

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Council's plans to charge for playground will widen health inequalities**

Researchers from London Metropolitan University say plans by Wandsworth Council to charge an entrance fee for a local playground could potentially widen health and social inequalities.

Wandsworth councillors have recently decided to charge children £2.50 to use the adventure playground.

London Met Senior Lecturer Daniel Cohen is the lead author of a new worrying report which shows a dramatic decline in children's strength over the last 10 years.

Daniel worked with fellow London Met lecturer Ann Delextrat and four researchers from the University of Essex to produce the report, published in the journal of child health, *Acta Paediatrica*. The study found that in the last decade the number of sit-ups 10-year-old children can do has dropped by nearly 30 per cent, while children's arm strength had fallen by about 25 per cent.

Daniel said the plan by Wandsworth Council to charge children to use the playground goes against the London Development Agency's 'Legacy Goal' of not increasing health inequalities.

"We know that lower income is associated with both poorer health and lower physical activity levels", said Daniel.

"The council charging for use of the playground will obviously only be a disincentive to lower income earners.

"Our report shows that even in a high income part of Essex, muscular fitness has declined over the past 10 years - principally upper body and core strength and endurance. These are aspects of fitness that may not be addressed in PE classes but as Tam Fry (Child Growth Foundation) commented in *The Observer*, climbing and play are the things that kids are doing so much less of. This type of fitness is protective against obesity, diabetes and heart disease.

"Having good muscular fitness also makes it more likely that kids are involved in sports and other physical activity which develop aerobic fitness, which we know is associated with academic performance.

"Therefore this move is potentially widening health inequalities and social inequalities by compromising the access of poorer families to this type of play."

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**Notes to editors:**

*Children growing weaker as computers replace outdoor activity*, The Observer  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2011/may/21/children-weaker-computers-replace-activity?INTCMP=SRCH>

*Tory council to charge children £2.50 for using playground*, guardian.co.uk  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2011/may/12/tory-council-charge-children-playground>

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