

School PE kit change gets girls into sport

Marc Horne

Ditching skimpy and uncomfortable kits in favour of more practical clothing has caused participation in sport to soar at Scotland's largest all-girls school, its head teacher has said.

Only 12 per cent of girls in Scotland regularly participate in sport at the age of 15. However, the number of pupils at St George's School in Edinburgh still playing sport by the time they are 17 or 18 has risen to 90 per cent.

Carol Chandler-Thompson, head of the independent school, said that modernising the uniforms girls were required to wear and replacing gym skirts with leggings had boosted confidence and participation.

"Body confidence among teenagers is quite fragile," she said. "I believe it is linked to the kind of kit that girls are being allowed to wear, do they feel comfortable?"

Chandler-Thompson oversaw sweeping changes in uniform requirements for PE lessons. "We really involved the girls and asked what was important to them," she said. "Rather than a skirt, which they wore previously, they opted for a skort, which is a skirt and shorts combined."

The issue has been raised by Maureen McGonigle, of the campaign group Scottish Women in Sport, who said: "Instead of skimpy shorts or skirts let our girls wear leggings and T-shirts."

A study by Women in Sport, which surveyed 4,000 teenagers across the UK three years ago, found that half felt self-conscious in sportswear. "Teenage girls are not voluntarily leaving sport, they are being pushed out as a consequence of deep-rooted gender stereotypes," Stephanie Hilborne, its chief executive, said.