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SCHOOLS ARE OFFERED THE CHANCE TO STEP OUT FOR FITNESS

THE island's year five students will all be offered the chance to step out to a healthier lifestyle.

With support from the Praxis Group, the Culture and Leisure Department and Guernsey Sports Commission are opening up the successful "Stepping Out" initiative to all primary schools.

The aim of the six-week scheme is to increase children's levels of physical activity and promote healthy lifestyle choices. Each child is bleep tested at Beau Sejour, they are given a pedometer by Praxis to count the number of steps they take and invited to attend special exercise classes put on for them by Beau Sejour and Guernsey Sports Commission staff before they are then bleep tested again six weeks later.

Children are also encouraged to increase their level of daily physical activity at home and school by keeping a daily log. Last year more than 50 year five pupils at La Houquette Primary School took part in the six-week 'Stepping Out' fitness challenge. Some of the children improved their fitness levels by up to 60%.

'The effort that the children put in was phenomenal,' said year five teacher Steve Davies, of La Houquette Primary School. 'Children were walking to school, taking part in more physical activities and even going for runs after school in an attempt to up their pedometer reading. It was fantastic to see so many children respond so keenly to this programme, and I look forward to participating in the scheme with new year five pupils this year.'

With financial support from Praxis the scheme is being offered to all primary schools free of charge.

Walking can easily be incorporated into a person's daily routine. It is achievable and enjoyable even for those who do not excel at other sports.

It requires no specialist facilities or equipment, but children will achieve a sense of satisfaction on seeing their total steps per day rise throughout the challenge. 'Achieving 12,000 steps per day for girls and 15,000 steps a day for boys is a great starting point in reaching the recommended 60 minutes of moderate activity a day for young people,' said Helen Mahoney, activities manager for Culture and Leisure.

'Children attaining that number of steps are more likely to be reaching recommended physical activity targets. Using a pedometer gives each child valuable feedback on the distance they are walking and can also act as an incentive.'

Stepping Out is one project the Praxis Group is supporting as part of its 25th Anniversary celebrations.

'Last year's programme at La Houquette was such a success that we were very keen to open up this opportunity to all year five pupils on the island,' said Simon Thornton, managing director of the Praxis Group.

'Physical activity is essential for good health, and walking can be one of the best forms of exercise there is. Supporting this programme complements our overall approach to healthy living and on behalf of the Praxis Group I would like to wish the island's youngsters the best of luck.'

The 2008 'Stepping Out' programme will start in June with bleep testing taking place at Beau Sejour on 2, 3 and 4 June, and finish with the final bleep tests on 14, 15 and 16 July.

Any school wishing to take part in this year's 'Stepping Out' challenge should contact Helen Mahoney, Activities Manager at Culture and Leisure on 747213.