

Research Briefing N° 8

Weighing it up: a review of the National Child Measurement Programme in England

This research reviews a national programme introduced to support public service response to childhood obesity.

Key words: childhood obesity; National Child Measurement Programme

Key findings

- The National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) has played an important role in raising the profile of childhood obesity locally and in providing data to inform the planning of both local and national services.
- Central guidance and support for the NCMP were generally valued and seen as critical to maintaining standards and consistency.
- The two main areas of concern for the future of the NCMP were lack of staff capacity and lack of funding. The weighing and measuring of children was usually carried out by school nurses, but a common theme was that this took up too much of their time and could be done by less specialist staff with appropriate training and supervision.
- Although originally introduced as a monitoring programme to provide anonymous data on obesity levels at local and national levels, the subsequent Department of Health (DH) recommendation that all parents should be told their child's results and that parents of overweight children should be contacted and offered support has created some ambiguity for practitioners over whether the NCMP is a surveillance or screening programme. Whilst two thirds of survey respondents thought that the benefits of providing routine feedback to parents outweighed the negative impacts, many had concerns about the angry response of some parents to the feedback letter, and the lack of weight management programmes to refer families on to.



What we did

The NCMP measures the weight and height of children in reception class (aged 4 to 5 years) and year 6 (aged 10 to 11 years) to assess obesity levels within primary schools across England. The data can be used at a national level to support local public health initiatives and inform the local planning and delivery of services for children. This review was commissioned by the DH in spring 2011 to take stock of progress with the programme since its launch in 2005, by drawing together new and existing data on the delivery of the programme and suggesting how it might need to be adapted in the light of the planned transfer of responsibility for public health from Primary Care Trusts to local authorities. The focus of the review was on the delivery of the NCMP rather than its impact on childhood obesity.

How we did it

A multi-method approach was used. This included:

- documentary analysis of studies commissioned by the DH between 2006 and 2010 which evaluated different aspects of the NCMP;
- notes from regional workshops organised by the DH in autumn 2010, and a small number of additional published studies identified through a rapid literature review;
- telephone or face-to-face interviews were undertaken with 17 key stakeholders at national, regional and local levels; and
- a detailed online survey of lead professionals involved in NCMP delivery – the survey received over 200 responses from all regions of England.

Further information

The full report can be accessed at [‘Taking Stock: a rapid review of the National Child Measurement Programme’](#) (pdf 0.8mb)

See also [annual data from the national monitoring programme on the prevalence of overweight and underweight children](#) (Health and Social Care Information Centre)

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