

5th March 2021

Sports flooring helping to re-boot school sports and fitness.

Design-driven sports floorings that deliver safe solutions for schools coupled with great value are today's winners, says David Carter, Sports Specialist Gerflor.

From the total lockdown in the 2020 spring term to an autumn term back at school but with stringent requirements for social distancing, equipment cleaning and hand sanitising, 2020 was the year that PE in our schools became a creative subject. It is not impossible that the COVID-19 pandemic might ultimately be judged as a period which allowed school sport to reboot itself, adjust priorities and emerge stronger and more relevant... and of course sports flooring surfaces will play a huge part in that revival.

More than ever, ensuring that schools are kept clean is a critical element of pupil safety. The importance of the school environment in pupil and staff care has been widely recognised in infection prevention and control (IPC). Keeping their communal sports areas clean is not just an aesthetic, but with the current pandemic has now of course become a huge safety issue and sports flooring plays a huge part in that on-going battle.

Recently the Prime Minister confirmed children and young people will be able to take part in sport and activity at school as part of educational provision and wraparound care from 8 March, while from 29 March outdoor grassroots sport for adults and children will restart, subject to guidance.

However, the dilemma for British state education decision makers is the need to invest to provide a greater number of new and refurbished sport and physical activity venues against a back-drop of spending reductions, which impacts on the budgets they can allocate. Last year The Government in their Sports Premium Report for 2020/21 said it would be providing funding of £150 million per annum for each academic year. This funding is being jointly provided by the Departments for Education, Health and Culture, Media, and Sport. Possible uses of this funding includes buying quality assured professional development modules or materials for PE/sport. This may be a tall order to fulfil as the cost of the pandemic in the UK has run into trillions of pounds and other considerations outside sport may take precedence?

Keeping Britain more active seems to be the stance that the Government and Public Health England have taken during the pandemic. Both bodies were extremely vocal in emphasising that during lock down we could only go out for exercise or a small bout of necessary shopping etc. It was a sober message right off the bat that exercise for everybody was crucial. Not just for the physical health of our children but also for their mental health too.

Sport England recently launched their Uniting the Movement programme which is their 10-year vision to transform lives and communities through sport and physical activity.

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They said in their mission statement, “as we adapt and rebuild from the huge disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic, we need to collectively reimagine how we keep movement, sport and activity central to the lives of everyone.” There is no doubt that we do need to get the country ‘moving’ again and tackling inactivity is also a major priority for Sport England as they aim to support projects that can encourage people to lead an active and healthy lifestyle. Influencing strategies at local and Government levels seems to be key in their approach to getting us back to fitness.

Cost-effective flooring solutions in this current coronavirus climate becomes even more relevant as they can play a major role in helping both private and public funded sport and physical activity premises to attract more customers by offering better facilities. The floors need to be adaptable to accommodate different tastes in exercise and sports.

As budgets are being kept on a tight rein, there are currently more club buildings being renovated rather than being built. But, although sports floorings need to be affordable, they must also look great, be fit-for-purpose and be safe. Considering performance values, installation costs, maintenance budgets and whole life cycle costs, they must also provide long-term value for money and a good return on investment.

The development of free-floating installation systems with advanced point elastic vinyl sports floorings has allowed quicker money saving installations. Their new flooring types significantly offer lower maintenance costs meaning the avoidance of unexpected costs which can easily forgotten. Most importantly, most hard existing sports floor surfaces like composite or compact PVC can be left in place while the new flooring is directly over-laid, thereby eliminating uplifting and making good subfloors and the associated costs and time.

Cutting edge foam technology also strengthens the flooring’s mechanical resistance, which is of great benefit where heavy-duty exercise equipment is used or in multi-use halls where high levels of indentation resistance are necessary. Some synthetic vinyl sports floorings can further contribute to low maintenance life cycles by not only being easy to dry sweep clean but also not needing regular treatments like traditional wooden floors.

For new construction projects with damp subfloor issues, revolutionary textile and foam backing integrated systems allow strong adhesive bonding without subfloors needing to reach 75% RH or costly DPMs being needed. In addition, isolating membranes suitable for foam-backed sports floorings enable loose-laying directly over concrete subfloors as clever, raised design technology permits air circulation in damp conditions.

It is therefore now possible to give a sports facility a super-quick face-lift. By installing a high performance, loose-lay system sports floor surface now takes half the time compared to a traditionally installed sports floor. Sport and exercise facilities can therefore maximise their budget spend on added value elements that attract customers like personalising the floor and adding wow factors.

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For example, bold colours, contemporary urban designs, and wood looks in vinyl sports floorings can be further enhanced with the latest digital printing techniques. Customising sports floorings has never been easier as colours, surfaces and visuals can be united to create unique designs for a sports facility. By using a flooring manufacturer's customisation services, it is possible to encapsulate the customer's images within a suitable flooring without compromising performance or quality.

The choice of sports flooring is a critical part of reducing the risk and severity of any injury, should it occur. The right floor sports floor can help to prevent both short and long-term impact injuries and the best possible flooring solution will also help achieve the perfect balance between grip and slide which again assists injury prevention.

European sports flooring standard EN14904 outlines the minimum performance requirements for a flooring to be classified as an indoor sports flooring. The standard covers point elastic, area-elastic and combined elastic sports floorings with properties suited to both multi-functional spaces and different levels of sport. These offer comfort and protection from impact and different levels of shock absorbency according to the level of activity. Point elastic floorings deliver three levels of shock absorbency compared with concrete to cater for different usage. A point elastic P1 flooring provides 25% of shock absorbing retention, with P2 35% and P3 45% respectively. Point elastic flooring provides impact protection and will instantly absorb impact with the floor thereby meeting the requirements of elite sport flooring. In-built, easy maintenance surface treatments also lower the risk of friction burns.

Recovering from the biggest crisis in a generation and providing sport and physical activity opportunities will be a pivotal element of the country's recuperation back to full health and fitness. Today's sports floorings can deliver champion solutions for a host of differing sports facilities including schools and colleges by providing long-term value and meeting precise criteria.

Learn more about Gerflor solutions, ask for a free sample or contact us to speak to a specialist today by calling 03332 412901, emailing contractuk@gerflor.com, or visiting gerflor.co.uk for the latest innovations.

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