

# ARE WE FAILING OUR FEMALE ATHLETES?

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### ARE WE FAILING OUR FEMALE ATHLETES?

In this report we look at the difference in performance between private and state school athletes across a few different metrics.

There are some interesting insights from our data so far and we would love to hear some discussion about your thoughts on the reasons for the results you see. Head over to www.thehurculesclub.com and leave a comment in the forum titled 'Are we Failing our Female Athletes?'

	Female		Male	
Age	Not for Profit	Privately Funded	Not for Profit	Privately Funded
11	41	40	299	34
12	141	72	436	77
13	237	64	426	87
14	247	91	483	73
15	114	90	379	121
16	41	61	206	80
17	15	44	174	51
18	3	12	69	22
Total	814	474	2201	543

# MALES

Below are 4 charts showing the average scores for each age group throughout school life, we can see at the age of change from primary to secondary school those in private education are performing better. Puberty isn't a factor yet in males aged 11 and 12 therefore this is likely a socioeconomic difference whereby those who attend private secondary schools have likely been at private primary schools. The sporting facilities and development at private primary schools is far superior to many state primary schools in our experience so far. I would imagine they bring a higher level to secondary school.

There is no difference between age at peak height velocity (PHV) between cohorts (using the Mirwald method due to difficulty collecting accurate parental height when visiting schools). Some theorise that the reduction in age at puberty over the past 200 years has been due to improved access to calories, because the body is suitably nourshed it has the excess energy required to begin the energy rich process of puberty and for girls to be suitably nourished to bear a child. There may have been a small delay in those at state schools where access to quality nutrition and sufficient calories is somewhat less, but thankfully this isn't the case!

Strength is slightly down throughout the ages however vertical jump follows most closely, interestingly vertical jump is a skill that requires no equipment to improve and is a simpler movement to become competent at than sprinting, in addition inner city state schools have a large curricular emphasis on basketball due to space constraints.



#### MEDIAN SCORES COMPARING MALE PUPILS PRIVATELY FUNDED AND NOT FOR PROFIT SCHOOLS





**20M SPEED** 





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VERTICAL JUMP





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AGILITY



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## SO WHY DOES THE GAP CLOSE IN MALES?

The most prominant factor I believe is sports club participation, 75% of young males participate regularly in sport and physical activity versus 37% in females. Across the youth sector does simply participating and exposing the body to movement allow the gap in ability to close post-puberty? The extra coaching received at sports clubs will likely match the extra contact time given to private school athletes, particularly boarding school athletes.

A lot of our testing days with athletes aged 15 upwards have been with GCSE PE groups, at younger age groups we have tested whole year groups where there is greater diversity in athletic talent. Showing the average ability at private schools is better when looking at the whole population particularly in the test with most skill and speed demands - the Pro Agility Test, whereas when the cohort is sporting in nature the difference is nominal in males.

# FEMALES

The first point of note is that age 18 has been omitted from the graphs due to the lack of comparable athletes at this age group.

Girls go through puberty from age 10-12, therefore differences in performance can be biological and socioeconomic, compared with predominantly socioeconomic in males. We see the gap in performance close after age 12 in 20m and Vertical Jump, however the gap increases in agility and relative strength, from a purely anecdotal perspective we have seen a distinct reduction in effort from state school pupils during the tests where you might 'look funny' e.g. touching the floor on the turn and pulling a face when straining to pull as hard as possible and getting sweaty/breathless in the YoYo test.

Pleasingly we see the gap close at GCSE age showing that those girls who are active in sport and are learning more about exercise, movement technique, mental resilience are competing at a similar level to their private school counterparts. However, with reduced participation in sport across the ages in women, are too many girls missing out on the opportunity to improve their physical literacy at younger ages? Schools should have much less of an emphasis on team sport with performance outcomes like Netball. A sport where body composition plays a heavy part in performance, the lack of rolling subs means some get small opportunities to participate in matches or are placed into a position that has little movement due to rules constraints in the sport and for some may lead to reduced enjoyment of sport in their first term of secondary school. Resulting in a dropout of participation in any sport thereafter.



Should we as coaches be doing more with young girls to improve their physical literacy and provide more confidence that they're capable of moving well and can adapt to another sport should they not have the body type or skills to perform at a high level in one particular discipline.

Should sports clubs be the target of the fix and recruit more girls to participate?Should coaches be arming female athletes with more skills to take to sports clubs?Is there a difference in the quality of PE teaching between state schools and private schools, meaning that the boys' gap is closed courtesy of club participation?

What other factors are at play here?

Let us know,

Mike Urquhart Senior S&C Coach



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