**SPORTS RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Have you ever wondered who was responsible for deciding on the very first curriculum for your school? In the case of Hymers College, the first curriculum was put together 126 years ago, and sport was an important part of that curriculum. How incredibly insightful of our predecessors to see that sport and physical exercise are a critical part of a first-class education.

Fast forward to the modern day. I am sure there is not one single Headteacher who has not been asked by a parent why their son or daughter is being ‘forced’ to play sport. Like me, I suspect many of you will have given an answer that highlighted the importance of being part of a team, not to mention the health benefits of building up a bit of a sweat. We might, if we were feeling rather brave, have said something along the lines that sport has a very positive impact on mental health and wellbeing. However, despite searching through many academic journals, I have been surprised to find very little educational research which actually supports these claims – that is until now!

A couple of years ago I had a number of conversations with Heads who had been faced with the parent I mentioned above, and asked if, as a Sports Committee, we might research the impact sport has on our pupils. We agreed to approach Peter Clough, the Head of Psychology at Huddersfield University, to produce a research tool which might give us some answers about the real impact sport has on our students. He not only did this, but also undertook the research, using HMC schools, and now reports on his findings.

In addition, the Youth Sports Trust has expressed its welcome to the research and wants to use Peter’s research tool to extend the research into state schools.

It is widely acknowledged that a healthy body equals a healthy mind, but this research is pointing at something considerably more important, that playing sport has a very positive impact on a one’s mental wellbeing and that those students who participate regularly have greater resilience.

In fact the research has suggested that there are no negative impacts at all on pupils’ academic performance and one could argue that pupils will benefit from a positive mindset gained from playing sport.

It would appear to be fair to say that sport is character building and that the resilience learnt from losing and failing is an important life lesson which is best learnt on the playing field.

So in addition to all of the benefits of staying fit and taking regular exercise, we can now say that playing competitive sport is really good for your mental wellbeing and that you will, as a result be happier.

Our predecessors who planned those early curriculums really did know a thing or two about education. Without the benefit of academic research they knew that playing sport was as important as studying Maths or English and that it would help their children remain healthy and happy.

It is desperately sad that over the past few years schools have been reducing their sports provision and one cannot help but wonder whether we are now starting to see the impact on society – a society that sees young people suffering from a burdening number of mental health issues, not to mention an obesity crisis.

Peter Clough summarises beautifully when he says “if sport was a pill I would make millions”.