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Arts and PE help pupils to thrive at school, study suggests

Pupils who enjoy physical education and the arts take part in school life more fully than those who do not, a study suggests.

Researchers have identified participation in physical education and activities such as music, drama and visual arts as the greatest predictors of engagement among children aged 12 to 15.

They also found that for 12 and 13 year olds, enjoyment of physical education was the greatest contributor to feeling connected to school.

The study assessed pupils' experience in a range of subjects by asking them to rate how much they enjoyed the subjects.

They also analysed data to gauge how parents, teachers and peers influenced the pupils' engagement with school.

Researchers at the Universities of Edinburgh, Limerick and McGill University in Canada assessed a group of more than 1700 early or middle adolescent pupils.

They used data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth – a long-term study of Canadian children that follows development and wellbeing from birth.

Those taking part were asked to rate their enjoyment of arts education, language arts, mathematics, physical education and science by choosing from four statements measuring their attitudes.

Statistical methods were used to examine the link between enjoyment of subjects with school engagement.

The researchers accounted for factors such as gender, parental encouragement, the influence of peers and the perceptions of teachers, and academic performance.

They also assessed participation in a variety of extracurricular activities in and outside the school.

Ranked among the top universities in the world

Dr Shirley Gray of the University of Edinburgh's Moray House School of Education, said: "These findings suggest that greater investment in physical education and arts education has the potential to improve school engagement, academic attainment and health and wellbeing."

Lead researcher Dr. Enrique Garcia Bengoechea of the University of Limerick's Department of Physical Education and Sport Sciences, said: "Curricular factors, and in particular the quality of students' experiences in physical education and arts education, may be more important than previously recognised in terms of understanding and promoting student engagement."

The study is published in the journal RETOS: New trends in Physical Education Sports and Recreation. Link: <https://recyt.fecyt.es/index.php/retos/article/view/63700>

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