

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Active School Flag?

The Active School Flag (ASF) was launched by the Department of Education in May 2009 and is organised through Mayo Education Centre. The purpose of the initiative is to recognise schools (primary, post primary and special schools) that strive to achieve a physically active and physically educated school community.

The goals of the Active School Flag are to:

- Raise an awareness about the value and importance of Physical Education, physical activity and sports programmes in schools
- To acknowledge the creativity, commitment and initiative of schools which actively promote a broad range of physical activity opportunities for all students
- To generate the support and involvement of the wider school community in encouraging more physically active schools
- To empower schools to approach outside agencies such as Local Sports Partnerships, National Governing Bodies and the HSE for their assistance.

Is every school eligible to apply for Active School Flag accreditation?

The Active School Flag is a Department of Education and Skills initiative and as such it must be in line with Department rules and regulations.

- The school provides timetabled PE for all classes in accordance with Department guidelines.
- The school PE plan is complete and up to date.
- Teachers timetabled to teach PE hold the appropriate qualifications (post primary only).

Primary - The Primary School Curriculum (pg. 70) states that one hour per week has been allocated as the minimum time allocation for Physical Education. Therefore primary schools wishing to apply for ASF accreditation must:

Provide a minimum of one hour of Physical Education for every pupil every week

Post Primary - In accordance with the Department of Education and Science Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools (2004-2005) all second level schools must provide Physical Education as part of the curriculum. The recommended provision across all year groups is two hours per week. Therefore post primary schools wishing to apply for ASF accreditation must:

Provide a minimum of a double period of Physical Education per week for all class groups and all students.

What do schools have to do in order to be awarded with an Active School Flag?

In order to be awarded an Active School Flag schools must:

- Inform staff, students, parents and the wider school community that the school is interested in working towards the Active School Flag and invite them to participate in the process.
- Establish an Active School Flag committee comprising of representatives from all areas of school life.
- Review the school's current situation for each of the review areas on the application form.
- Look for support from the National Governing Bodies of Sport, Local Sports Partnerships and the HSE to increase physical activity levels in the school.
- Plan and implement a series of improvements that will result in enhanced PE and physical activity provision in their school. *PE, physical activity and sports provision should be noticeably improved as a result of the school's participation in the Active School Flag initiative.*

How much work will it be?

The amount of work required by a school to achieve the Active School Flag will depend upon the strength of the school's current provision across the 15 review areas.

It is important that the whole school community is made aware of the school's interest in applying for the ASF and invited to contribute. Applying for the Active School Flag should be a *team effort*.

Each school should appoint an ASF coordinator from the staff to lead the process. The next step should be to set up an ASF committee comprising of representatives from all areas of the school community – students, teachers, management, non-teaching staff members, parents and members of the community.

At least one improvement needs to be made for each review areas 3-15 (primary) and 4-15 (post primary). The number of improvements expected will depend upon the strength of the school's *current situation*. If the current situation is very strong one improvement will suffice. In review areas where the current situation is less well developed, schools will be expected to plan and enact more than one improvement.

A lot of projects take place throughout the year which, if focussed on physical activity, could contribute significantly to the school's ASF application. For example a primary maths project might be to survey students about their means of transport to school. An LCA task might be to map the local community in terms of the physical activity opportunities that there are for teenagers.

There is no closing date for applications. Schools can work to suit their own unique context and requirements. Some schools may achieve ASF accreditation in a matter of months whereas for other schools it may take 2 or more years.

Is there a lot of paperwork required for the Active School Flag process?

The ASF application form (valid from September 2011) has been streamlined in response to feedback received from schools. The new single form application format will allow schools to present their information more clearly and reduce the paperwork aspect to the process for them. An *Application Form Guidelines* is available under the Primary/Post Primary tabs and schools are advised to photocopy this and use as a reference as they complete the online application form.

Schools must complete all 15 sections of the application form, limiting their responses to one page per review area. Blank templates accompany 6 of the review areas. These will allow schools to present their information in a very clear and concise way.

Do we need to send in any of the evidence with the application form?

No. Schools should e-mail the completed application form only. Schools should indicate the type of evidence that they have in hand to verify that the improvements stated in the application form have been achieved. The actual evidence is not required until the accreditor visits the school for the accreditation visit.

If it takes a few years for our school to apply for the Active School Flag will some of our improvements go out of date?

In many cases schools will take 2/3 years to be in a position where they fulfil all the Department of Education and Skills criteria and substantially address each of the review areas. This is perfectly acceptable as there is no time limit on the process and by its nature it will be an ongoing process.

If some of the improvements are undertaken and achieved 12 or more months before the application form is submitted that should be stated in the **‘current situation’** section of the form but it should be stated that the school was actively working towards the ASF at the time when the improvement was achieved.

Schools on an annual basis should review their current practices and revise, expand or amend as required.

So if, for example, a school invested in playground markings 2 years prior to submitting their ASF application form then the introduction of the playground markings belongs in the ‘Current Situation’ section and not the ‘Improvements’ section

In the ‘Improvements’ box a smaller improvement would be expected – for example, the year after playground markings went down the school might decide to use them as an integral part of the ‘Buddy’ system. Older buddies are encouraged to use the playground markings with their younger buddies as a means of socialising. That would be the more recent improvement and that should be written into the ‘Improvements’ section.

Will some schools be refused the Active School Flag?

Schools which do not fulfil the Department of Education and Skills guidelines in the following areas cannot be awarded the Active School Flag:

- PE timetable provision
- PE plan
- PE teacher qualifications (post primary schools only)

The ASF screening committee has to be satisfied that the applicant school addresses each of the review areas in a substantial way prior to assigning an accreditor. The individual circumstances of the school, including school size and the facilities available on the school grounds, will be taken into consideration.

Detailed feedback will be given by the screening committee to schools that are unsuccessful. They are invited to re-apply once the necessary improvements have been made.

It is very important that schools read and follow the *Application Form Guidelines*. Information must be presented in a clear, concise manner otherwise the application will be returned to the school and delays will result.

What help is available to schools to assist them through the application process?

Schools are strongly advised to download the *Application Form Guidelines* document which accompanies the application forms under the Primary/Post Primary tabs. For each review area there are prompt questions and suggested references to help schools complete each section of the application form.

Active School Flag information evenings will be held in many Education Centres this autumn. Details of dates and venues can be found under the ASF Notice Board section.

There is also lot of helpful information on the ASF website under the tabs on the left hand side of the home page.

Local Sports Partnerships, National Governing Bodies and the HSE are aware of the Active School Flag initiative and can offer very valuable support and guidance to schools.

Schools should contact eolas@activeschoolflag.ie with any specific queries they might have about the ASF process. The query will then be forwarded to either the screening committee or the ASF coordinator and we will endeavour to reply to your query as quickly as possible.

Is it possible to apply for the Active School Flag through Irish?

Yes. The following ASF application documents (primary and post primary) are now also available in Irish:

1. ASF Review Areas - *Leimisteir Athbheithnithe*
2. ASF Application Form – *Foirm Iarratais ar ASF*
3. ASF Application Form Guidelines – *Treoirline Foirme Iarratais*

These documents are located under the Primary and Post Primary tabs and also under the Bunscoil and Scoil Dara Leibheal tabs on the LEAGAN GAEILGE.

Schools can be screened and accredited through Irish also.