



A key to improving academic results is..... sport?!?

Coming from New Zealand to Ireland to work here at The King's Hospital School has been a really interesting move, and the differences in the educational settings of both countries have been quite fascinating to observe. This is not going to be a post analysing the merits of that system vs this system however, one difference I have noticed is that it seems that in Ireland EVERYTHING is 'hinging' on the Leaving Certificate exams. The structure of the Leaving Certificate places significant stress on students, and on you, their parents, in supporting your children to get through this important time of their lives.

So here is my challenge to you. Have you considered how sport and physical activity can help you during this time?

There is a significant amount of research that shows being physically active can be beneficial to academic performance:

- *A review of 3 large-scale studies found that academic performance is maintained or even enhanced by an increase in a student's levels of physical education and sport, despite a reduction in the time for the study of academic material.*
- *Other studies have found improvements for many children in academic performance when time for physical education and sport is increased in their school day.*
- *Studies have found physical activity improves self-regulation, planning and attention, which is fundamental to literacy and numeracy.*

I have read a large number of research articles over the past two years to familiarise myself with as much of this research as possible, and what has come through loud and clear is that doing more physical activity has NO DETRIMENTAL IMPACT on academic performance. In the majority of examples, it improves academic performance.

Sport and physical activity also supports the health and wellbeing of our students to manage the pressure of the examination periods. Here are a few comments from KH students:

'I enjoy sport because it's a pressure release for me after a day in lessons'

'I use my exercise as a chance to unwind from a school day and refresh'

'I like that it's not just competitive, and I can simply enjoy playing it'

'I enjoy the different friendships I experience on a team'

With the Leaving Certificate being the pressure cooker that it is, think about how important it is for our students to have something they can do to reduce their anxiety and stress. It's important that we consider two things for our students:



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1. Are we helping them to achieve academic results to the best of their potential?
2. Are we helping them to stay happy, healthy and balanced during a time where there is a lot of external pressure?

I hope we can all agree that sport and physical activity is an important element in helping answer yes to these two questions. The recommendation from the Department of Health is teenagers should be physically active for one hour each day, so what are some practical ways to help them do this?

1. Ensure they attend all trainings and matches for their teams. These are opportunities to be active that already planned in to your child's week.
2. Speak with your child so they know the importance of being active during their breaks when they study, e.g. going for a quick walk, or even standing up while reading notes
3. Make the most of the school grounds and facilities, so even on days when sport training isn't on they can use the pool or go for a walk.
4. Schedule physical activity at the same time as their friends, so it's a chance to connect socially and disconnect from 'the books'.
5. Drink plenty of water and avoid eating junk food while studying.
6. Support them to get at least 7 hours sleep a night (8 is even better), so study, socialising and physical activity shouldn't eat in to that precious 'sleep time'.
7. And finally, I am not trying to advocate that sport and physical activity should take the place of all study, so support your child to ensure they are finding a balance and studying for an adequate amount of time.

I haven't included the research I have highlighted in order to make it a quick read for you, but if you want to go deeper into the research I am happy to share any of the articles.

My door is always open to discuss balancing study and sport/physical activity commitments so give me a call or an email if there is anything you would like to discuss and encourage your child to do the same.

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