

# The Essex Guide to OPENING YOUR SCHOOL FACILITY

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# CONTEXT ●

Schools for many children and young people are accessible, trusted, and safe spaces that provide the best setting to be active. However, access to these facilities after 3pm and at weekends for community use is often limited and ad-hoc.

We know that many schools across Greater Essex already open their facilities (at some level) for community use outside of school hours and that a high percentage of those that currently do not, would be interested in doing so with additional support and guidance.

Through providing high quality afterschool clubs for your own students and opening the doors of your academy/school out of school hours, your communities would have access to valuable local assets, with a wide range of physical activities, groups and local services to benefit their health and wellbeing.

The purpose of this document is to share our recommendations and model guidance for schools and academy trusts regarding issues and options to consider when looking to make facilities available to the community on a sustainable basis.

This Essex guide has been compiled based on findings from a research report created by our consultant partners Knight, Kavanagh & Page Ltd (KKP), 2022.

# TYPES OF FACILITIES A SCHOOL CAN OFFER

The type and range of school facilities that can be made available/hired to the community is, in theory, extensive and extends well beyond sports facilities.

It can include any of the examples listed to the right.

Clearly, many schools may utilise a combination of these to maximise the opportunity to boost income, and meet the needs of their communities.

## Other



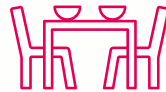
Sports halls and activity halls



Swimming pools



Fitness gyms



Dining/ assembly halls



Library



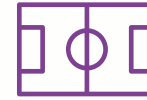
Conference/ meeting rooms



Changing rooms, showers and toilets



Welfare facilities ie. first aid room



Grass pitches



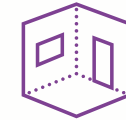
Classrooms/ consultation rooms



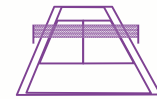
ICT rooms



Playgrounds



Smaller multi-use games areas



Netball, tennis and basketball courts



Athletic tracks



Drama, dance and music studios



Car parks



Technology rooms (cookery, art, textiles)

# WHY OPEN YOUR SCHOOL/ACADEMY FOR COMMUNITY USE?

## Motivations

The motivations for schools in respect of offering community access to their facilities vary considerably. They can include:

- A genuine commitment from governors and executive teams to bringing people from the local community in to use school amenities.
- The desire to place the school at the heart of the community.
- The opportunity it presents to market the school and promote it to prospective pupils/ parents, to build affinity and 'showcase' the quality and breadth of its offer.
- The opportunity to increase commercial and generic revenue returns funds which contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of schools' sports facilities and equipment in the future. Revenues generated are not ring-fenced so surplus income generated can be spent flexibly.
- The opportunity to foster school-club links with clubs that hire school premises and to enhance these by jointly working to enable pupil access to club-based opportunity during extra-curricular and/or out of school hours.
- The broader health and wellbeing benefits to pupils, staff and the community.
- In the context of Ofsted evaluation of school leadership and management – community use can make a major contribution to the extent to which schools are perceived to 'engage effectively with learners and others in their community, including – where relevant – parents, carers, employers and local services'.

## Hassle Factors

Conversely, we understand that 'the hassle factors' which can limit or deter school interest and ambition include:

- Net cost.
- Additional operational staffing requirements and implications.
- The (additional) administrative processes linked to, for example, the taking of bookings and/or collection of hire charges.
- Issues associated with school security and key liabilities.
- The additional wear and tear on school buildings and wider premises.
- The adequacy of storage for additional community equipment (when such space is already stretched in many schools).
- The school need for access to certain spaces at specific times of year.

The key is to ensure that additional work caused is minimised, the effect on school security abated, the physical impact minimal and the cost implications (whether this relates to the generation of a surplus or keeping the net cost of enabling community as low as is possible) optimised.



## THE OUTCOMES SCHOOLS WISH TO ACHIEVE BY OPENING THEIR FACILITIES

Sport England suggests that the primary driver for both primary and secondary schools was to establish themselves as the hub of the local community by offering a safe, trusted, and accessible space for people of all ages to be active during evenings, weekends and holiday periods. Typically, the best outcomes from a well-structured and managed school community include arrangements such as:

- The generation of sufficient income from facility hire to ensure their sustainability in the longer term (i.e., to cover the cost of replacing artificial grass pitch carpets or floor resurfacing/new line markings in sports halls, new décor in publicly available spaces, invest in new (e.g., LED) lighting, purchase new equipment (such as badminton posts or tennis nets etc.).
- Making the community feel welcome at the school and part of the school community.
- Reputational improvements; sharing facilities with the community can make a fundamental difference to how the school is viewed (and treated) by people living in and around its location. A prime marketing opportunity to prospective new pupils and their families.
- Enabling the school's pupils and the wider community to gain access to a range of positive activities to learn, be coached and to play recreationally and competitively out of school hours.
- Establishing links to sports clubs and groups which can provide opportunities for additional coaching/instruction in sports and other activities making a positive contribution to the school curriculum and its extra-curricular offer.
- Helping to make local sporting clubs and activity groups more vibrant and viable by giving them regular affordable access to good quality sports facilities.



# HOW TO OPEN YOUR SCHOOL?



## Trouble shooting

Typical models include:

- Direct provision (management by the school)
- A dual (or joint) use management arrangement – typically with a local authority
- Separate use of same building but under indirect school control
- Separate use of the same building but under alternative user control.

## Operating Models:

KKP's recently produced options appraisal of operating models for Sport England and Active Partnerships which considers the pros and cons for each model is available [here](#).

## Community Use Agreements:

A community use agreement is a valuable way to formalise an agreement which covers the expectations of, and the management and operational arrangements for school facilities. Typically, included in these agreements are hours during which the school's facilities are available, management arrangements and pricing parameters and policy. Templates to produce these are available on the Sport England website [here](#).

Having a strong, trust-based relationship with the agency managing community use is imperative. This needs to encompass, for example, the flexibility to accommodate each other in times of need (unforeseen circumstances).

## Resources required

What needs to be set up and continuously delivered for community use of facilities?



Risk management



Invoicing



Safeguarding policy



School events calendar



General admin / queries



Expectations and perceptions



Marketing and promotions (website, photography etc)



Initial set up requirements, health & safety, insurance, safeguarding, security, pricing etc



Management responsibility for lettings



Access arrangements



Booking systems/ processes (casual/ block bookings/ online etc)



# MAKING IT HAPPEN!

## Programme your facility strategically

Ensure that your programme of use is well thought out, balanced (i.e., includes a range of sports/activities) rather than simply working on a 'first come first served' basis. (A sports hall can be fully booked with 5-a-side side adult or junior football that could play/train outdoors (possibly on your artificial grass/grass pitches). This could, in turn, free up space to cater for netball, badminton or basketball - which could cater for a wider range young people, women and girls etc.

## Develop a 'strategic pricing policy'

A number of the agencies which may have an interest in using your facilities may be commercial (rather than simply being a constituted club or not-for[1]profit entity). For example, a commercial swim school being the dominant hirer of school pools. Consider differentiating between commercial and other users or working commercial hirers harder. If hiring a school pool to a commercial entity, you might, in addition to the hire fee, insist that they teaching a given number of school pupils to swim as part of the hire arrangement. A sliding scale of charges is also an acceptable approach to encompass a variety of hirers.

## Reinvest surpluses

Generating sufficient income to enable the school, possibly in partnership with specific hirers i.e. gymnastics) to invest and enhance sports facilities (and/or equipment) to the mutual benefit of the school and community users.

## Promote and present what you do positively

School leadership teams, governors, NGBs and local partners recognise the value and are keen to continue to invest and support community use at the school for the longer term.



**A useful way forward is to consult other local schools to see how they manage lettings, understanding their challenges and the pros and cons for the systems and process they have chosen to apply.**

Factors considered, include:

- Issues related to location, access, security, 'manageability' etc.
- Facilities programming, booking processes and existing use patterns, charges etc
- Current marketing, communications and advertising.
- The facility user experience; customer care etc.
- Skills/knowledge gaps in schools – related to the need to maximise the business/ community opportunities available as a result of opening facilities to the public.
- Overcoming key challenges and perceptions: (manageable) number of people on site, parking etc.
- Realistic options to offer (and the desirability of offering) casual bookings; booking and staffing requirements, payment, insurance etc.



## MARKETING YOUR SCHOOL



### Low cost and simple marketing techniques include:

- Promote via your pupils and staff – many of them will be members or have family who are members of local sports clubs.
- Update website and use local media/social media routes to publicise availability and, when a booking is made, work with the user groups to promote this community opportunity jointly – again with and through pupils, staff, parents and local networks.
- Get the school used during school holiday periods for HAF clubs and other mechanisms to do good and demonstrate the importance local community relationships.

## MAXIMISE SUCCESS

To ensure success, there is a requirement to operate in a business-like way to ensure maximum benefit to the school, this includes:

- Consideration to seasonal sports and how best you can work with interested parties to ensure there are bookings in place all year round.
- Insist on hirers committing to (and paying for) full booking period, rather than ad hoc. arrangements. This may mean the hirer has to pay for period when they may not make full use of the facilities, or have less participation, but does ensure a high level of user commitment and that maximum revenue is generated.
- Ensure groups pay by direct payment methods in advance. Payment by cash/cheque simply creates an extra administrative task.
- Minimise impact on school resources. For example use 'key holder groups' giving responsibility to hirers for letting themselves in and locking up when they leave. Installing a keypad or 'zoning of facilities', saves on costs of site supervision and can be the difference between generating a surplus or a loss.
- Consider half hall/pitch or single court bookings if they can be paired with other lettings to ensure the whole venue is being used.
- Set up bookings on the hour / half hour and back-to-back to ensure maximum income is generated. Short time slots are difficult to manage and reduces income. (Change over time will have to be factored into letting agreements and understood by all parties.)
- If you're renting out more than one space and they all need use of changing rooms, stagger session start/finish times to ease the pressure on changing space.
- Use of local networks to publicise availability/coordinate supply.
- Consider the booking process from the hirers perspective, making sure it is easy to use and doesn't put additional pressures on school staff. Either use a website that allows interested parties to see what's available and the pricing, or have an online system to directly book, will make queries easier to respond to.



## FUNDING

This document has been focused on the sharing of best practice, learned experience and recommendations for schools, to support the opening of school facilities out of school hours and at the weekends. We hope it has proved useful and thought provoking and supports you to take the steps required to open your doors to your wider communities wherever possible.

This can (and has) been achieved by many schools across the county without the need for external funding, through the inclusion of administration tasks into existing roles or via external management companies. Any improvements to booking systems and marketing along with costs associated with extended hours for site staff and utilities were realised through the sustained income generated from these lettings.

It is recognised that staff capacity has hit an all-time limit, and in order to support those communities with the most barriers to physical activity and appropriate groups/facilities, the DfE have launched their Opening Schools Facilities investment fund. Managed and supported via Active Essex (for Greater Essex), this funding will target support to schools with a high percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals, from low affluent families, culturally diverse groups, and pupils with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities). This will result in around 40 selected schools signing up to a 2 year development and delivery plan agreement. The number of schools engaged will be reviewed throughout the process.

Take a look at the Sport England Small Grants offer [here](#).

Visit the Opening School Facilities page on the Active Essex website [here](#), for further information. Or email us at: [cyp@activeessex.org](mailto:cyp@activeessex.org)



## USEFUL LINKS AND RESOURCES

Sport England has a range of resources and templates available to support schools to open their facilities in an inclusive, accessible and sustainable way.

Take a look at their page [here](#).

To express your interest in working with Active Essex, or to find out further information about opening your school facility, get in touch [here](#).