

**ACTIVE
SCHOOLS**
IN ESSEX



INTERIM REPORT 2025-26

Date issued: March 2026

ACTIVE SCHOOLS IN ESSEX

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Active Essex, funded by Essex County Council Public Health, is delivering a transformational programme to help schools embed physical activity into everyday life. This interim report captures progress from September 2024 to January 2026, focusing on what's working, what's changing, and what comes next.

Children in Essex are not moving enough. **Fewer than half meet the Chief Medical Officer's daily activity guidelines, leaving over 120,000 children** missing out on vital health and learning benefits. Schools are uniquely placed to change this.

Evidence shows that sport and physical activity improves:

- School readiness
- Behaviour and attendance
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Academic attainment
- Long-term life chances

As the report states, physical activity is a “powerful lever for improving the wider determinants of health” and aligns with Essex's ambition to help every child thrive.



The programme has two core elements:



System Approach



School Engagement

Over the first 16 months of the programme we engaged with **37 Essex Schools** in total, testing different approaches to our work and enlistment of schools,

To date, the Full CAS model is proving most effective, offering detailed auditing, action planning, CPD, system connections and ongoing practitioner support. Established relationships aided school engagement with the bespoke approach being key.



Visiting Howbridge Infants to complete their audit

IMPACT

Children Are More Active

71% of schools* have already recorded an increase in pupils meeting daily activity guidelines.

(*using Full CAS approach)

Behaviour, Wellbeing & Readiness to Learn Are Improving

Teachers report:

- Better concentration
- Higher engagement
- Improved behaviour for learning
- Reduced incidents at lunchtime

Students say movement “helps me concentrate” and “refreshes our brains.”

Whole-School Culture Is Shifting

Profiling scores show significant improvements for schools across the following areas:

- Policy
- Environments
- Staff (stakeholders)
- Opportunities across the day and beyond



WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

- Deep practitioner support accelerates change.
- Schools value expertise more than ‘one off’ additional project funding.
- Place-based working strengthens insight and alignment.
- CAS auditing builds accountability and sustainable progress.
- Staff perceptions of physical activity are shifting beyond PE.
- System connections are deepening and creating ripple effects.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

To maintain momentum, the programme will:

- Continue broadening understanding of physical activity across the whole day and beyond.
- Balance school autonomy with structured touchpoints
- Embed a continuous audit cycle
- Strengthen system alignment to reduce fragmentation
- Sustain practitioner support to drive long-term change





Introduction

In September 2024 Active Essex were awarded 100k from Essex County Council Public Health for a transformational project entitled, Active Schools in Essex.

This is an interim progress report, which focuses on delivery from September '25 - January '26 in order to share programme approach, ways of working, impact and future recommendations.

This programme has 2 key elements:

System Approach:

Identifying the 'systems' surrounding and engaging with schools (ECC and beyond).

How the 'system' surrounding schools can work together more efficiently through:

- Identifying/creating shared outcomes
- Efficiencies in approach/contact with schools
- Linking opportunities and resources
- Improving/sharing school knowledge and insight

School Engagement:

- Encouraging schools to taking a 'Whole School Approach to becoming an Active School'
- Understanding schools preferred ways of engagement
- Enabling SLT to review current practice and to identify and address priority areas for change
- Implement change through bespoke support, subject matter expertise and whole system approach.

The Need

The Sport England Active Lives, Children and Young People Survey (December 2025) reveals that under half (49.1%) of children in England meet the Chief Medical Officer's minimum guideline of 60+ minutes of daily activity.

There are still over 120,000 children in Greater Essex who are not moving enough to gain the potential health and learning benefits.

Improved system alignment and school engagement leads to collectively contributing to the following outcomes:

Creating Active Schools Aligns to Strong Foundations Portfolio

3.b Education

Our purpose is to continue to support the Education System in Essex to develop in a way that supports all children and young people with a specific focus on the vulnerable groups: SEND, Disadvantaged, Children in Care. We are developing our place-based approach through the delivery of key projects and Levelling Up initiatives within Harlow, Tendring and Basildon.

The Rationale

Essex is committed to enabling all children and young people to obtain the best educational outcomes to support a successful transition to adult life and optimising opportunities for employment. The education system has been significantly impacted by covid, presenting challenges and opportunities for ECC to transform education services.

2030 outcome overview



Outcome 1

ECC will be the "Champion of Children", driving and enabling an excellent, equitable, safe and inclusive education system across Essex.



Outcome 2

All young people in Essex will be prepared for adulthood and have equitable access to future employment and independence opportunities.



Outcome 3

We will deliver a high quality continuous professional development offer to promote a workforce that is skilled, competent, diverse & agile.



Outcome 4

We are optimising technology developments to drive forward our approach to excellence, equity, safety and inclusion in the education system.

School Readiness and Best Start in Life

Recent guidance emphasises that gross motor skill development is the primary indicator of "School Readiness."

Children with poor physical development at age 5 are 40% less likely to achieve the expected levels in literacy and numeracy.

The 'Best Start in Life' Framework (Ofsted & PHE, 2025)



Behaviour and Attendance

Research from the Youth Sport Trust (2025) highlights that 77% of teachers reported a direct positive impact on pupil attainment, attendance, or behaviour following increased physical activity interventions.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Children with 'Multiple Positive Attitudes' towards being active (confidence, competence, and enjoyment) report significantly higher levels of well-being and school engagement.



Levels of Attainment

Active children are 20% more likely to achieve the highest grades in core subjects like Mathematics and English compared to their sedentary peers.

World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Centre for Health Protection (July 2025)

Young people with higher attainment at age 16–18 are far more likely to be in sustained employment, education, or training in early adulthood'

Department for Education, Destinations of KS4 and 16–18 Students (Official National Statistics)

Higher-qualified young people have higher employment rates and lower economic inactivity.

ONS (Official National Statistics) Labour Force Survey (A06 data set) Labour Market Status

Physical Health and Prevention

The 2025 "Country Cards" for the UK indicate that physical inactivity accounts for 1 in 6 deaths and costs the UK economy over £7.4 billion annually (including NHS costs and lost productivity).

The Global Observatory for Physical Activity (GoPAI, 2025)

Reducing Inequalities

Physical activity is a "social vaccine." Children in the lowest income deciles have 35% less access to green space, making school-based PE the most critical intervention for reducing health inequalities.

Faculty of Public Health (FPH) Position Paper (2025)

Climate and Environment

Schools promoting "active playgrounds" and travel plans contribute to a measurable reduction in localised particulate matter, protecting pupils from significant environmental hazards.

The Air Quality and Active Travel Study (The Lancet Public Health, 2024)

Programme/Framework

There remains a limited understanding of the conditions that enable schools to embed physical activity into everyday school and community life, and the subsequent impact this has on children and young people.

One of the core challenges is the complex system schools operate within.

Through this programme we:

- Identify the 'systems' surrounding and engaging with schools (ECC and beyond)
- Connect these systems to work more efficiently by:
 - Creating shared outcomes
 - Reducing duplication in how partners engage schools
 - Linking opportunities, resources and expertise
 - Working 'at place' to understand local need
 - Improving and sharing school insight

In order for a school to adopt a whole-school approach to physical activity, within this programme we set about to:

- Understand how to effectively engage with schools and maximise impact.
- Enable senior leaders to review current practice and to identify and address priority areas for change.
- Implement change through bespoke support, subject matter expertise and use of a whole system approach.

By embedding physical activity into the culture of schools, we help young people build:

- Self-management skills
- Resilience and emotional regulation
- Confidence to be active in community settings
- Healthy habits that track into adulthood

These are foundational capabilities that support long-term independence, reduce future reliance on services, and contribute to better life outcomes.

Physical activity is a powerful lever for improving the wider determinants of health. A whole-school approach supports:

- Improved mental wellbeing (reduced anxiety, improved mood, better concentration)
- Stronger social connection and belonging
- Improved behaviour and engagement in learning
- Greater readiness for adulthood, employment and community participation

These benefits align directly with Essex's ambitions for health creation, where communities, schools and systems work together to create the conditions for children to thrive.

School Selection

Schools were initially selected based on established relationships with Active Essex through previous engagement and participation in programmes such as 'Opening schools Facilities', Key Stage 1 Awards and CPD course attendance.

We selected schools where there was 'an energy' at senior leadership level to develop their approach to physical activity provision.

We initially targeted 25 schools, surpassing this in January 2026, engaging a total of 37 schools.

Three approaches were used to initially work with schools (Figure 1).

Approach	Coffee Catch Up	Online Audit	Full Creating Active Schools (CAS)
Explanation	Informal coaching discussion with school staff to reflect on the use of the whole school approach to physical activity. In terms of support, deemed as a 'light' approach, which is reliant on schools to develop an action plan and undertake next steps independently.	A digital audit consisting of 30 questions to be independently completed by school staff. On completion, a bespoke Action plan was developed for the school/ In terms of support, deemed as a 'medium' approach, which is reliant on the school to undertake next steps independently.	Using the CAS Framework and Online Hub, an audit is undertaken with Active Essex support. Subsequent action planning and support is offered to undertake next steps. In terms of support, deemed as a 'heavy' approach, which is collaborative and supportive throughout each stage.

Why schools wanted to join:



The Agreement/Key Actions

Approach	Coffee Catch Up	Online Audit	Full Creating Active Schools (CAS)
Actions / Timeline	Contact school and offer support (email or face-to-face). Organise Coffee Catch Up meeting time/date (face-to-face). Undertake Coffee Catch Up meeting.	Contact school and offer support (email or face-to-face). Share Online audit. Develop a Bespoke action plan. Share Action Plan. Email to offer any further support.	• Contact schools and arrange initial support and audit meetings. • Complete CAS Hub profiling/audits and support schools to sign up and engage. • Facilitate action planning sessions and share agreed actions and next steps. • Connect schools with relevant programmes, partners, and opportunities. • Deliver tailored support, including training, audits, site visits, resources, tools, and funding guidance. • Provide Community of Practice sessions and regular 1:1 school reviews. • Support schools to re-profile on the CAS Hub, monitor progress, and adapt support to meet ongoing needs.
Number of Schools (as of January 2026)	6 schools	9 schools	CAS Year 1 (as of July 25) = 9 schools CAS Year 2 x (as of January 26) = 13 schools

A total of 37 schools engaged (as of January 2026)

Feedback gathered from school staff and practitioner reflections, during and after the auditing process allowed for a clear judgement on the most suitable approach to adopt.

- The 'coffee catch up' approach was heavily reliant on school staff to initiate actions independently, with limited support/time on offer. Some school staff were lacking in knowledge in relation to physical activity and whole school approaches, so further expertise was deemed as necessary to enable them to be capable of making meaningful changes in their settings. Follow up communication with each setting (those who responded), noted their desire for further 'hands-on' support (The Downs Primary).

Feedback gathered from school staff and practitioner reflections, during and after the auditing process allowed for a clear judgement on the most suitable approach to adopt.

The 'coffee catch up' approach was heavily reliant on school staff to initiate actions independently, with limited support/time on offer. Some school staff were lacking in knowledge in relation to physical activity and whole school approaches, so further expertise was deemed as necessary to enable them to be capable of making meaningful changes in their settings. Follow up communication with each setting (those who responded), noted their desire for further 'hands-on' support (The Downs Primary).

The 'online audit' approach was time-consuming. Developing the initial audit, analysing the audit and developing subsequent, bespoke action plans took at least 2 days per school. School staff's feedback was positive around the level of detail within the action plan, 'this will help us determine which area to develop next and inform how we utilise funding' (Purford Green Primary School).

Why we selected the Full CAS Approach:

- An agreement of further follow up support was deemed as 'advantageous' and 'time-saving' (Braiswick Primary).
- The CAS online hub was noted as 'very detailed' and 'helpful to evidence progress moving forwards' (Alderton Junior School).
- The CAS online hub 'enabled data sharing to target interventions and connect wider system opportunities' (Active Schools in Essex Development Lead)
- The access to instant CPD support (delivered by Active Schools Development Lead) was noted as 'invaluable and smooth' (Hatfield Peverel Infant School)

Recruitment of our CAS lead was internal, extending the role of our Education Practitioner. This individual has extensive subject matter/local knowledge and experience as well as an excellent reputation and existing trusted relationships with Essex schools. Working alongside Active Essex CYP lead we were able to ensure rapid mobilisation of the programme and also plan for the programme to extend (within budget) to cover 2 academic years (rather than 1 year). This was essential due to the timelines in alignment with the school academic year.

The strategic decision to work at place in Harlow was made for Year 2. This ensures alignment to the place-based expansion work, links to additional funding and allows us to explore a different approach to recruitment of schools and system alignment. Our learning at this stage leant towards the 'Full CAS Approach' as the most successful so the full cohort was engaged in this way.

We are closely aligned to a PHAB (Public Health Accelerator Bid) project which links to the vision of whole school approaches to physical activity within the school day. This is currently underway through delivery from Castle Point and Rochford School Sport Partnership, a hugely successful and well established infrastructure in that area.

Collaboratively we are focused on sharing our learnings, impact and creating the conditions to enable schools and young people to thrive. Working through the place based system, this approach is being replicated (and funded) in Basildon as a catalyst to begin to create a PE and School Sport delivery structure in this area.

Headline Impact

By prioritising the Creating Active Schools (CAS) audits over quantitative Physical Activity (PA) tracking, the programme intentionally focused on the 'Conditions for Change' (Capability, Opportunity, and Motivation) rather than just the 'Output' (minutes of movement).

'System Readiness' over 'Metrics'

In the first two years, the goal was cultural shift, not just counting steps. It was deemed that baseline PA levels may be invalid if a school doesn't yet have a robust culture of reporting. The CAS audits provided a qualitative baseline of the school's policy, environment, and stakeholder buy-in, which is a more accurate predictor of long-term success.

Avoiding 'Measurement Fatigue'

We recognise that schools in Essex are under extreme administrative pressure. Introducing heavy data-sharing requirements on entry would have created a barrier to engagement. It was ensured the relationship and trust were built first—increasing the likely validity of the baseline data collected.

The 'Test and Learn' Nature of the Pilot

As an explorative programme, the evaluation framework was designed to be iterative. Identifying the need for more robust quantitative data as the project matured is evidence of a responsive evaluation strategy.

Current Findings

At the time of PA data capture, 7 out of 11 data sets were completed.

- 5 data sets show progress
- 2 data sets stayed the same
- 2 data sets not shared due to time of entry
- 1 data set deemed invalid
- 1 data set missing - school unresponsive

**a completed data set comprises a PA baseline (time of programme entry) and comparable January 2026 data.*



Pupils are more physically active

71% of participating schools recorded an increase in pupils meeting the Chief Medical[LV1] Officer's (CMO) recommendation of 60 minutes of physical activity on average per day as a direct result of their engagement with CAS.

Figure 1: Changes in activity levels – Focused groups

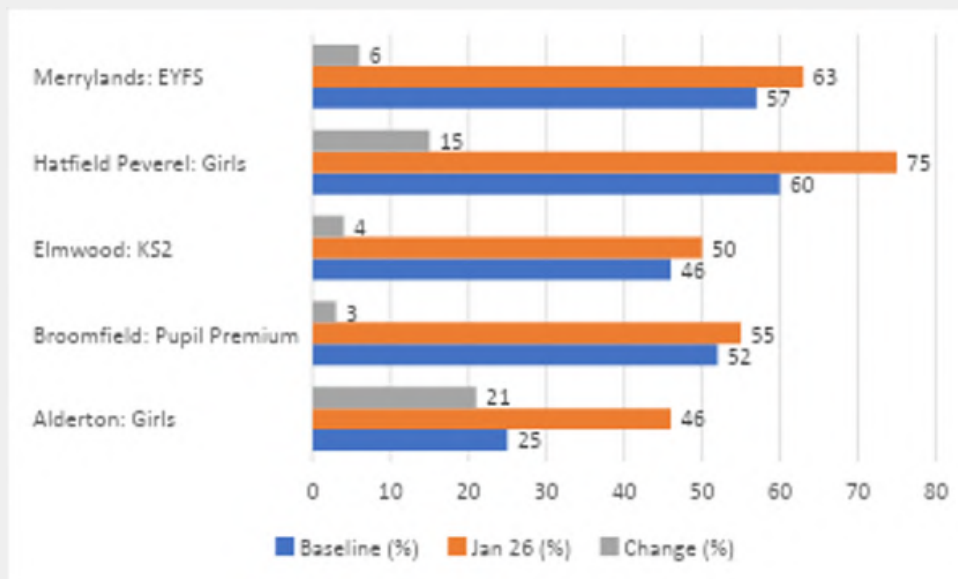
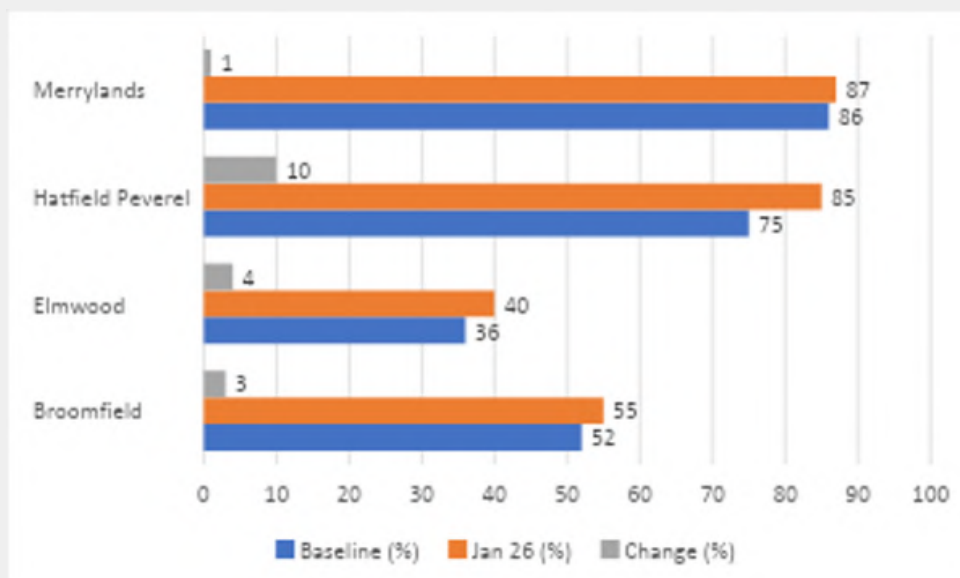


Figure 2: Changes in activity levels – Changes in activity levels – KS1 pupils



Pupils behaviour, wellbeing and readiness to learn has improved

Data collected by the Hatfield Peverel Infant School on the number of behavioural incidents occurring during lunchtimes shows a drop from 40 in the 2024 autumn term (before CAS) to 25 in the comparable 2025 term.

"Implementation of the new lunchtime Action Plan, new playleader and games has helped with this (reduction)."

(Teacher)

Further findings are reported below in the Hatfield Peverel Infants case study (Appendix 1).

Alderton Junior School note the impact on behaviour for learning.

"Embedding physical activity across the school day is really impacting levels of engagement and readiness to learn."

(Teacher)

"I like moving during lessons. It helps me concentrate."

(Student)

Further findings are reported below in the Alderton Junior School case study (Appendix 2).

Positive impacts seen across the whole school

"Adopting a 'whole of school' approach appears to be most effective for increasing physical activity: incorporating curricular learning with the culture, ethos, environment, and engagement of the wider school community. Physical activity isn't just about sport; it's about creating active cultures that support every child's health, development, and academic success."

WHO Global Research (2024-2025)

Changes are happening. Use of the CAS Profiling tool, offers schools the opportunity to track their progress in granular detail against the actions set out in their bespoke action plans.



Figure 4 shows:

- Increases in profiling scores, by boxes shaded in green .
- Percentage increases in this area (numbers).
- Actions and support on offer, which has aided impact as part of the Full CAS Approach - underlined.
- Which aspect of each of the four CAS Framework areas have shown the greatest increase in score throughout the year (bold).

Figure 4: Changes in Baseline Profile Scores, Key Areas of Improvement and Actions

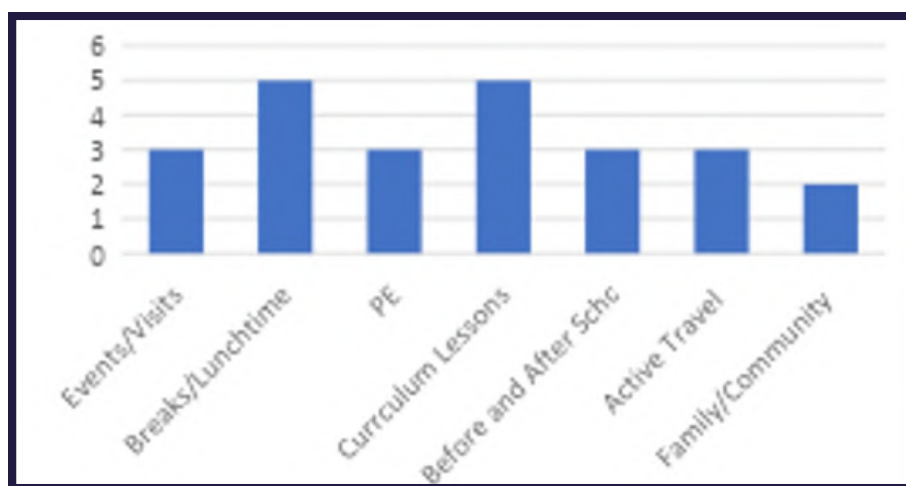
School	Profiling Score – change on Baseline			
	Policy	Environments	Stakeholders	Opportunities
Alderton Junior School	Monitoring & Evaluation +10% <u>1:1 Strategic planning to develop tracking systems</u>	Classrooms & Corridors +20% <u>Delivered whole staff training on PA in the classroom</u>	School Leaders +33% <u>1:1 meetings linking PA to SIP</u>	Curriculum lessons +33% <u>Linked in with ECC Outdoor Education Pilot</u>
Bardfield Academy	School improvement +40% <u>1:1 meetings linking PA to SIP</u>	Outdoor Space +30% <u>Linked in to London Marathon Foundation bid Funding for playground development</u>	Teachers/Other staff +20% <u>Delivered lunchtime training for staff</u>	PE lessons +25% <u>Strategic planning to develop curriculum progression and content</u>
Broomfield Primary	Monitoring & Evaluation +10% <u>1:1 Strategic planning to develop tracking systems</u>	Classrooms & corridors +17% <u>Delivered whole staff training on PA in the classroom</u>	Teachers/Other staff +18% <u>Delivered whole staff training on quality of teaching and learning in PE</u>	Before & After School Clubs +13% <u>Linked in with School Games Organiser and local networks</u>
Elmwood Primary	Monitoring & Evaluation +13% <u>1:1 Strategic planning to develop tracking systems</u>	Outdoor Space +18% <u>Supported in auditing provision and strategic planning of improvements</u>	Teachers/Other staff +33% <u>Delivered network CPD x 2</u>	Active Travel +50% <u>Linked in with Active Travel team to develop action plan</u>
Hatfield Peverel Infants	Monitoring & Evaluation +30% <u>1:1 Strategic planning to develop tracking systems</u> <u>Supported recruiting new playtime leader</u>	Classroom & corridors +17% <u>1:1 Strategic planning to develop tracking systems</u>	School Leaders +17% <u>1:1 meetings linking PA to SIP</u>	Playtimes +8% <u>Site visit and co-creation of playground provision</u> <u>Delivered staff training on active play</u>
Merrylands Primary	Communications +7% <u>1:1 Idea sharing using case study examples</u>	No Change	Parents & guardians +6% <u>1:1 Idea sharing using case study examples</u>	Active Travel +75% <u>Linked in with Active Travel team to develop action plan</u>
Oak View School	Monitoring & Evaluation +40% <u>Supported delivery of whole school training</u> <u>1:1 strategic planning</u>	Outdoor Space +10% <u>Supported funding access for outdoor equipment</u>	Teachers/Other staff +11% <u>Linked in with SEND Specialist training opportunities</u>	Wider Community +50% <u>Linked in with School Games Organiser and Inclusion Lead (YST)</u>
North Crescent Primary	Communications +27% <u>1:1 Idea sharing using case study examples</u>	Classrooms & corridors +5% <u>1:1 Idea sharing using case study examples</u>	No Change	Events/Visits +13% <u>Linked in with School Games Organiser and local networks</u>

Each school is working on areas deemed suitable for their needs, linked to whole school priorities. By developing policy, environments, stakeholders and opportunities we are aiming for whole school/ system change.

Evidence from the EEF (Education Endowment Foundation) suggests that when movement is "de-siloed" (moved out of just PE lessons and into the whole day — active travel or active math lessons), it has a +2 month impact on academic attainment, effectively linking health to the school's core mission of learning.

Figure 5: 'Opportunities' showing improvement in profiling scores

Figure 5 (below) shows the development in opportunities created as a result of the Creating Active School Programme (using the CAS profiling tool).



Note on Data Validity

It is recognised that shared PA data across the cohort varies in consistency. This is a deliberate result of our 'Proportionate Universalism' approach, allowing schools to focus on behavioural audits before moving to rigorous reporting. The upcoming Year 3 Evaluation Framework will formalise these reporting timelines to provide a robust, unified data set, building upon the qualitative foundations established in the pilot phases.

1. Professional Collaboration & System Integration

Learnings & Successes

- **Strategic Relationship Building:** Establishing direct connections with Senior Leadership Teams (SLT) and Subject Curriculum Leaders has proven to be a critical success factor. Leveraging these existing relationships significantly eases the onboarding process and fosters immediate, high-level collaboration.
- **Infrastructure Synergy & System Connectivity:** Utilising existing school and county infrastructures has resulted in exceptionally strong engagement. The role of Active Essex is highly valued for providing connections into the wider system, such as linking schools with the ECC Active Travel team, leveraging additional funding and linking to Public Health workstreams to avoid duplication.
- **The Power of Practitioner Expertise:** The depth of practitioner knowledge directly influences programme efficiency. Being embedded within the Active Essex ecosystem enables practitioners to signpost schools to high-value opportunities with precision. Direct delivery from practitioner reduces barriers to schools and increases pace of working.
- **System Alignment & Scaling:** Early engagement and a collaborative 'test and learn' approach are building a unified understanding of shared outcomes. This success is evidenced by a second cohort of 11 schools now established for development in Harlow.
- **Intelligence Gathering:** Working in a place-based manner allows for the collection of rich, local, and shared intelligence, providing 'boots on the ground' insight, opportunities and connection that traditional data often misses.

2. Auditing & Action Planning

Learnings & Successes

- **Deep Insight & Accountability:** The supported auditing process (CAS profiling online tool) is met with strong positivity. Schools have established strong foundations for a sustainable CAS journey through the use of this tool and the creation of bespoke action plans.
- **Enhanced Monitoring:** Schools now have a much clearer understanding of how active their students are through improved monitoring processes integrated during the audit phase.
- **Strategic Capacity over Capital:** Schools demonstrated a high level of engagement by leaning into the practitioner's capacity and expertise rather than requesting additional funding, proving that expert guidance is a primary driver of change.
- **Physical Literacy & Pupil Voice:** Utilising physical literacy-informed auditing has significantly improved the understanding of inactivity. This allows for the authentic integration of pupil voice, ensuring interventions are meaningful to the children.
- **Collaborative Precision:** Joint auditing ensures that support is targeted and aligned with the specific needs of the school community, providing a unified health profile that can be shared with system partners.

3. School Engagement & Sustainability

Learnings & Successes

- **Empowered Staff Confidence:** Dedicated practitioner support acts as a catalyst for growth, accelerating subtle but impactful changes to school policy and the physical environment.
- **Flexible, Needs-Led Delivery:** The 'Full CAS' approach is proving highly flexible. It allows schools to progress at different rates due to resource constraints or competing priorities while addressing a wide range of opportunities.
- **Bespoke, Place-Based Action:** Impact is significantly higher when actions are tied directly to the School Development Plan (SDP). This has enabled schools to focus on diverse areas, from curriculum and break times to reaching out to parents to encourage walking and cycling.
- **Sustainable Pacing & Marginal Gains:** Allowing schools to progress at their own pace prevents them from feeling overwhelmed and leads to more embedded, lasting transformation.

4. Perceptions & CPD Needs

Learnings & Successes

- **Whole-School Cultural Shift:** There is a visible shift in perception; staff now have a greater understanding of the need and benefits of active schools, moving beyond viewing physical activity solely as 'PE.'
- **Strategic Communications:** Consistent, high-quality communication touchpoints have proven effective in de-siloing health and wellbeing, placing it at the heart of the school's mission.
- **Empowering the Wider Workforce:** Ongoing CPD has successfully started to upskill staff across the entire school spectrum, creating a more unified and confident approach to active learning.

The above contributed to the achievement of our key impact measures. (see below)

	Baseline	Target (July 25)	Actual (July 25)	Actual (January 26)
Schools engaged in Creating Active Schools	0	25	22	37
Action plans written	0	22	22	30
Policies: test and learn improvements evidenced	0	5	10	18
Environment: test and learn improvements evidenced	0	5	6	17
Stakeholders: test and learn improvements evidenced	0	5	14	22
Opportunities: test and learn improvements evidenced	0	5	17	24
Test and learns started	0	20	22	37
MATs engaged	0	3	2	2
School leaders championing whole school approaches to physical activity	0	22	22	37
Framework created for whole school approaches to physical activity	0	1	1	1
Evaluation report for whole school approaches to physical activity	0	1	1	1
Whole school approaches to physical activity in Essex Community of Practice	0	1	1	3
Recommendation report for whole school approaches for healthy lifestyles	0	1	1	1

5. Ripple Effect Mapping

Ripple Effect Mapping is a way of capturing the wider, often unexpected impacts that emerge when people and organisations work collaboratively. It helps us see not just the planned outcomes, but the secondary and tertiary effects, the subtle shifts in relationships, behaviours and opportunities that signal deeper system change taking root.

Through joined-up working at both place and system level, we're beginning to see real 'ripple effects'. Teams are connecting more naturally, barriers and questions are being resolved more quickly, and deeper relationships are forming that help us identify and progress new opportunities.

This is a key success of working in this way. See APPENDIX 3

Recommendations and Next Steps

- **Broadening the Definition of PA:** Despite progress, many staff still default to equating physical activity only with sport/PE. Continued, diverse CPD is required to demonstrate how PA can be integrated into non-traditional areas, such as active classrooms and transitional periods.
- **Balancing Autonomy and Momentum:** The challenge remains in ensuring that this 'bespoke' pace does not lead to stagnation; future delivery must balance school autonomy with consistent, structured momentum-building touchpoints.
- **Continuous Cycle:** To maintain momentum, the auditing process should be viewed as a continuous cycle rather than a one-off event, requiring a framework that supports both the initiation and the long-term continuation of development work.
- **Practitioner Support:** Regular contact (Communities of Practice, Action Planning meetings etc) mean that schools remain accountable for their ownership of the action plan. Embedding these structures will support the shared ownership and gradual transition towards embedded practice.
- **Pacing & Action:** While support is high, it does not always translate immediately into system-partner action. As school involvement in CAS deepens, these wider system connections will become even more critical to success.
- **Addressing System Fragmentation:** Some systems surrounding Children and Young People (CYP) remain disconnected, leading to ad-hoc support offers from an Essex County Council (ECC) perspective. Further connections and understanding of the CAS programme alongside system partners is needed to embed work effectively.
- **Intensity of Support:** Evidence suggests that 'lighter touch' versions of support do not yield the same rate of progress or impact as dedicated, deep-dive practitioner involvement.

The progress made so far shows what becomes possible when schools, system partners and practitioners pull in the same direction: children move more, staff feel empowered, environments become richer, and whole-school cultures begin to shift. The evidence is clear—when physical activity is embedded into everyday school life, it strengthens behaviour, wellbeing, readiness to learn and long-term health outcomes for every child. But this is only the beginning.

To truly unlock the potential of Essex's young people, we must continue building the conditions that allow active schools to thrive: deeper system alignment, sustained practitioner support, and a shared commitment to making movement a core part of the school day. The ripple effects already emerging across the county show that this approach works—not as a short-term intervention, but as a catalyst for lasting change.

By continuing this work, we are not just increasing activity levels; we are shaping healthier schools, stronger communities, and brighter futures for children across Essex. The momentum is here. Now is the moment to build on it.

Full programme evaluation to be released September 2026

Appendix

Appendix 1: Hatfield Peverel Infants Case Study

In early 2025 the school used the CAS Framework to identify a range of improvements, including developing activity opportunities for students during the lunchtime break by making better use of the playground.

With the support of Active Essex, a new playground layout was created, based upon a site visit to another school, as well as research with both staff and students into their attitudes and needs. A new play leader was also recruited, staff trained, and a varied play plan introduced.

The new playground layout and related activities, which also include more sedentary activities, has been well received by both staff and students:

“The new zones/play areas are working well.” (Teacher)

“The new basketball hoops are great and make me jump.” (Student)

“I like colouring because we can draw whatever we like.” (Student)

“The skipping ropes are great and when I skip, I can do 37 skips.” (Student)

A key aim of the CAS Framework is to provide benefits that go beyond only increased levels of physical activity. Data collected by the school on the number of behavioural incidents occurring during lunchtimes shows a drop from 40 in the 2024 autumn term (before the playground reorganisation) to 25 in the comparable 2025 term. Although this change can be due to a range of factors, the school has said:

“Implementation of the new lunchtime Action Plan, new playleader and games has helped with this (reduction).”

The school has reported increased levels of activity amongst pupils, with 92% of Early Years students and 85% KS1 students meeting the Government's activity targets in January 2026.

These amount to respective increases of 12% and 10% over the March 2025 figures.

Appendix 2: Alderton Junior School Case Study

This school has used the CAS Framework to increase the skills of school staff to introduce physical activities into their non-PE curriculum lessons, as well as helping parents and guardians to understand the importance of physical activity, including the use of more Active Travel modes on journeys to and from school.

Again, with the support of Active Essex, the school carried out a review of its current physical activity provision and needs and then created an action plan. This plan has already involved:
Holding a workshop with parents and guardians to highlight local activity opportunities and the benefits to their children of being active.

- Involvements in the ECC Outdoor Education Pilot
- Training staff in delivering physically active learning across the curriculum.
- Improvements to the corridor and classroom areas of the school to allow more opportunities for physical activity across the curriculum.
- The launch of an Active Travel plan for the school.
- Launch of a Daily Mile challenge to engage students in 15 minutes of physical activity daily and including parents bi-monthly.

"Children that wouldn't normally participate much in lessons have been more active, particularly some of the SEND pupils as they can access the learning in a different way." (She gave the example of using the Ninja maths activity). Year 3 teacher

"We have been trying a lot more outside learning as part of the Essex Outdoor Learning pilot project. During an RE activity with mind maps which we did outside, the pupils were more engaged and stayed focussed and on task much more so than they would have if we had done the same activity at our tables inside." Year 5 teacher

"Daily Mile helps us to refresh our brains and think more clearly." Y6 pupil

"Daily Mile helps raise my heart rate and fitness and I like the extra time outside." Year 4 pupil

The school has also reported increased levels of activity amongst pupils, with 46% of girls and 21% of SEND students meeting the Government's activity targets in January 2026. These amount to respective increases of 21% and 6% over the March 2025 figures.

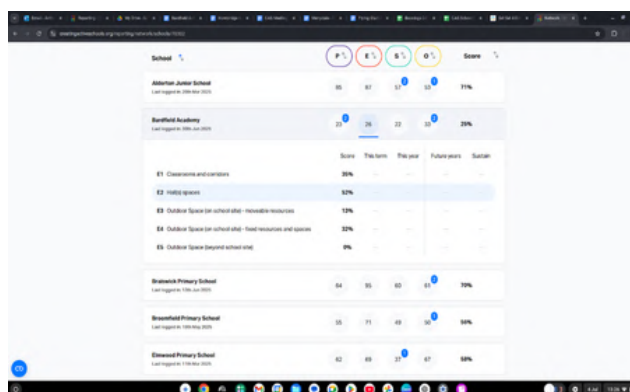


Appendix 3: Ripple Effect Highlights

LME Daily Mile Active Playgrounds example (below)

Bardfield Primary completed their CAS audit in April 2025.

The Bardfield audit noted the low ranking of 'Outdoor space on school site (13% and 32%)' and selected these as areas of development as part of their Action Planning session in May 2025 (below).



The London Marathon Foundation launched an Active Playground fund, shared at a national meeting attended by Active Essex's Daily Mile lead in late September 2025. The fund was aimed at supporting targeted areas of 'need' with 10 schools nationally to be selected as recipients of the funding.

The Active Essex Daily Mile Lead, worked alongside the CAS Development lead to analyse criteria and select eligible schools. The CAS online hub provided a rich and detailed evidence base to utilise in order to select relevant funding recipients.

Bardfield Primary School were recommended to The London Marathon Foundation with a detailed rationale of why they should be selected.

Bardfield Primary were successful in the collaborative bid (Active Essex and Bardfield Primary School) and planning meetings were arranged.

The CAS Development Lead, Daily Mile Lead, Deputy headteacher, PE Lead and London Marathon Foundation colleagues attended the playground meetings to plan effective use of the funding to install new markings around both KS1 and KS2 playgrounds for Daily Activity (noted as an area of development on the Bardfield Action Plan).

Playground markings were installed.

Playground markings are being used to improve PA opportunities across the wider school day, including increased Daily Mile and use of markings during break and lunchtime activities.

Reprofiling on the CAS hub noted a significant increase in the target areas (below).

