880 individual community members taking part in the programme.

Figure 4: OSF Programme throughput delivery (Round 2 and Round 3 – data was not collected for Round 1)



Source: OSF Programme Monitoring Information

In Round 3, the majority of projects were aimed at pupils eligible for Free School Meals, however, many schools tried to deliver sessions for multiple target audiences (see figure 5).

Figure 5: Breakdown of target priority group

Priority target group	No. of projects
Ethnically diverse communities	398
Free School meals	405
Girls	394
SEND	326

Source: OSF Programme Application forms (n=171)



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There were issues with schools uploading participant data (discussed in a later section) which led to errors in reporting figures. The Active Partnership Network built a system to discount the data known to be incorrect and provides a percentage representation for the “true” data. This data shows that for London:

- One fifth of the participants (19%) were from ethnically diverse communities
- Over half of participants (56%) were eligible for Free School Meals
- Three fifths of participants (60%) were female
- Just under half of participants (45%) were disabled or had special educational needs

Use of funding and resources to manage overhead costs, staffing, and buying equipment

Overall, £3,927,166.98 of funding was distributed to schools to fund 1,048 projects. The majority of funding was spent on coaching and equipment for team and individual sports (see figure 6).

“I was quite clear that I was buying resource for setting up an after-school provision [and] what I needed was a storage room to put those resources in, because they shouldn’t just go into the general PE cupboard.”

Managing overheads when opening facilities was a challenge, in particular, paying for staff to open up/close sites or provide additional support to extra-curricular sessions outside of regular contracted hours, such as caretakers and reception staff. On the pre-funding questionnaire, 75% (n=167) of schools stated that their sports facilities are staffed by school staff (for example, a caretaker).

“Two members of staff on my site team are actually 52 weeks already...so in terms of working a rota, it’s working out the timings. But if I had to start [and all staff were contracted for 40 weeks], that’s where I think I’d have issues in who’s going to open? Who’s going to close? How do I introduce a security system where I feel confident that the external provider can manage that?”

“One of the issues has been having someone to have the place open...we recently went down from two to one caretaker just because of budget constraints. We’ve requested funding to pay for me [a business manager] to come in during the holidays because my contract is only 42 weeks a year. So, I’ve been coming in extra to make sure these kind of things happen.”

Session costs were also mentioned by staff on applications, but there was a variety in approaches to address this with some schools charging and some schools using the OSF funding to offer free sessions. Schools understood that whilst charging for sessions could support sustainability, it can also cause a barrier to some students, particularly those from lower-income households.



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“We found that by just charging £1 a session, the numbers are more consistent each week with children actually turning up...we have this company that will do a football club and they will charge about £6 a session. So, my thoughts are when they do the football next term is that we would put it at £3 a session because then that way it’s almost like we’ve got an introductory offer to them at 50% off.”

“If [some schools] have any overheads, they might need to charge until they recoup some of the overheads, but then that cost gets passed on and sometimes that can then become a barrier for some children.”

Figure 6: Breakdown of spend

Breakdown of spend	Amount of money	% of spend
Coaching	£1,162,874.30	30%
Equipment - Team Sport	£1,077,731.67	27%
Equipment - Individual activity	£708,987.89	18%
Other	£365,158.88	9%
Swimming pool testing/plant services	£152,217.04	4%
Storage facilities	£132,253.05	3%
Equipment – To improve health & safety	£125,210.72	3%
Equipment – To enable increased accessibility	£75,658.36	2%
Staffing – Admin	£54,365.14	1%
CPD	£33,883.87	1%
Staffing – Cleaning	£20,851.64	1%
Staffing – Security	£17,974.42	0%

Source: OSF Programme Invoice data

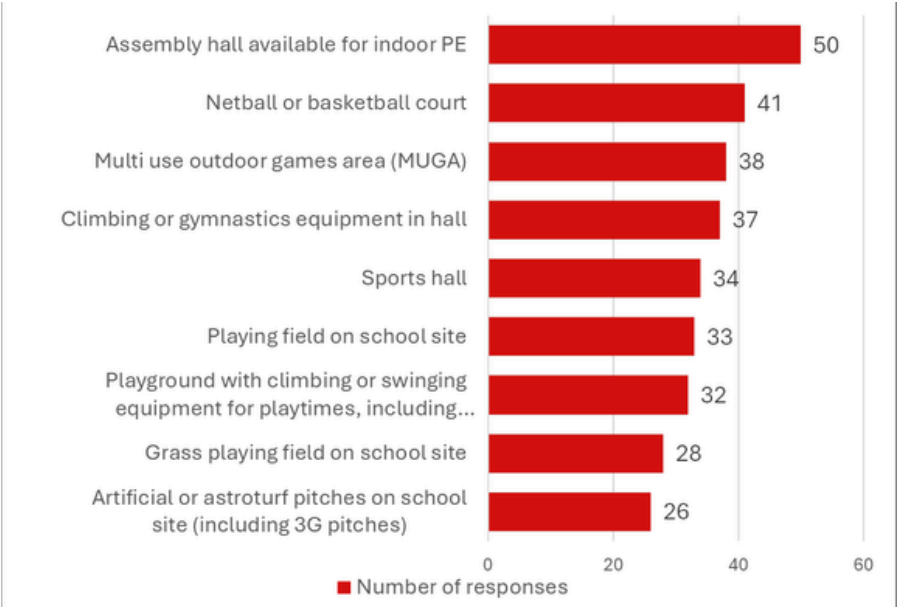


FINDINGS

Adapting spaces and managing facilities

The most common types of facilities schools said they have are assembly halls, netball or basketball courts, multi-use outdoor games areas, climbing or gymnastics equipment in hall, sports halls, playing field on school sites, and playgrounds (see figure 7).

Figure 7: Facilities schools have available for use in the 2024/25 academic year



Source: End of programme school survey (n=72)

Many schools identified that a barrier with the funding restrictions was that they could not spend anything on capital repairs, whilst 42 (37%) schools said that another barrier to optimising the funding was not being able to purchase fixed equipment.

“Our field area for football is not great and when I’ve spoken to football clubs about using it for weekend matches, it’s not suitable, it’s too uneven, there’s divots in there. So, I would have loved to have been able to have our field repaired so it [can be] used for some of these sports and that would extend [our offer] even more.”

Multi use outdoor games area (MUGA), playground with climbing or swinging equipment for playtimes (including adventure playgrounds and trim trails), and netball or basketball courts were the most popular facilities that schools would have applied for capital funding (see figure 8).



FINDINGS

Figure 8: Facilities schools would be interested in applying for capital funding

Facility	Number of responses	Percentage
Multi use outdoor games area (MUGA)	17	25%
Playground with climbing or swinging equipment for playtimes, including adventure playgrounds and trim trails	15	22%
Netball or basketball court	12	18%
Assembly hall available for indoor PE	7	10%
Climbing or gymnastics equipment in hall	7	10%
Artificial or astroturf pitches on school site (including 3G pitches)	7	10%
Playing field on school site	6	9%
Sports hall	5	7%
Gym or fitness room	5	7%

Source: End of programme school survey (n=67)

Schools could use their funding to make adaptations to their sites to improve facility access (e.g. improving security or providing access keypads) and/or to improve accessibility. Schools noted that whilst they had sporting facilities they could rent out, they did not always have additional facilities that external clubs would need when using these spaces, such as access to toilets, or a water fountain.



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“I think the major change I had to make was about entry and exit...[we changed our access system] to Paxton Net2. I had to add some more security locks into places to let people in. We modified a gate point to make sure it was on a magnetic lock to get into our fields...all these changes, they're quite good because it does help in the future to run these things independently because people can enter and exit, not freely, but securely.”

From Round 3 of funding applications, 310 projects said they opened their indoor facilities compared to 235 projects taking place in outdoor facilities. Schools highlighted that there were advantages and disadvantages to opening both indoor and outdoor facilities. Whilst outdoor spaces could be used without access to the main school building, they could be affected by weather meaning there was no guarantee that bookings could be made consistently across the year. Whereas indoor facilities, whilst unaffected by weather, needed improvements to accessibility and security.

“We've got a really lovely grass pitch but about five months of the year it's waterlogged so it's not always [usable]. Whereas our local high school has got a 3G pitch which you can use all year round. So, they're more likely to advertise because they can consistently have bookings through the year, whereas ours will be hit and miss based on the grass. Our playground space is ok, but then it might not be ok for, let's say, a football match.”

Schools that a lot of their maintenance and deep cleaning work took place during the school holidays. When extra-curricular clubs take place, where staff, children, and the wider community are using facilities, this can interrupt this essential maintenance work and needs to be factored into planning around facility opening.

“We don't rent our facilities like most schools do, or rent the hall, because that's when we try and get a lot of the maintenance work done, or our contractors in, because you've got to squeeze them in as well somehow in the whole school year. The reason why I'm looking at security systems and works is to make sure that I can carry on doing the work and the partner organisation running the activity feels like they do it safely and securely.”

“Some of the caretakers, a lot of the time during the school holidays, they like to do deep cleans. So, we're trying to deep clean but then you've got children going into the toilets, you've got staff coming inside to use our staffroom.”

Safeguarding and policies

Schools were very aware of having a duty of care for children that attend sessions on their site, whether they are pupils of the school or not. As well as asking external organisations to provide their safeguarding policies, schools also provide training to external organisations on which members of staff are on the safeguarding team and how they should report disclosures.



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“We start with the health and safety, the site induction, if there’s any equipment that they’re going to use...it’s about risk assessing what equipment they can use – those dangers and what’s reasonable and what’s not. Everybody must undertake safeguarding, they’ve got to have an enhanced DBS, not general.”

“For example, with the change in policy from the Government about the duty of care to children, even when it’s the holidays within the school facility, we just need to make sure that procedure-wise that we get the safeguarding policies and the risk assessments...making sure we have a copy of the safeguarding policy of the clubs.”

Schools also mentioned providing additional training to those who are renting their facilities, including site inductions, health and safety, and fire safety. Schools asked external organisations to provide risk assessments and share a copy of their public liability insurance. Whilst schools said these checks and training were necessary to open their facilities to external organisations, they did note this causes additional administrative work that they had not accounted for when planning their opening.

“Another thing I’ve found hard is doing all the paperwork, data...is a big job.”

“It’s making sure that safeguarding...public liability is in place. It’s just those sorts of things really, all the nitty gritty paperwork just in case something happened - the fire procedure, making sure they’re clear on it. It’s just a lot of admin staff that must take place to make sure that it runs.”

Four fifths of schools (78%, n=54) said they ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ that they found it easy to find coaches that met their safeguarding requirements.

Supporting children and young people to access more opportunities

Where schools ran projects for their students, they saw these projects having a positive impact on children, for example, improved behaviour, improved engagement, increased fitness levels, and improved enjoyment of physical activity. 91% of schools (n=68) said they thought their OSF projects had ‘a great deal or ‘a lot’ of impact on their pupils.

“[The students] can’t wait to go to dance clubs and the after-school clubs are very popular. There’s waiting lists to go on and get into the clubs...[The clubs] are a positive step for students to become less anxious, learn to socialise with each other, be more independent...these are all the skills that they need to learn. And then also when the community comes, they have to, you know, be able to socialise with others and join in.”



FINDINGS

When deciding whether to set up after school and holiday clubs, staffing costs were the main deciding factor. During term-time, some schools felt comfortable running after school sessions as they already had maintenance staff on site. Whereas staffing costs during school holidays is more of a challenge, as many school staff are only contracted for around 40 weeks per year.

“I’m really quite fortunate that some of the works that the schools has done has enabled us to open up and because the way my staffing is structured, we’re able to accommodate...[extra-curricular sessions]...I have a cleaning team in the evening, one of those people is a key holder. Therefore, I know my building is locked up at 6pm. So, to run the club from 3:15pm-5:45pm, the additional cost of locking up isn’t there”.

“In term time, our after-school clubs are for our [students only] because it just gets difficult timing-wise...we don’t have a caretaker here late...so making sure that there’s someone on site in the evening doesn’t really work for us because we want to make sure our staff have work life balance.”

In terms of advertising sessions, schools have tried a variety of methods including leaflets/letters (both print and electronic), advertising on websites, social media, and word of mouth.

“We sent emails out to our parents. Initially when all the bookings were through [the external coach] they just had it on their website... And then we started doing a dual booking system with the HAF (holiday activity and food) programme schemes – we write a little bit to the HAF booklet that goes out to parents, but it also goes on the HAF booking website and it comes up with all the different activities and people just select which ones they want.”

“[if you] just give out some flyers they’re not really going to take notice of it. Whereas if the children know who they are and they’ve worked with them, they’ve been in lessons with them, their friends are then talking about it as well, or parents, they’re more like to go along and join that club.”

Supporting the wider community to access more opportunities

London Sport research shows that 25% of schools in London currently open their school facilities for community use. Of the 72 schools that completed the end of programme survey, 79% currently open their school for community use for sport-related activities.



FINDINGS

From the end of programme survey, assembly halls, sports halls, and Multi-Use Outdoor Games Areas were the most popular facilities offered for community use (see figure 9).

Figure 9: Facilities offered for community use

Facility	Number of responses	Percentage
Assembly hall available for indoor PE	31	53%
Sports hall	28	47%
Multi use outdoor games area (MUGA)	24	41%
Playing field on school site	20	34%
Grass playing field on school site	18	31%
Artificial or astroturf pitches on school site (including 3G pitches)	18	31%
Netball or basketball court	16	27%

Source: End of programme school survey (n=59)

Schools understood that their facilities/clubs could provide additional opportunities to the wider community by providing more local sport and physical activity venues, and so reducing transport costs for users. Of the 559 projects funded through OSF in Round 3, 229 projects were being delivered for the community in evenings, weekends, and over school holidays.

“The holiday activities are not just for our children, our pupils, they’re open to anybody who lives in the area. We get people coming over [the other side of the borough] because there aren’t any free cycling courses going on, so they’re coming over to the other side of the borough to access these courses because there’s nothing like that where they are.”

“Ealing has a lovely hockey club but sometimes when you have a big borough, the hockey club might be in a location that’s actually quite a way away from us. That’s not convenient for parents to travel if they don’t have a car as well, so it’s quite nice to have different locations within a large borough where children can access it in different venues.”



FINDINGS

When letting out facilities to external users, schools are conscious of providing access only to areas that are needed, and so have considered how they can open/close different spaces within their schools, or if this presents challenges to opening at all.

“The hall that we’re using was built in 2016 and so is slightly more modern. And so therefore where the hall comes off into the main part of the building, [there are] other doors to stop people moving around the school for us to be able to lock. So, it makes it easier for us to be able to actually close off those areas. But I think if we didn’t have [this in place], that would make things a lot trickier. We would then be having to install more internal doors that are then lockable.”

“A lot of them want access to kitchens and things, and I can’t do that because I’ve got an external catering company... or [receiving feedback saying] “you’ve only got children’s toilets, not adults’ toilets, therefore we couldn’t bring adults on site because we don’t have that facility.”

Schools stated that to rent out their facilities to external providers, they would need to make adaptations to their sites, such as improving access (e.g. improving security or providing access keypads) or improving accessibility.

“One of the things with the hall and being able to rent that whole space out was that there was no drinking water available... we are able to go ahead with having a water fountain installed which is really helpful.”

Of the schools that said they open their facilities (n=58), the majority of them use a caretaker (34%) or a third party (29%) to manage access for community use.

Almost half (47%) of schools (n=58) use a digital booking system for managing external bookings. ‘School Hire’ and ‘Sharesy’ were the most popular booking systems. Of the 31 schools that do not use a booking system, they shared this was due to:

- Cost of using systems
- Not having enough demand for external bookings to justify having a formal booking system
- Not having a need for a booking system due to using third-parties (such as Mitie, Schools Plus, School Space) or office staff managing bookings

Almost two thirds (64%) of schools (n=58) said they thought their OSF projects had ‘a great deal or ‘a lot’ of impact on their local community. Schools said the OSF funding enabled them to:

- Improve access and inclusion by allowing them to open facilities during school holidays as well providing free sessions to their pupils, their families, and the wider community
- Expand their sports offerings by offering specialist-led clubs (such as gymnastics, karate, tennis, and boxing) and purchasing a wider range of physical activity equipment.



FINDINGS

- Build partnerships with the local community, particularly local coaches and sports clubs. This strengthened relationships between the schools and the local community as well as created pathways into sports beyond what is offered at schools.

Open school swimming pools for swimming and water safety lesson both during and outside the school day for pupils at the school, pupils at other local schools and community members

London Sport research shows that, as of 2024, there are 733 swimming pools in London with 16% of these (116) are behind school gates. Of the 116 swimming pools in schools, under half (45%) open these facilities for community use

Only six of the (72) schools that took part in the end of programme survey said they have a swimming pool on site. Fifteen of the schools said they have access to a swimming pool off the school site.

On reflecting on this objective, the OSF programme team felt it was partially met as only 25 funded projects were swimming related and not many schools had their own swimming pool on site. The team also noted that the majority of swimming projects were pupil-only as they used their funding to hire off-site swimming pools out and to transport their pupils to the pools.

Participants are provided with a range of stimulating and enjoyable opportunities to take part in physical activity and sport

Range of physical activity opportunities. The OSF funding also allowed schools to offer opportunities to students that they may not normally be able to engage in.

“For the football, [we’ve seen] a big number increase with the girls attending. Boys, we’ve always had a relatively high number [but having] a girls-only club and boys-only club, that’s really had a good positive impact on getting some of those girls into sport.”

“For our [project], I did work out the other day I think we’ve taught about 180 children to ride a bike. Which is amazing. I get emotional about it because I’m just like, that’s...what a legacy, you know?”

Football, netball, running/athletics, basketball, tennis, dance, cricket, and gymnastics/cheerleading were the most popular activities offered at schools during PE lessons (see figure 10).



FINDINGS

Over the course of the programme, multi-sports, football, basketball, table tennis, swimming, dance, and boxing were the most popular activities that schools wanted to deliver with their OSF funding (see figure 11).

Figure 10: Most popular activities offered at schools during PE lessons

Barrier	No. of times mentioned
Football (include blind football and other adapted forms)	67
Netball	60
Running or athletics	60
Basketball (including wheelchair basketball)	57
Tennis	56
Dance	56
Cricket	55
Gymnastics or cheerleading	52

Source: End of programme school survey (n=72)

Figure 11: Breakdown of activities applied for by schools

Sport/physical activity	No. of projects
Multi-Sport	246
Football	104
Basketball	88
Table Tennis	49
Swimming and Diving	48
Dance Sport	44
Boxing	40

Source: OSF Programme Application forms



FINDINGS

Developing partnerships and collaborating with external organisations

Four fifths of schools (82%, n=68) said they collaborated with external local coaches on their OSF funded projects. They were predominantly hired to provide specialist expertise in their respective sports, and they were also used to provide CPD for teachers.

Four fifths of schools (78%, n=54) said they 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they found it easy to find coaches for activity providers. Schools established partnerships with external local coaches by searching online and reaching out directly, building on existing relationships, or via their Local Authority and/or London Sport.

Schools said they valued when their local councils or other organisations like London Sport were able to recommend and/or introduce local coaches or community organisations.

"With schools all trying to find different coaches for these different areas, whether London Sport are going to have a little bit more clout by going out [and] contacting them, or putting the message out to general coaches in the areas that you would also recommend...that would save us a bit of time of trying to find and contact these people."

"The difficulty can be finding a coach. You have to start before you even put the bid in [and] some places say they're all booked by the private schools, or their coaches are only people who work in the evenings."

"I love it when organisations like [London Sport] say "let's have a group forum meeting", or, "let me start to introduce you to people", because I would never have known about [other external organisations], even though I've been doing my research online."

Two thirds of schools (65%, n=54) said their partnerships with local coaches were not established prior to the OSF funding. Schools said that London Sport helped establish a third of these coach partnerships (29%, n=35).

Over four fifths of schools (85%, n=54) said they 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they feel confident in continuing their relationship with local clubs in the future.

Only 15% of schools (n=66) said they collaborated with National Governing Bodies (NGBs) of sports to deliver their OSF funded projects. NGBs were predominantly used for training and advice.

Four fifths of schools (82%, n=56) said they would be interested in working with NGBs with football being the most requested sport. Athletics, cricket, basketball, and netball were also popular.



FINDINGS

Participants are signposted to take part in the same or similar activities in their local community, following the end of their participation in the programme

In terms of participants being signposted to similar activities in their local community, the London Sport OSF project team noted this objective was only partially met due to it not being a mandatory part of the funding. The project team did try to support with this but did not feel they had the capacity or knowledge to signpost to locally trusted organisations or coaches.

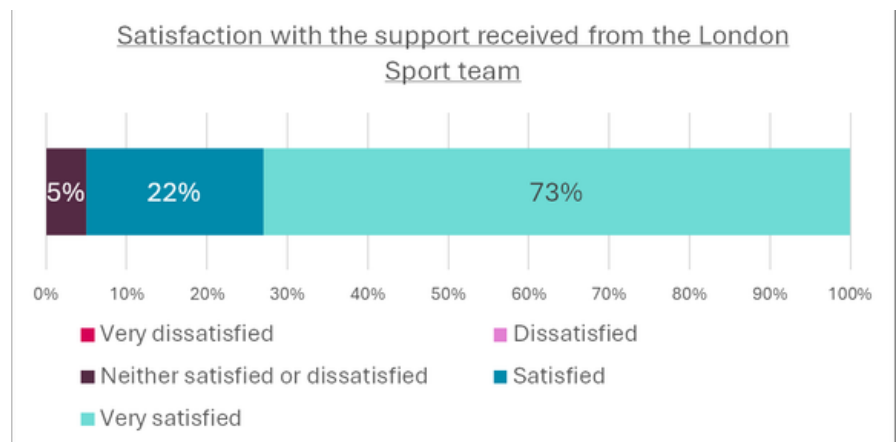


Programme management

Three quarters (73%, n=64) said they were 'very satisfied' with the support they received from the London Sport team (see figure 12), and 42% (n=65) were 'very satisfied' with the news & opportunities page that London Sport shared (see figure 13).

Communicating with schools, both in terms of conveying the offer to schools and providing ongoing support to schools, was viewed positively by the project team. This was due to the team building sufficient knowledge of the project and building a communication strategy to engage schools. The team noted that it can be difficult to reach schools, particularly during busy periods or when there are staff changes, but that phone calls are more successful in engaging schools rather than emails.

Figure 12: Satisfaction with the support you received from the London Sport team

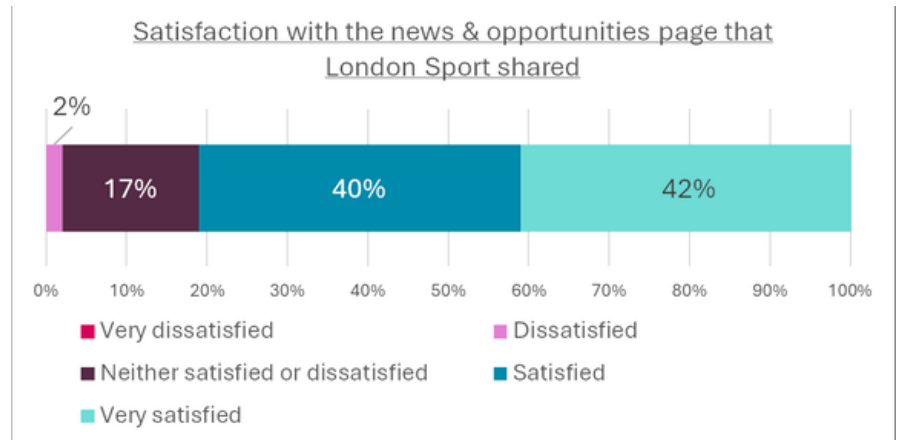


Source: OSF Programme Application forms (n=64)



FINDINGS

Figure 13: Satisfaction with the news & opportunities page that London Sport shared



Source: OSF Programme Application forms (n=65)

The team shared that reviewing school applications was challenging at times due to the complexity of the DfE fund guidance. This made it difficult for schools to understand and therefore complete the application form.

The team recommended for any future funding programmes that additional time should be allocated in project plans to support schools to complete their applications.

As part of their funding agreement, schools were required to submit participant data, however data collection was only redesigned by the Active Partnerships Network 18 months into the programme, and this meant that schools were asked to retrospectively add data from previous months.

The London Sport programme team agreed that having a data collection procedure in place from the start of the programme would have been better.

Collecting and uploading participant data was another challenge schools identified with only half of schools (48%, n=65) saying they were 'very satisfied' with the process for submitting participation data from Round 3 onwards (see figure 14).

In particular, schools were encouraged to upload of monthly participant data, but schools said they would have found it easier to upload data at the end of each term. In addition, when working with external providers, there was additional administrative work for schools to remind them to share this information.



FINDINGS

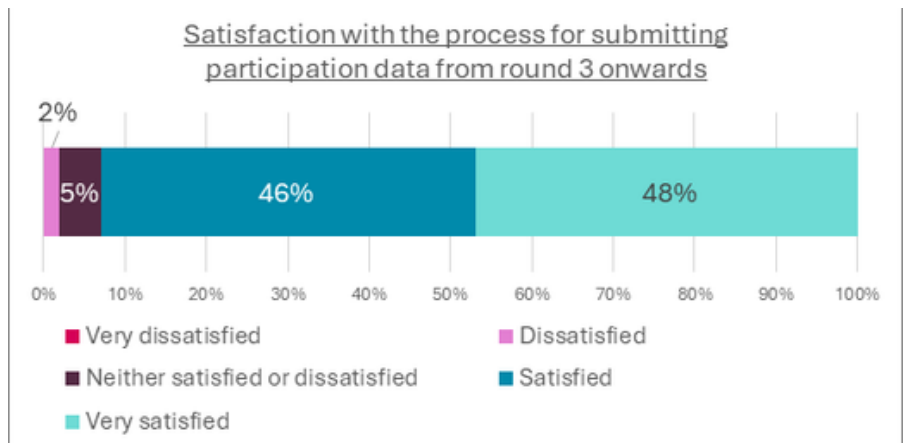
“[A challenge] is the uploading of the data for the registers...I don't know whether that was a simpler process, almost like an Excel spreadsheet that you're just punching in those numbers. I mean, it's not the worst thing but it just I don't know whether there's like almost like a simpler way of doing it... Whereas [at the end of term] I know club's finished, now I've got the register, I know how many people have been, and I can work out my figures from there... it's on one bit of paper it's also all there.”

“The reporting on participants is sometimes tricky because we share some of the bike and bookings with the cycle instructor and [sometimes I have to] wait for them to get back to me with their breakdown, because I'll get a list of who's coming, but I won't know the breakdown details...sometimes waiting for that information is a bit frustrating, but again, that's just chasing – if you're organised, you just chase them.”

Schools were asked to submit data via a Smartsheet form, however, once submitted, schools could not view their data. As the London Sport project team could see all data, this occasionally led to additional administrative work for London Sport in confirming with schools the data they had submitted.

As a solution to this, the London Sport project team created an online tracker that schools could view to see what they had uploaded.

Figure 14: Satisfaction with the process for submitting participation data from round 3 onwards



Source: OSF Programme Application forms (n=65)

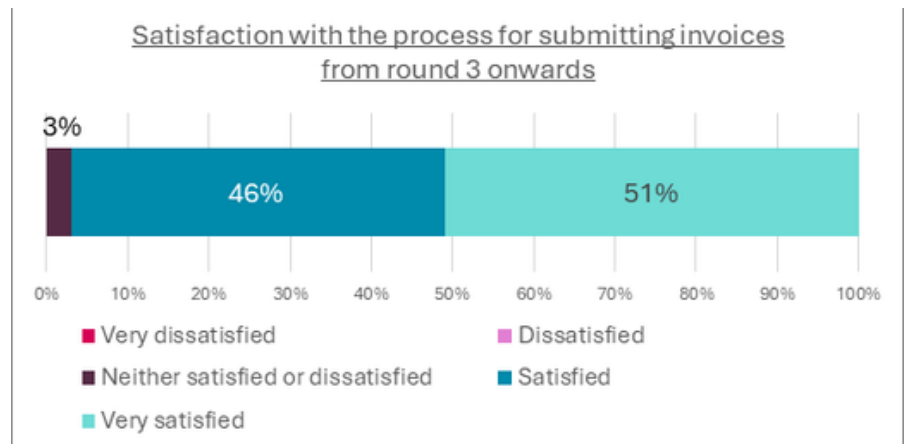


FINDINGS

Almost all of schools (97%, n=65) said they were ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with the process for submitting invoices from round 3 onwards (see figure 15).

The team found processing invoices a time-consuming and process-heavy task due to the volume of invoices but recognised that it is unlikely that efficiencies could be made to improve this task. Whilst a small number of additional London Sport colleagues were brought on to help processing invoices, it would have been beneficial to have a larger number of colleagues supporting.

Figure 15: Satisfaction with the process for submitting invoices from round 3 onwards



Source: OSF Programme Application forms (n=65)

London Sport was rated ‘excellent’ with an NPS score of 78 (out of 100) meaning 83% (n=65) would recommend working with London Sport. There were a variety of reasons for this including:

- Staff were described as helpful, knowledgeable, passionate, and professional
- Staff were easy to contact, responsive, and understood the pressures that schools face
- The application process and ongoing processes (such as data and invoice submissions) were made simple and efficient, and schools felt well-supported throughout
- The communication with schools was consistently praised
- The programme had a significant impact on pupils, the local community, and schools enabling more physical activity sessions to take place



CONCLUSIONS

The Opening Schools Facilities programme was designed to help schools to open their existing sport facilities, including school swimming pools, for a broader range of young people and the wider community by partnering with sporting organisations to help deliver activities.

The majority of projects were aimed at current pupils of each school rather than for the wider community. During the application process, many schools needed encouragement from the London Sport project team to develop community-focused initiatives. The London Sport project team attribute this to several factors:

- School staff naturally prioritised the benefits of physical activity for their pupils, especially given the existing constraints from on school budgets.
- The Department for Education's application questions were not specifically geared towards community use.
- Community engagement typically demands greater resources, including time for relationship-building, than pupil-focused projects.

Participation targets for children and young people in London were exceeded with 479,241 attendances. This is based on 30,605 individual pupils taking part in the programme.

Participation targets for community users in London were exceeded with 36,821 attendances. This is based on 3,880 individual community members taking part in the programme.



CONCLUSIONS

To open their facilities, many schools had to make facility adaptations such as, improving facility access through additional security or by providing access keypads, or improving accessibility. Several schools said capital spending on their facilities, such as repairs or enhancing its maintenance would enable them to open to a greater extent.

Schools also took on additional administrative work to open their facilities out of hours, such as data collection, providing safeguarding checks and health and safety training.

The majority of funding was spent on coaching and equipment for team and individual sports.

Whilst schools managed to form relationships with external organisations to use their facilities, many shared that these were not existing contacts, and they relied on searching online to develop their coach and user organisation networks. Schools said they valued when their local councils or other organisations like London Sport recommending/introducing local coaches or community organisations to them.

The complexity of the DfE fund guidance made it difficult for schools to understand and therefore complete the application form. There were additional challenges for schools meeting funding requirements such as the process for submitting participant data being established 18 months into the programme which meant schools were asked to retrospectively add data from previous months, and, schools being required to upload monthly participant data rather than on a termly basis, which would have suited schools better.



RECOMMENDATIONS

New facilities have been made available to children and young people and community users: opening school facilities could provide additional opportunities to the wider community by providing more local sport and physical activity venues, but more targeted identification of facilities is warranted.

Recommendation: Conducting desk research to identify leisure facilities in each borough alongside school locations could identify “gaps” where there are fewer opportunities for local residents to be active. Strategically targeting these schools to open their facilities to the wider community could improve access to local venues for residents and provide new opportunities for people to be physically active.

However, there is a need to be conscious that not all schools are interested in opening their school facilities: schools highlighted several barriers that are preventing them opening their facilities for community use including: Not having dedicated members of staff to manage lettings effectively, viability (cost vs. profit), safeguarding concerns, security, and storage for equipment.

Recommendation: If London Sport has an ambition to support schools to open their facilities for community use, work should be done to ascertain which schools have an interest in opening to community and only work with those who have ambitions to open facilities.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Wider community access to facilities needs further planning to maintain safeguarding and protect the wider school estate: schools are receptive to opening their facilities, but considerations need to be made when opening to the wider community access such as security and accessibility.

Recommendation: If opening school facilities to the public, consider if facilities have access to water and toilets, and how access to a facility can be controlled.

One of the challenges with opening facilities for community use was limited interest from the community in some initiatives

Recommendation: Build in more research at the start to understand the needs of the community and what activities they want to do, particularly if there is a stronger emphasis on opening facilities for community use.

Funding capital repairs would widen the range of facilities made available through the programme: many schools identified that a barrier with the funding restrictions was that they could not spend anything on capital repairs. Schools said making capital repairs to their facilities would have enabled them to open their facilities to a greater extent.

Recommendation: Consider adapting the current grant funding programme to remove the restriction around capital spend. If this is not possible, consider other fundraising opportunities (through grants, sponsors, and investors) to create an alternative programme that could fund capital repairs.

Schools need help connecting to coaches and organisations that might use their facilities: one of the main challenges schools identified in opening up their facilities externally was finding and building a network of coaching and user organisation contacts. School staff a very busy and identifying new contacts can be time consuming work.

Recommendation: There is an opportunity for local councils or other organisations like London Sport to act as a convenor to recommend and/or introduce local coaches or community organisations.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Schools were worried about the additional administrative burden that came from opening up their facilities: by opening facilities this can bring additional administrative burdens on schools including bookings and invoicing management, user liaison and management and monitoring of facility use, if managed in-house. External agencies can manage these for a school, but this can significantly reduce the financial benefits to schools facing unprecedented budgetary pressures.

Recommendation: To cover the additional staffing overhead costs, the programme should consider incorporating full administrative costs in funding applications. The OSF funding did provide administrative costs for 12 weeks, but not for the full length of projects. External lettings organisations provide an alternative management system, but there are costs associated with these. Organisations such as London Sport who have supported multiple schools to open their facilities, could support this by providing a checklist of policies or best practice examples.

Programme management and associated administrative needs must be factored into programme delivery: When project managing a large funding programme, some tasks, such as processing invoices or reviewing applications, are time-consuming and process heavy.

Recommendation: Build in additional time within the project plan around 'pinch points' or areas of work that take a longer amount of time such as processing invoices or reviewing applications.

If you have any questions about this report, or are interested in working with us, then we would love to hear from you.

Some ways to get involved include:

- Sharing examples, case studies and best practice of other similar projects.
- Telling us about evaluation you're conducting and how you're using what you learn.
- Expressing an interest to work with us directly on specific actions.
- Sharing your ideas and experiences of impact or evaluation.
- Finding out more about the OSF programme.

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