State primary schools in the West Midlands (UK) implemented a childhood obesity prevention trial from 2011 to 2015. WAVES (West Midlands ActiVe lifestyle and healthy Eating in School children) included children from diverse ethnic backgrounds within the participating schools. The children recruited were in year 1. From the schoolchildren participating in the trial, the gender, ethnicity, deprivation score, body mass index (BMI), Dietary intake (kJ/24 hrs), fruit and vegetable intake, and Physical Activity Energy Expenditure (PAEE) Mean score were taken. Outcomes were taken in two follow-ups (age 7-8 and age 8-9) from the baseline (age 5-6 years). School administrators were also given a survey on healthy eating and physical activity (PA) in the schools.

In all schools it was found that healthy behaviours were promoted “to some degree”. There was a tendency to promote PA over healthy eating (HE). Although there were mostly non-significant results between school environment category and outcome measures, by the second follow up schools with a focus on PA had a statistically significant lower mean zBMI than schools with a minimal health focus. In fact, higher PAEE levels were found in schools with a “complete health focus” rather than a minimal health focus. Therefore, there may be a correlation between school environment and healthy living patterns.

Reference: Garden, Elizabeth Mairenn et al. “Relationship between primary school healthy eating and physical activity promoting environments and children’s dietary intake, physical activity and weight status: a longitudinal study in the West Midlands, UK.” BMJ open vol. 10,12 e040833. 22 Dec. 2020, doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2020-040833