

External Providers and Teaching Quality Physical Education

Physical Education New Zealand (PENZ) believes that:

ākonga (students) need quality physical education to improve their lifelong learning – we can provide quality physical education by establishing a supportive learning environment.

External providers can help deliver suitable activities and provide expertise in some areas of physical education, but teachers will have the best understanding of the needs of their ākonga, curriculum requirements and good teaching practices.

Teachers need to be in control of designing the best physical education programme for their class.

Quality Physical Education

‘Quality’ physical education involves being inclusive and fair and adding value to the lifelong learning of tamariki (children) about all aspects of movement. As with any other subject, teachers need to establish supportive learning environments for physical education that will encourage ākonga to develop the discipline and relevant knowledge and skills, including critical thinking.

Many educators believe that quality physical education experiences are best delivered by the teacher, who understands their ākonga and the school environment well. However, researchers have found that many primary school teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand lack confidence and competence when it comes to physical education. As a result, they often turn to external providers to teach some of the health and physical education content. [1, 2, 3.] While this is perfectly understandable and can work well, any partnership between a school and external providers must be set up with the aim of delivering quality physical education.

Using external providers to deliver quality physical education

External providers come from a range of local community and national organisations. They offer their services to schools in the belief that they can add value to the school curriculum. In health and physical education, schools might look to use an external provider because the external provider:

- has expert knowledge of a specific topic, for example healthy eating and drug education
- can provide physical skills for particular activities, such as, a water safety programme
- offers access to particular outdoor venues
- has developed or is a partner in a particular programme or sporting event.
- has access to famous or particularly talented sports people who will encourage ākongā by being there.

External providers generally arrive at a school with their own programme. They deliver these programmes in or out of school time, and schools may or may not need to pay for their services.

Of course it is exciting to have a sports star or someone new come to school, but schools need to ensure that whatever is provided on the day will enhance the quality of their school's physical education curriculum. External providers can be brought in to help with sessions, but they should not design the physical education programme – this responsibility must remain with the principal and the teachers. Even when teachers think they aren't very 'sporty', they need to lead the physical education. There are several reasons for this.

Teachers have a much better understanding of their learners' needs and behaviours, the curriculum requirements, and sound teaching practices.[1.] They can use their knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the tamariki in their class to make sure everyone is encouraged to be involved to their fullest capacity. They are best placed to plan learning activities that are age appropriate in the physical education context and will meet the needs of their ākongā most effectively.[4.]

External providers may have greater expertise around particular movement activities for physical education, but they are not usually trained teachers. They won't necessarily have a comprehensive knowledge of the curriculum requirements, [5, 6.] the school's processes, the learners' needs, or class management strategies. Teachers have given examples of external provider-led sessions lacking organisation and involving multiple occasions where tamariki have had to stand in a long queue waiting for a turn.[6.] Plus, research comparing learning with external providers against learning with the classroom teacher shows that tamariki prefer to be taught by their teacher.[3.]

However, external providers can help broaden the teachers' knowledge and extend a school's ability to deliver engaging physical education lessons. For this kind of support to be most effective, principals and teachers need to plan and decide how best to use the external provider's expertise before inviting the provider to come in and teach at their school.

There are a range of online guidelines and checklists available to help principals and teachers decide how and whether to involve external providers in their health and physical education programme. These sample checklists are a useful reference, but PENZ recommends that, where possible, schools format their own criteria to best meet the needs of their school, allowing stakeholders to be fully informed and engaged in the decision-making process.

Things to think about

While some teachers may not feel they are experts in all aspect of the health and physical education curriculum, they need to remember they have the pedagogical skills to deliver quality physical education lessons. Principals and teachers who decide to involve external providers in delivering their health and physical education curriculum should consider these questions:

1. Where do the activities offered by the external providers fit with our school's physical education programme?
2. How will this external provider add quality experiences, knowledge and understanding to our tamariki and the physical education programme?
3. Will the external provider help us meet our teaching goals for physical education or is their involvement unnecessary?

By considering these questions carefully and honestly, a school can ensure they use external provider services fittingly to support quality physical education in their school.

References

1. An enduring issue: Who should teach physical education in New Zealand primary schools? Petrie K. (2011). *New Zealand Physical Educator*, 44(1), 12–17.
2. Physical education in Aotearoa New Zealand primary schools: Teachers' perceptions and policy implications. Dyson B, Cowan J, Gordon B, Powell D, & Shulruf B. (2018). *European Physical Education Review*, 24(4), 467–86.
3. That is a Big Passion of Mine as a Typical Kiwi: Primary school principals', teachers', and students' perspectives on physical education in New Zealand. Cheng D. (2020). Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Auckland, NZ: University of Auckland.
4. Recommendations to improve primary school physical education: Classroom teachers' perspective. Morgan PJ & Hansen V. (2007). *The Journal of Educational Research*, 101(2), 99–108.
5. Health and physical education in Aotearoa New Zealand: An open market and open doors? Petrie K, Penney D, & Fellows S. (2014). *Asia-Pacific Journal of Health, Sport and Physical Education*, 5(1), 19–38.
6. External providers and their impact on primary physical education in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Dyson B, Gordon B, Cowan J, & McKenzie A. (2016). *Asia-Pacific Journal of Health, Sport and Physical Education*, 7(1), 3–19.

Resources

- *Checklist to Aid School Leadership in Programme/Event Decision-making*, developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Health. See: <https://hps.tki.org.nz/Tools-for-Schools/Checklist-for-schools>
This checklist outlines criteria on which to gauge the external provider in line with a set of dimensions to consider under 'Key areas' criteria, such as programme integrity, outcomes, evidence, and staff, etc. The checklist includes appendix information on costing, a formal agreement between the school and external provider, and referee form.
- *Working Together for Tamariki: Guidelines to support schools, kura and external providers when working together to deliver physical education and physical activity opportunities*. Sport New Zealand. See: [sport-nz-working-together-for-tamariki.pdf](#)
These guidelines serve as a tool for schools, kura and external providers when working together to provide quality physical education and other physical activity experiences for tamariki aged 5–11 years. It includes a range of critical questions to establish guidelines between the school, kura and external provider. The intent is to manage legal and safety requirements, roles, responsibility of care, curriculum implementation and programme delivery, and to encourage the co-construction of a memorandum of understanding for the parties involved.
- *The New Zealand Curriculum*. Ministry of Education. (2007). Wellington, NZ: Learning Media.