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# OBESITY FEAR FOR YOUNGEST PUPILS

**PUBLIC** health bosses say healthy initiatives in the city are working to stop the increase of obesity in older children – but more work needs to be done to tackle the problem in younger children.

Last week, figures from a healthy weight survey revealed almost 20 per cent of children in Plymouth are either overweight

by **HELEN PEARSE**

Health Reporter

or obese. Over the last ten years, the percentage of overweight or obese five and six-year-olds in the city has doubled, whilst the percentage of 10 and 11-year-olds has remained fairly static.

Today, those who carried out the survey, from the city's public health development unit, said the data on the older age group

shows initiatives that have been put in place in schools and the community are paying off.

These include teaching parents to cook, telling them about healthy food, healthy schools initiatives, swimming schemes, school sport schemes, virtual bus schemes for children to walk to school, and classroom exercise.

Gill Lewendon, consultant in public health, said: "From the survey we think the results are very encouraging. We haven't

had the year-on-year increase in the older children in obesity. In the last 10 years Plymouth has been doing something right, otherwise we would see them getting fatter and fatter."

Their concerns are now focused on the younger age group, and how to address the issue.

Dr Lewendon said: "The age group we are more concerned about is Year One which has shown an increase in obesity levels. We want to focus on what

happens before they get to school and we know where we need to focus our efforts. We have got to get it right for these pre-schoolers now so we don't have a year-on-year increase for all our children."

In May, all Plymouth's health visitors and assistants are meeting to produce an action plan about what more they can do to reduce obesity in younger children.

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