Author's response to reviews

Title: Lessons learned from the AFLY5 RCT process evaluation: Implications for the design of physical activity and nutrition interventions in schools

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Author's response to reviews: see over
We would like to thank the Editor for the opportunity to revise the paper. Please find below a point by point response to all of the issues raised. The responses all relate to line numbers in the revised text which has also been highlighted to yellow to make identifying easier for the editor.

Reviewer 1:

Minor Essential Revision:

1. The study is very interesting and relevant to the field of physical activity and public health. In general the manuscript is well written and properly conducted. Thus, I only have some comments/suggestions.

Response: Thank you for the supportive comments. Responses to each issue raised are presented below.

2. In the methods sections, is not clear how was made the selection of the present sample. What criteria were used to select pupils, parents and headteachers?

Response: We have added more detail on the methods for this study to lines 121-161.

3. The results section is extremely detailed; however the discussion may not have the same detail/integration with the existing literature.

Response: In light of the feedback from Reviewer 2 we have re-shaped the discussion to align the results with literature from the Health promoting Schools movement. This has been achieved throughout the discussion.

4. Finally I suggest reorganizing the conclusion section in two paragraphs: list of the most difficult challenges that a successful intervention will face and what are the steps that may be more easily implemented.

Response: We have reworked the conclusion section. Please see the revised text on lines 534-550.
Reviewer 2
The kinds of process evaluation presented in this manuscript are an important and often underdeveloped aspect of intervention research. Potentially they can offer valuable insights for research and practice. This is a nicely written report of a process evaluation of a school-based diet and physical activity intervention, that gives a clear and systematic presentation of its findings. That said, there are several areas in which it could be strengthened or further developed, as set out below.

Response: Thank you for recognising the quality of our work. Detailed responses are below.

Major revisions
1. The study needs to be better contextualised in relation to what is already known about effective health promotion within school settings, with clarification in the Introduction of how it addresses research needs, and consideration in the Discussion of what it adds to existing knowledge. A body of relevant research that the authors need to better engage with, particularly as it seems to present very similar findings and recommendations to those given in this manuscript, concerns health promoting schools. The authors will be able to select relevant publications from this literature, and some to consider are:


Response: Thank you for this very helpful suggestion. We have now highlighted this literature in the introduction (lines 100-103) and related all of our findings back to this literature in the discussion.

2. There are details about the process evaluation that are not provided in the methods section, with reference made to another manuscript that is undergoing review [ref 18]. Given that it is not clear when and in what form the other process evaluation manuscript will be published, it would be helpful to readers for important details about the methods to be provided here. These include the sampling and recruitment of teachers and students, the procedures for data collection (locations, timing and duration).

Response: We have added more detail on the methods for this study to lines 121-160.
3. In the Results section there are two sections (lines 267-270, and lines 329-335) where it is not clear whether we are reading the author’s interpretation and recommendations, or comments from study respondents. If it is the former then the authors should adopt the style of integrated results and discussion more consistently, whereas if it is the latter then it should be clearer that the points were made by respondents.

Response: We have reviewed these sections and as this content is covered in the discussion these sections have been removed.

4. In addition to the above, there are several quotes given that seem to add little value to what is provided by other quotes and accompanying summaries. Those which could be removed are on lines: 163-165; 177-178; 204-205; 379-381; 404-406.

Response: Thank you for this feedback. We have reviewed each of these quotes and removed most of them. However, we felt that the quote that was initially on lines 204-205 should be retained. This is now on lines 225-226 and is shown in yellow for clarity.

5. Add “a” before “project champion” on line 436.

Response: Change made. Please see line 450.

6. Ref 24 is referred to as a systematic review on line 452, whereas it is not.

Response: Thank you for catching. Text on line 465 has been changed to the results of previous studies (one is a systematic review another a process evaluation).

Discretionary revisions

7. In the Introduction the authors state that the AFLY5 intervention was not found to be efficacious, and go on to say that the process evaluation from this study would offer insights that could lead to more effective diet and physical activity interventions (lines 102-105). The lingering question that this reader had as the Results were presented was to what extent the findings were directly relevant to the AFLY5 intervention. The Discussion includes some comments about possible improvements to the AFLY5 intervention, but these could be elaborated upon further, with consideration of whether these issues may explain the lack of efficacy found in the RCT.

Response: We have extensively edited the discussion in light of the feedback from the reviewer. We have summarised the key changes for AFLY5 on lines 544-547.

8. Some phrases and terms may be unfamiliar to an international readership, as they were to this reviewer. For instance “lower down the school” (lines 273-274) presumably means in earlier grades at school, and “homeworks” (lines 356,358) means homework.

Response: We have made these changes. Please see lines 298 and 373.

9. On lines 463-464 the authors refer to the need for “greater recognition at the policy level of the importance of diet and physical activity”, which is somewhat vague and could be improved by a more concrete recommendation.

Response: Please see new text on lines 4482-484.