

Cookies on GOV.UK

We use some essential cookies to make this website work.

We'd like to set additional cookies to understand how you use GOV.UK, remember your settings and improve government services.

We also use cookies set by other sites to help us deliver content from their services.

[Accept additional cookies](#)

[Reject additional cookies](#)

[View cookies](#)

 **GOV.UK**

▼ Menu



[Home](#) > [Education, training and skills](#) > [Inspections and performance of education providers](#)
> [Inspection and performance of schools](#) > [Subject report series: PE](#)



Research and analysis

Levelling the playing field: the physical education subject report

Published 20 September 2023

Applies to England

Contents

[Context](#)

[Knowledge in PE \(for a glossary of key terms see Appendix A\)](#)

[Main findings](#)

[Discussion of the findings](#)

[Recommendations](#)

[Primary findings](#)

[Secondary findings](#)

[Annex A: Key terms used in this report](#)

[Annex B: Methodological note](#)

Context

For many pupils, physical education (PE) will be the first and only place where they are taught safe, efficient and intelligent movement. In PE, pupils are also taught important health-related knowledge to help them make informed decisions about how to live a healthy, active life. When taught well, high-quality PE challenges myths, misconceptions and ingrained inequalities that can limit participation for all. In addition to timetabled PE lessons, schools also offer extracurricular experiences that can provide additional time for high-quality instruction, practice and feedback to increase pupils' competence and confidence in PE, physical activity and sport.

Beyond the school gates, physical activity levels have generally recovered since the pandemic, but 'improvements are not universal'.^{[\[footnote 1\]](#)} Stubborn differences between ethnicities, sex and levels of affluence remain. For example, pupils are still twice as likely to be able to swim 25 metres unaided if they are from a high affluence family than from a low affluence one.^{[\[footnote 2\]](#)} That is why it is important for high-quality PE to make a positive difference to pupils' opportunities and experiences and contribute to levelling the playing field for all, regardless of individual starting points.

This report evaluates the common features of PE in 25 primary schools and 25 secondary schools visited between November 2022 and June 2023. It identifies strengths and areas for development in how pupils are taught the subject. It builds on our physical education research review, which was published last year.^{[\[footnote 3\]](#)}

In this report, we summarise the main findings from both primary and secondary

schools and share our recommendations. We then set out our more detailed findings in primary schools and secondary schools separately. These 2 sections focus on:

- curriculum design and organisation
- what pupils have learned
- pedagogy and assessment
- school-wide systems and policies

Inspections evaluate schools against the criteria in the school inspection handbooks. Inspectors will not use our findings in this report as a 'checklist' when they inspect schools. We know that there are many different ways that schools can design and teach high-quality PE.

PE is a compulsory part of the national curriculum for all pupils, from Year 1 to the end of key stage 4. It has its roots in physical development (PD) in the early years foundation stage (EYFS), where children are taught important knowledge about building gross and fine motor skills. While academies are not required to teach the national curriculum, they must teach a curriculum that is at least as broad and ambitious.^[footnote 4] Pupils in many secondary schools also have the option to study a PE- or sport-related qualification at key stage 4 and/or key stage 5. Qualifications at key stage 4 remain broadly popular: although the number of entries to GCSE PE fell between 2019 and 2022, the number of entries to PE- and sports-related qualifications as a whole has increased recently.^[footnote 5]

All pupils are entitled to high-quality PE. Developing pupils' competence and confidence in PE through a high-quality curriculum is as much a priority now as it has ever been. Developing competence is important because of its relationship to motivation, enjoyment and, subsequently, the potential to build confidence and engagement in physical activity and sport.^[footnote 6] It is widely cited that children with higher motor competence participate more in sports and physical activity.^[footnote 7] This higher participation can also be positively associated with improved fitness and health.^[footnote 8] A recent Sport England survey reported that only 15% of girls in Years 9 to 11 agreed with the statement 'I find exercise and sport easy'; a slightly larger number of boys in the same age group also agreed. Too few young people feel competent in this important area of their lives.^[footnote 9] Therefore, it is important to consider whether PE in schools is nurturing pupils' physical development and teaching them the important knowledge they need to participate in sport and physical activity and make informed decisions about how to live a healthy, active life.

Since the publication of our last PE report in 2012, there have been many changes

in education policy that have directly influenced PE provision in schools.^[footnote 10] For example, PE and sport premium funding has been in place in primary schools since 2013, as has the most recent national curriculum. However, a recent national survey reported that only 56% of primary teachers felt confident teaching PE, with 15% reporting that they are not confident.^[footnote 11] Despite 10 years of PE and sport premium funding, and the first of the 5 key areas of improvement being ‘increased confidence, knowledge and skills of all staff in teaching PE and sport’, some of the changes in policy have not had the widespread intended impact.^[footnote 12]

Knowledge in PE (for a glossary of key terms see Appendix A)

In this report we refer to 3 conceptually distinct but functionally connected forms of knowledge that allow pupils to make progress towards the aims of the national curriculum in PE. These are not terms that Ofsted expects pupils or staff to use during inspections. These forms of knowledge are:

- motor competence – knowledge of the range of movements that become increasingly specific to sport and physical activity
- rules, strategies and tactics – knowledge of the conventions of participation in different sports and physical activities
- healthy participation – knowledge of safe and effective participation

Main findings

Many schools visited have enough time in the timetable to teach a broad and ambitious PE curriculum. Most primary schools teach PE for 2 hours per week. Around half of secondary schools teach PE for 2 hours per week for both key stage 3 and key stage 4.

A small number of the schools have clearly defined the broad and overarching aims of their curriculum and broken them down into a clear progression of the knowledge pupils need to learn.

In the schools where the curriculum is stronger, the most appropriate physical activities and sports to teach are prioritised. These activities are selected because they enable pupils to learn essential subject-specific knowledge to meet clearly defined, ambitious end points of the curriculum.

In nearly half of the primary schools, children in Reception are well supported by knowledgeable adults to develop safe, efficient and effective movement quickly.

Verbal explanations given by staff in lessons are often clear and precise. In most schools, they use subject-specific vocabulary and question pupils effectively to check their understanding. Pupils' verbal recall is strong for areas of the curriculum that are taught more clearly, and key content is revisited.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported to achieve well in PE in just over half of the schools. In these schools this is because:

- the curriculum end points are clearly defined and ambitious for all
- staff (including teaching assistants (TAs) and unqualified staff teaching PE) are well trained and supported to implement specific strategies for pupils with SEND
- staff have clear, specific and actionable information to support them in meeting the pupils' needs in a PE setting.

Many pupils we spoke with have a broad understanding of health, particularly the social and mental health benefits associated with participating in physical activity. They spoke confidently about what they have been taught in personal, social and health education (PSHE) and science lessons to help them to develop a clear understanding of health.

In a small number of schools, assessment in PE is well designed. Assessment objectives are clearly defined and aligned carefully to what has been identified as knowledge that is important for pupils to have and to put into practice.

All the secondary schools teach PE- or sport-related qualifications at key stage 4 and/or key stage 5. In all these schools, the exam specification informs the curriculum. The knowledge to be taught is set out clearly and precisely, and sequenced carefully to give pupils opportunities to revisit and secure prior learning. Teachers give pupils high-quality explanations with relevant real-life examples. This means that the planning and teaching of PE qualifications are stronger than the teaching of compulsory PE at key stage 4.

Many curriculums across both primary and secondary schools are intended to give pupils experience of a wide range of sports or physical activities. However, it is not always clear how what is being taught or the order of teaching in the curriculum are supporting all pupils to know more and do more in PE. As a result, many curriculums lack coherence.

The average time spent on one 'topic' or activity in each year is 5 hours. This means that, for many pupils, the curriculum design does not give them the time they need to build knowledge and develop relative fluency before moving on to a new activity that requires prior learning.

Many schools do not match the ambition of the national curriculum. In two thirds of the schools, dance is not taught to all pupils, or the dance content being taught is not well organised. Furthermore, in three quarters of schools, outdoor adventurous activities (OAA) are either not taught effectively or not taught at all. In comparison, nearly every curriculum includes football to support the teaching of attack and defence. In schools where the curriculum does not match the ambition of the national curriculum, this narrows pupils' experience of PE.

Pupils' swimming and water safety attainment in primary schools is mixed. In many schools this is due in part to the cost of transport and access to swimming pools, and in part to the challenges schools have faced because of COVID-19. However, in many schools, the evaluation of the swimming and water safety element of the curriculum is limited, and many schools do not make full use of the PE and sport premium, which can be used to fund top-up swimming lessons, where needed.

Across both primary and secondary schools, most pupils are actively participating in lessons. However, the quality of what they are doing is variable. Where it is weaker, pupils lack the foundational knowledge needed for the next stage of the curriculum or to participate meaningfully in competitive elements of PE lessons. Significant gaps in motor competence are not identified and addressed quickly in many primary schools, particularly fundamental movement skills (FMS).

A small number of pupils in both primary and secondary schools routinely miss PE lessons so that they can receive support in other areas of the curriculum. For example, some practise reading in key stage 1 or complete work from other subjects in key stage 4. In addition, the amount of time allocated to PE in the timetable significantly reduces in key stage 4.

In most of the secondary schools, the compulsory key stage 4 PE curriculum lacks rigour, balance and depth. It rarely matches the ambition of the national curriculum. The important knowledge to be taught is not always clearly identified, and teaching is not supporting all pupils to make progress in compulsory PE.

In some schools there is a strategic approach to developing staff's subject knowledge, and how to teach it, through continuing professional development (CPD). In these schools, staff receive effective training in teaching the planned curriculum.

Extracurricular provision is broad and ambitious across primary and secondary schools. All pupils have opportunities to experience different activities and also get better at what they are learning in PE. However, over half of the schools do not monitor attendance at extra-curricular clubs and activities. This means that it is not always clear whether their extracurricular programme is inclusive for all.

Discussion of the findings

The important role of PE in developing pupils' competence and confidence in physical activity and sport cannot be underestimated. Not all pupils will learn to

participate in physical activity or sport beyond PE lessons. This means that schools must use timetabled lessons strategically to teach all pupils the important knowledge that they need to make informed decisions about how to live a healthy, active life.

All schools we visited were aware of the importance of a high-quality PE curriculum. The curriculum in some of these schools matches the breadth and ambition of the national curriculum. In these schools, clearly defined curriculum goals have been broken down into essential knowledge that pupils need to be taught in order to know more and do more in PE. Carefully selected sports and physical activities were prioritised to best teach the essential knowledge identified. Some schools have recently introduced new physical activities to the curriculum to align more closely to pupils' interests. Where this is successful, schools have ensured that these activities teach important subject knowledge that pupils need to confidently develop their competence in PE.

In too many schools, however, the curriculum does not match the ambition of the national curriculum. In some schools, this is because the curriculum has significant breadth but at the expense of depth. The curriculum design does not give pupils enough time to build knowledge and develop proficiency before moving on to a new activity. The curriculum therefore gives pupils brief experiences of a wide range of sports or physical activities, but what pupils know and can do as a result of what they have been taught is often limited.

In some other schools, particularly secondary schools visited, the curriculum does not match the ambition of the national curriculum because some activities specified in the national curriculum are not being taught. In just over a third of all schools, dance is either not taught at all or only taught to some pupils. In a further third of schools, the precise content to be taught is not clearly identified. OAA is similarly absent from many curriculums, or it is not clear what is taught. Where there are gaps in the PE curriculum, pupils' understanding of and proficiency in PE differs widely.

Many primary schools vary in how they teach swimming and water safety and evaluate the assessment outcomes for this compulsory section of the primary national curriculum. Access to, and the cost of swimming pool hire and travel prevent some schools from providing high-quality swimming and water safety teaching. The pandemic has also posed additional challenges for many schools. However, it is not always clear in primary schools precisely what is taught, how it is taught or how the curriculum is organised to help all pupils achieve the ambitions of this aspect of the national curriculum.

Although many pupils enjoy PE and have a positive attitude to learning in lessons, particularly at primary school, fewer pupils report feeling confident or competent in

PE. This is partly because the pedagogical approaches selected are not always well matched to pupils' prior learning. Many staff have sufficient subject knowledge to provide effective explanations and demonstrations. However, too often teaching is not quickly adapted in response to pupils' misconceptions and gaps in knowledge. This means that too many pupils do not have the secure foundational knowledge they need in order to meaningfully participate in lessons and meet ambitious outcomes. Pupils are often expected to learn knowledge rapidly and demonstrate success with very little purposeful practice and feedback to help them to improve. As a result, the curriculum in these schools is covered but not securely learned. Inevitably, for some pupils this significantly limits their access to the curriculum and achievement. In particular, for pupils with SEND, the quality of support they receive to enable them to participate fully is often not precise enough nor having the impact intended. For example, in some schools, some pupils with SEND are not well supported to develop high quality movement patterns before moving on to be taught more complex knowledge.

Some primary schools specifically showed strengths in teaching efficient and effective movement to the youngest children. In the primary schools where physical development (PD) and subsequently PE are taught well, the explicit teaching and assessment of FMS helps to steer pupils towards knowledge that they might struggle to learn on their own.

There are, however, significant differences in how assessment is used in PE. In schools where assessment is stronger, the knowledge to be taught and what pupils need to know and do next has been precisely identified. A range of appropriate approaches check what pupils know and can do. The information collated is used to revisit important previous content that is not secure, including responding to misconceptions quickly, before they become embedded. In schools with a well-organised curriculum, where assessment reliably checks what pupils need to remember, pupils are able to recall important knowledge clearly and in more detail. They are also able to demonstrate competently and confidently what they can do as a result of the curriculum. Assessment is particularly strong in most qualification-level PE classes, both at key stage 4 and key stage 5.

In schools where assessment is weaker, this is often because assessment is not always aligned with what is in the curriculum. This was particularly evident in schools where identified end points are not clearly broken down to show how pupils will make progress. In these schools, pupils are therefore not always assessed on what is important to know and do to develop increasing competence in PE.

Beyond timetabled lessons, many schools complement their curriculum with extracurricular activities that provide additional breadth and depth to timetabled

lessons. In the schools with stronger extracurricular provision, activities are well aligned to a comprehensive curriculum and provide all pupils with opportunities to practise more and receive targeted instruction and feedback. However, not enough schools have effective systems in place to monitor the inclusivity of their extracurricular provision.

Overall, the evidence gathered for this report identifies some common strengths but also important areas of improvement in relation to PE in England's schools. The need to provide consistently high-quality PE for all has, arguably, never been more urgent. The pandemic has provided challenges to schools and to PE as a subject, but the time is now to level the playing field for all.

Recommendations

Schools

Schools should:

- Make sure that their curriculum matches the breadth and ambition of the national curriculum for all pupils. It should include carefully sequenced and taught swimming and water safety lessons in primary schools, and OAA and dance in primary and secondary schools.
- Clearly define the important knowledge that all pupils need to be taught so that staff can use this information to support their planning, selection of pedagogical approaches, and assessment.
- Choose the most appropriate physical activities and sports, so that pupils achieve the intended end points of the curriculum. Make sure that specific sports and physical activities are sequenced coherently to broaden pupils' understanding from key stage 1 to key stage 4.
- Make sure that the time in PE lessons is spent on developing competence. Pupils should practise, refine and revisit previous content

before learning new or more complex knowledge, so that they can secure the prior learning and build their confidence. In some schools, where a wide range of sports and physical activities are covered superficially and the intended curriculum is not learned, this might mean reducing the number of physical activities and sports across the year.

- Support pupils with SEND effectively so that they can access an ambitious curriculum and achieve well. This includes ensuring that staff are well trained to provide precise support so that all pupils can meet clear and ambitious end points.
- Ensure that staff regularly check pupils' understanding and respond to any gaps in knowledge and misconceptions that they identify. This might include practising knowledge that has been taught previously but not securely learnt so that gaps in knowledge do not widen.
- Check that all pupils have the knowledge they need in order to participate well in competitions or tasks in lessons that require them to synthesise a range of knowledge. This involves giving all pupils opportunities to learn and refine FMS from Reception.
- Ensure that what is assessed aligns with the important and precise knowledge pupils need to retain as outlined in the curriculum. Use assessment information to inform subsequent teaching in the short, medium and long term.
- Ensure that departmental monitoring and evaluation focuses on the quality of what pupils know and can do.

Wider policy

Policy leaders should:

- Support schools to make evidence informed funding decisions that focus on improving staff competence and helping more pupils to make progress

in PE. This includes considering how schools can best use funding to improve swimming and water safety outcomes for all pupils in primary schools, and how to design and implement curriculums that match the ambition of the national curriculum.

- Support schools to provide professional development opportunities that are meaningfully informed by school leaders' evaluations of pupils' attainment. This includes ensuring that staff have the subject knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge to teach FMS effectively, efficiently assess pupils' progress in PE, and help all pupils with SEND to achieve ambitious curricular goals.
- Support schools to develop extracurricular programmes that provide additional depth to timetabled PE through specific activities designed to extend pupils' knowledge and understanding.

Primary findings

Curriculum

Summary of the research review in relation to curriculum

The curriculum sets out what pupils should be taught. A high-quality curriculum in PE is one that meets all pupils' needs by identifying the knowledge required to participate in physical activity and sport and to make informed decisions about how to live a healthy, active life. It is important that all pupils are taught a curriculum that matches the breadth and ambition of the national curriculum. Schools need to decide:

- what to teach pupils, so that they achieve the aims of the national curriculum
- how to structure the curriculum
- which sports and physical activities should be included

Three forms of knowledge can support schools in structuring their curriculum:

- motor competence
- rules, strategies and tactics
- healthy participation

In our research review, we highlighted the important role that developing FMS plays in building pupils' competence and confidence in PE. It is also important to allocate sufficient time in the curriculum to secure pupils' declarative and procedural knowledge before they move on to more complex knowledge.

1. Typically, in the schools visited, enough time was allocated to teaching PE. While Ofsted does not set out how much time should be allocated to teaching PE each week, the Association for Physical Education (AfPE) recommends 2 hours of timetabled PE per week; as of March 2023, the government is also asking schools to offer a minimum of 2 hours curriculum PE time.^[footnote 13] Out of the 25 primary schools, we found that 21 met this recommendation.

2. In most of the primary schools, leaders were clear, in broad terms, about the vision for the PE curriculum. They were determined to support all pupils to enjoy sport and physical activity and to have the confidence to participate in physical activity beyond the school gates. Less clear was how the curriculum was designed to meet these high ambitions. Where schools had been more specific about their aims for the curriculum, staff made more effective decisions about how to plan for, teach and assess pupils' learning.

3. Most schools were implementing a commercial scheme. In some cases, this meant that the knowledge to be taught was identified clearly and well sequenced over time. Typically, however, the curriculum did not intentionally and incrementally build pupils' knowledge to meet clear, specific and ambitious end points. This was because the declarative and procedural knowledge to be taught had not been specified and sequenced. In some schools, leaders tended to rely on assumptions about individual staff members' knowledge rather than establishing clear and explicit shared expectations about what should be taught and when in PE. For example, the curriculum in a third of schools did not set out clearly and precisely when or how running, jumping and throwing were to be taught. This meant it was not clear what important knowledge pupils were expected to demonstrate and retain. Without this, pupils who do not take part in physical activity and sport beyond school risk not being taught important foundational knowledge.

4. In many schools, the curriculum matched the breadth and ambition of the national

curriculum. The physical activities and sports that the schools had chosen took account of the agreed body of knowledge that pupils should be taught in key stage 1 and key stage 2.

5. In some schools, the curriculum lacked coherence because it had been planned first and foremost to include particular physical activities and sports. This was instead of planning the curriculum so that pupils were taught, incrementally, the knowledge necessary to achieve end points that matched the ambition of the national curriculum. In stronger curriculums, the rationale for prioritising each physical activity and sport, and when it occurred in the curriculum, was determined by what pupils needed to be taught so that they could develop competence over time.

One school had decided that gymnastics was an important activity to prioritise within their curriculum to teach all pupils about balance, agility and coordination.

They decided to teach gymnastics each year between year 1 and year 6. They had thought carefully about which balances and methods of travel they would teach and how they would develop pupils' knowledge securely. For instance, in one unit of gymnastics, pupils were taught how to demonstrate 4 different rolls. For each roll there were clear success criteria to support staff in teaching high-quality movement.

Pupils were taught how to link their movements and include each roll in a short sequence. They were also taught key vocabulary to discuss their sequences. Each subsequent unit of gymnastics was clear in what was taught, when and why. Within each unit there were clear and specific opportunities to revisit and build on knowledge from other activities, such as how to maintain balance when changing direction, which had been carefully linked to games-based activities within their curriculum.

As a result, pupils showed a clear and connected understanding of balance, agility and coordination and they could confidently discuss their strengths and areas of development using ambitious vocabulary.

6. The curriculum in many schools was unbalanced. In some schools there were limited opportunities for dance and OAA in the curriculum because staff lacked competence and confidence to teach these areas. In dance specifically, it was not

always clear what knowledge was being taught and when; this meant that how pupils would make progress over time was not clear. In only a fifth of schools, pupils spoken with could recall declarative knowledge related to dance. In contrast, most pupils could describe clearly and precisely the different ways to pass a ball in football.

7. Many schools had built their curriculum by planning experiences rather than what pupils needed to learn through those experiences. The curriculum was intended to give pupils exposure to a wide range of sports or physical activities. However, it often did not give pupils enough teaching time to build their knowledge and develop fluency before moving on to a new activity or context. This meant that many pupils were unable to apply their prior knowledge successfully to new contexts, because it was not secure.

8. The average time spent on one topic or activity was 5 hours in a year. The average number of sports and physical activities that pupils were exposed to within an academic year was 10. This meant that, as well as limited teaching time on each activity, there was very little flexibility within the curriculum to adapt subsequent teaching to respond to pupils' misconceptions or emerging gaps in pupils' knowledge before they were moved on to the next topic or activity.

9. The location and availability of swimming facilities often limited the design of ambitious curriculums for swimming and water safety. This meant that the curriculum time allocated to teaching the swimming and water safety elements of the national curriculum varied considerably across schools. In around half of schools, leaders did not have clear oversight of what was taught or how it was taught. They did not know what pupils or groups of pupils were particularly struggling with and so they did not always know how to adjust or improve their provision. Only a few schools reported that they had used the PE and sport premium to pay for top-up swimming lessons for those pupils that did not meet the national curriculum requirements after their PE lesson time.

10. Many schools taught physical development through an indoor and outdoor session each week. These sessions were often complemented by opportunities to develop physical development in the wider provision. Some schools set out more precisely what was to be taught, and when, in Reception based on what children showed they knew and could do. This provided staff with clear guidance to help them to make effective decisions about pedagogy and assessment. However, in some schools, bigger objectives had not been broken down into sequences with clear outcomes. For example, there was planned time for pupils to practise their gross motor skills, but this did not include the careful break down of step-by-step actions involved in different movements, such as methods of travel or rolling a ball

efficiently. This meant that children who struggled during the early stages of these movements were not given clear and consistent instructions, purposeful opportunities to practise or feedback. In the schools where the development and refinement of FMS was better, staff had been given clear examples of activities to support them in teaching efficient FMS and key vocabulary to Reception-age children. This was complemented by carefully considered and structured opportunities, as well as play, to revisit and refine this knowledge. It was clear when and how Reception-age children were taught the important foundational knowledge necessary to thrive and be well prepared for the next stage of their education, particularly children who required additional support.

A school shared some of their planning for teaching physical development in Reception.

One example focused on teaching jumping. It was clear how children were taught key commonalities between a small range of jumps that included jumping forwards and backwards and side to side. Children were taught essential knowledge including how to use their arms and legs when preparing to jump and land, and how to jump on, off and between apparatus. There were clearly defined 'teaching points' and what success looked like within the plans which helped staff to focus their observations and provide targeted support to children who were at an earlier stage of movement. 'Teaching points' were enlivened through clear visuals. This helped to develop a consistent language and high-quality models across all staff for all children. Jumping was taught during a series of carefully planned sessions and revisited explicitly in other activities, such as during 'Simon Says' and 'The Bean Game' (warm-up activities in other sessions).

It was clear, through the plans, that there was significant time provided to support children with gaps in their knowledge during planned sessions and also during other points within the timetable.

11. Commonly, schools had carefully considered what children were taught in Reception and linked this to what they were to be taught in key stage 1. In schools where this was strongest, there was sufficient time to revisit and secure the FMS before moving on to more complex content, for example linking movements together.

12. In nearly all schools, all pupils had access to the same curriculum being taught at the school and were taught PE through the same range of physical activities and sports. For example, football featured in nearly every curriculum as part of teaching all pupils important principles of attack and defence.

13. In a very small number of schools, what should be taught in key stage 1 and key stage 2 had not been precisely set out. Staff were free to choose the sports or physical activities to be included in the curriculum, and their decisions were often not reviewed. An unintended consequence was that pupils in different classes were not taught the same knowledge and different groups of pupils had a varying experience of the subject.

14. All school staff discussed the importance of an ambitious curriculum for all, including pupils with SEND. Most pupils with SEND were being taught the same curriculum, with support and adaptations in class. However, the curriculum did not always make clear what was most important for pupils with SEND to know and be able to do in readiness for future learning.

15. In just over half of schools, some PE content, mainly dance, was linked to wider cross-curricular themes. For example, dance was linked to topics that pupils were being taught in geography, history or science. In most of these, the PE-specific knowledge to be taught was not clear and not prioritised. However, in schools that had made the cross-curricular links clear, the topic formed a relevant and appropriate stimulus to learn specific dance knowledge and did not detract from the effective selection and sequencing of knowledge in PE. For example, a dance unit in Year 3 was linked to teaching about natural disasters in geography. In this unit, pupils were clearly refining their knowledge around unison and canon, different speeds and pathways. The unit was very clearly prioritising important PE specific knowledge, while using what pupils had been taught in geography as a stimulus.

16. In a minority of the schools, the planned curriculum had been thoughtfully adapted to provide time and space to teach and revisit what pupils had missed as a result of COVID-19. In these schools, staff had checked what pupils had learned and what they needed to know to move on to the next stage of the curriculum. They used this information to plan what pupils were taught.

17. In around half of the schools, leaders had carefully considered what to teach about how to participate in physical activity and sport in a healthy way; for example, how to prepare for and recover from exercise, and the importance of hydration and rest. They had carefully considered the physical, mental and social aspects of health and wellbeing to be taught within the PE curriculum. In these schools, the knowledge to be taught had been clearly sequenced with connections and comparisons

between different activities that featured in the curriculum. For example, pupils were taught some of the mental and social benefits of participation during each activity that featured within their curriculum. Pupils from these schools could confidently articulate specific similarities and contrasts between different activities.

18. Furthermore, some schools had made appropriate links between PE, PSHE and science to teach pupils important and age-appropriate knowledge about how to live a healthy, active life. For example, staff made purposeful links between what was taught in PE and safety-specific elements of PSHE, including the importance of rules and responsible risk taking.

What pupils remember and can do

Summary of the research review in relation to what pupils remember and can do

Timetabled PE lessons might be the only opportunity for some pupils to learn the knowledge they need to make informed decisions about participating in physical activity and sport and leading a healthy, active life. In our research review, we highlighted differences in swimming and water safety outcomes between pupils from different ethnicities and levels of affluence. We also identified further developments required to make sure pupils with SEND are well supported to access the curriculum and meet ambitious outcomes in PE.

19. In some of the schools visited, the vision for PE was not translating into secure and consistent practice. This resulted in considerable unevenness in how much pupils knew and could do in PE.

20. Many pupils across key stages 1 and 2 were not secure in FMS. These skills were often not targeted explicitly and consistently enough in lessons. As a result, pupils were not given enough opportunities to refine their FMS. This made it difficult for them to learn more complex knowledge in the PE curriculum which mean that they struggled to achieve the intended outcomes of the curriculum by the end of primary school.

21. Many schools told us the overall percentage of their pupils who met the swimming and water safety outcomes set out in the national curriculum. Across the schools, by the end of Year 6, 63% of pupils could swim proficiently over a distance

of at least 25 metres, and 72% could perform safe self-rescue in different water-based situations. Most schools said that this element of the curriculum had been affected by lack of time and of access to swimming pools and high-quality teaching of swimming. Sport England has highlighted that factors such as affluence and ethnicity influence whether pupils achieve these national curriculum outcomes. Very few schools had evaluated their own curriculum and used additional funding to support weaker swimmers to close these gaps. For some pupils, school is the only place that they will have an opportunity to do this.

22. The outcomes for pupils with SEND varied within and between schools. Some pupils with SEND showed a secure understanding of the curriculum that they were taught. In these schools, pupils received the precise support that they needed and their progress and attainment were closely monitored. Staff collaborated effectively with the special educational needs coordinator (SENDCo) to develop specific strategies to support pupils with SEND so that they could learn the curriculum. For example, a pupil who might benefit from a writing slope in the classroom might not need this in a PE lesson but might benefit from other forms of adapted equipment. However, in some schools, despite positive attitudes to inclusion, and high expectations of pupils with SEND, staff did not always have the subject and pedagogical content knowledge to adapt their teaching to support all pupils to achieve ambitious end points.

23. Pupils' verbal recall of what they had learned in PE lessons was inconsistent. Most pupils could confidently recall the shared and specific rules, strategies and tactics for different invasion games. In many schools, these had been taught more effectively and given more time in the curriculum than other activities. In some cases, pupils could confidently and competently discuss the relationships between different activities. They could refer to important knowledge that they had been taught, such as methods of restarting games when the ball leaves the playing area. However, their knowledge of rules, strategies and tactics for other activities beyond invasion games was limited. This meant that some pupils' recall was unbalanced, and they lacked the foundational knowledge required to participate fully in other activities that they were taught. In very few schools, where pupils' recall was broad and balanced, the curriculum matched the ambition of the national curriculum and high-level intended outcomes were carefully broken down into essential knowledge taught through a carefully prioritised range of activities.

24. Most pupils spoken with confidently discussed and understood a range of social and mental health benefits associated with physical activity. Many also provided clear examples of how participation in physical activity and sport 'improves fitness' and 'can strengthen your heart'.

25. In some schools, time allocated for PE had been sacrificed to provide additional interventions or help pupils to catch up with missed teaching in other subjects. For example, just over a third of pupils and staff told us that PE was sometimes missed to support reading, for example. Leaders explained that often the subject missed was rotated and so this was not a deliberate decision to miss PE.

Pedagogy and assessment

Summary of the research review in relation to pedagogy and assessment

High-quality PE teaching enables pupils to remember the curriculum in the long term and develop competence in physical activity. Staff need high levels of subject expertise to create the best possible conditions for all pupils to learn the curriculum. The research is clear that staff need to identify pupils' misconceptions quickly, and plan instructions, explanations, practice and feedback to reduce the likelihood of these becoming embedded. Practice is important because it enables pupils to consolidate their understanding. For all pupils to benefit from purposeful practice, they need to have the knowledge necessary to access the learning. For some pupils this might mean that they receive additional support. Staff also need to communicate high expectations for pupils' engagement during practice. As pupils improve and demonstrate that they know more and can do more, staff can reduce the amount of support they provide. Knowledgeable staff monitor practice carefully so that they can make timely adjustments.

For pupils to achieve well, staff need to communicate their expectations clearly and plan frequent opportunities to check pupils' understanding. It is also important that pupils have time to respond to feedback to increase their competence before moving on to more complex learning. The research highlights that it can be detrimental to pupils' progress if the school's approach to assessment is not carefully aligned to the curriculum.

26. In all the schools visited, what was being taught in lessons matched the curriculum. However, some schools were not always using the most appropriate pedagogical approaches to teach the curriculum, particularly when classes included a significant number of lower-attaining pupils.

27. In some schools, teaching was based on assumptions about what pupils had

been taught rather than what they had demonstrated they had learned. What pupils knew and could do was not always checked before moving on in the curriculum. This meant that some pupils were being taught more complex content without having learned the foundational knowledge necessary to understand it.

28. Some children in Reception classes were not given enough time for regular and specific high-quality instruction, practice and feedback. In many schools, Reception classes gave children opportunities to 'be' physically active and 'do' physical activity. But it was less clear where lower attaining children had opportunities to receive the explicit teaching they needed to improve the quality of their movement. In some schools, physical development in Reception was mainly taught and practised during times when children could self-select the activities that they engaged in. Commonly in these cases, the children engaged in activities that they enjoyed and these were not necessarily those that they needed more practice with. This meant that some children who needed additional help to reduce gaps in their knowledge were missing important opportunities for high quality instruction, practice and feedback.

29. In schools where the teaching of physical development was stronger, staff carefully planned how to explain and model to the children different movements and movement patterns. Staff based their approach to teaching on what pupils demonstrated they knew and could do. They organised play-based activities and targeted activities so that all pupils could purposefully practice and receive feedback to help them improve the range and quality of their movement. Children were encouraged to try their best and given praise for their efforts and successes. Knowledgeable staff helped children to see the similarities and differences between different contexts. They also helped children to name and describe their movements and encouraged them to use specific vocabulary.

30. In many key stage 1 and key stage 2 lessons, pupils were well supported to use accurate declarative knowledge. Staff frequently modelled key vocabulary when describing and explaining and also during their feedback to pupils. They encouraged pupils to use ambitious vocabulary and praised them for doing so accurately.

31. Many schools spoke about the importance of verbal recall in PE when checking what pupils already knew. While most staff began lessons by asking pupils questions to check the declarative knowledge they could remember, too few checked the procedural knowledge that pupils could physically demonstrate. For example, in one school, staff checked that pupils could recall the key points for a successful chest pass in netball but did not give them the opportunity to physically demonstrate their level of competence. This meant that some pupils were moved on to the next part of the curriculum without demonstrating the secure foundational knowledge needed to access more complex learning.

32. In nearly two thirds of schools, staff used clear and precise demonstrations to give pupils a mental picture of what they needed to know and do. Staff checked during and after the demonstration that all pupils had understood it.

33. In around half of the schools, practice time for pupils was purposeful. Pupils consolidated their knowledge and developed their competence. This was because:

- Staff had checked that pupils had the knowledge necessary to be successful during independent or group practice. Importantly, pupils had the motor competence required to participate in the practice activity.
- Staff made their expectations for practice activities explicit. Essential teaching points and success criteria were clearly and precisely communicated, and pupils were given timely visual or verbal reminders during their practice. This reduced the likelihood of misconceptions becoming embedded.
- Pupils spent sufficient time practising. They had enough time to build their knowledge before being moved on to more complex content or applying it in a game or competitive situation. They spent very little time on tasks that did not support the learning, such as standing in queues or waiting to share equipment.
- Staff quickly adapted the practice activity if they identified a misconception or gap in pupils' knowledge. Similarly, they also ensured that the practice activities were suitably challenging. For example, pupils practising a standing broad jump were encouraged to gain height by jumping over low hurdles. Pupils who were successful in the broad jump added a short run up to add further distance. With success, the support required was reduced and the complexity of the task increased. The responsiveness of staff made it less likely that pupils were embedding misconceptions.

34. The feedback staff provided did not always lead to pupils knowing more and doing more. This mainly happened because:

- The verbal feedback given to pupils was not always actionable (pupils were not clear on what they needed to do) or manageable (the motor competence required to respond successfully was beyond pupils' current capability) – for example, pupils being encouraged to look for space to pass a ball in a small-sided game of football when they cannot yet successfully pass the ball over the distance required.
- The task that pupils were engaged in was not designed to improve the quality of participation. For example, pupils dribbling during an activity in basketball were being encouraged to 'look up'. Pupils heard the encouragement but did not respond because the leader had not changed the activity to encourage them to do so.

35. In many schools where lessons involved competition, this element lacked a clear purpose. Often pupils who had struggled to complete the related tasks successfully beforehand were not able to participate fully in the subsequent competition. For most of these pupils, the game or competition had too many unfamiliar features, and there were too many variables at play. In some lessons it was clear that pupils found this frustrating and demoralising, and disengaged from the lesson as a result. In lessons where competition had been carefully considered and was successful, staff had adapted the activity to give lower-attaining pupils fewer features to focus on. As the pupils became more successful, staff removed the adaptations so that the activity resembled the fuller version of the competition more closely.

One lesson visited focused on passing in netball. Towards the end of the lesson, pupils moved into a competitive situation. The teacher clearly explained that the purpose was to challenge pupils to select and complete the most appropriate pass. The class were divided into 6 groups. Two groups were assigned a playing area and the aim was to make 5 consecutive passes without an interception to win a point. Two groups had a similar size playing area but with 2 clearly marked 'end zones'. The aim was to catch the ball in an 'end zone'. The final 2 groups had a larger playing area that resembled the centre and attacking thirds of a netball court. The aim for these pupils was to catch the ball on 2 marked crosses within the attacking circle. In this final game there were also restrictions as to who could enter the attacking circle.

The teacher regularly provided feedback to each group, re-iterating key points and providing clear demonstrations. From time to time, pupils were moved between teams within their game. Pupils could also be moved between games. All pupils were practising what they had been taught and developing their competence.

36. Many lessons included elements where pupils were expected to think or move creatively. Some pupils lacked the depth and breadth of knowledge to think and move creatively. For some pupils, this meant that they could not participate fully, and some did not want to participate as a result.

37. Staff had a strong commitment to providing similar, if not the same, opportunities for all pupils to develop competence in PE, regardless of their starting points. However, in just under half of the schools, the information available to help staff

support a pupil or pupils with SEND was either not used, not clear to staff or not understood by staff. For example, some strategies on how best to support pupils with cognition and learning needs were not specific enough to help PE staff provide appropriate support. This meant that some pupils with SEND struggled in PE because they did not receive the support that could have helped them, such as more time to practise, additional step-by-step demonstrations or visual prompts. Where pupils with SEND were better supported to meet ambitious outcomes, activities were modified where required. For example, one badminton lesson included a pupil who was a wheelchair user. The shuttlecock was replaced with a balloon to enable the pupil to practise moving and making contact with the racquet during an activity. After doing this successfully, the pupil moved onto receiving a shuttlecock from a peer before attempting to hit the shuttlecock over the net.

38. In some schools, TAs were present during PE lessons. Most TAs had detailed knowledge of the pupils they were supporting and were used successfully to support pupils' learning. For example, in one school a TA successfully supported a pupil to navigate their way through a short obstacle course by breaking down the course into manageable sections first and giving the pupil more practice time and feedback before completing the full course. Through the incremental development of the complexity of the task, the pupil was motivated by their successful completion of the task. However, in weaker provision, TAs were not given subject-specific explicit guidance to support pupils well. At times, this meant that the school's ambitious aspirations were not translating into practice.

39. We saw a range of assessment systems and approaches across the schools. However, very few were aligned to the taught curriculum or assessed the precise knowledge pupils needed to learn to increase their competence. In schools where practice was weaker:

- Assessment did not set out clearly what pupils were expected to know. Instead, it focused on broad 'I can' statements, such as 'I can work well in a team' or 'I can link skills to a specific activity'. The building blocks of declarative and procedural knowledge necessary for pupils to build competence in the activity, such as the knowledge they needed to know and demonstrate about working well in a team, were not identified. This meant that staff were inconsistent in the criteria they used to decide whether pupils had met particular objectives. This led to many decisions made about subsequent teaching being based on 'thin' and sometimes unreliable evidence of pupils' progress.
- Assessment focused on pupils' enjoyment of PE and the effort they made – pupils were given less specific and helpful feedback on what they had learned or how to improve.

- The information that staff collected through assessment was not used to inform subsequent teaching. Staff did not always respond to the misconceptions or gaps in pupils' knowledge that they had identified. This meant that pupils did not have secure prior knowledge before being taught more complex content.

School-wide systems and policies

Summary of the research review in relation to school-wide systems and policies

It is generally agreed that PE makes a unique contribution to the school curriculum. However, there are school-wide actions that need to be taken to make sure pupils benefit from a clear, coherent and highly effective PE curriculum. The research highlights the important role of effective subject and school leadership, including robust checking that the intended curriculum is being enacted. In addition, the research is clear about the importance of specific CPD to support all staff to teach high-quality PE. A carefully crafted curriculum complemented by extracurricular activities can broaden and deepen pupils' experience of PE.

40. Leaders in most of the schools visited described PE as a highly valued subject. However, there was sometimes a disconnect between the value they ascribed to it and the actions taken to ensure the value was clearly communicated and reinforced throughout the school.

41. Many staff felt that a lack of equipment and facilities was a barrier to improving PE. Lack of funding, in particular for transport to swimming pools, and the rising costs of pool hire, made it difficult for some primary schools to provide an appropriately balanced and ambitious PE curriculum.

42. Of the 25 schools, 21 met the AfPE's recommendation of teaching PE for 2 hours per week. However, not all schools spent timetabled PE lessons on high-quality instruction, practice and feedback to improve all pupils' competence.

43. Just over a third of schools reviewed the curriculum regularly and rigorously. Leaders had clear oversight of all areas of the planned PE curriculum and of the staff teaching PE. Furthermore, they understood where there was variation in how effectively staff were teaching the curriculum, and had clear actions in place to support staff. However, in some other schools, review of the curriculum was

predominantly through lesson visits that focused on what staff were doing rather than what pupils were learning.

44. Staff teaching PE had varying levels of subject knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. Many staff valued the support of the subject leader, and some gave clear examples of how their practice had improved as a result of specific training and teaching support. However, in many cases, self-report surveys and speaking to the subject leader were the main ways that schools identified staff competence and confidence. These approaches did not always provide the details that were needed to provide targeted support. This meant that formal and informal opportunities to improve staff's competence were sometimes missed.

45. Some staff were well supported to meet the needs of pupils with SEND in PE. They could identify specific effective approaches to support the pupils with SEND in their classes to achieve the curriculum outcomes.

One school said that, in the past, the information that they were given about individual pupils with SEND, and their targets and specific strategies to support them, was 'not very PE-friendly'.

With the support of the SENDCo and external help from a local school, leaders worked with staff and pupils to develop clearer and more specific strategies that provided meaningful support in a PE context. To do this, firstly leaders focused their attention on improving their 'wave one provision'. They identified areas of effective teaching that could be exemplified.

For example, they focused on ensuring that all staff used clear and specific language more consistently during explanations and feedback. Next, leaders across the 2 schools planned and implemented more bespoke strategies that were needed to further support pupils with particular needs, while maintaining the integrity of the activities in which they were participating.

For example, when it might be appropriate to change equipment, either short term or long term, so that pupils could meet their targets (such as providing a larger, slower ball), they did so. Staff regularly reflected on how well pupils with SEND were learning the curriculum and when particular strategies or approaches might need to be adapted.

46. PE-specific CPD was available to subject leaders and staff, but it was often limited and irregular. This was due in part to the impact of the pandemic. For example, schools prioritised the training needs and monitoring of other subjects, while being mindful of workload.

47. Unqualified teachers, including higher level teaching assistants and external sports coaches taught some PE in just over a third of the schools. There was a notable difference in the understanding of inclusion between trained teachers and unqualified teachers. Some unqualified teachers require additional training and support to understand the needs of pupils with SEND in their classes and help them to achieve ambitious outcomes.

48. Many early career teachers had a clear and accurate understanding of their strengths and areas for development as a result of internal support and review.

49. All schools offered a range of extracurricular sports and physical activities. These provided additional depth to timetabled PE. Many schools had successfully linked their extracurricular provision with opportunities in the local community to participate in sport and physical activity. Some schools also regularly evaluated their extracurricular offer and adapted it to increase inclusivity. However, only a third of schools had systems in place to monitor attendance at sports or clubs. This meant that it was not always possible to identify which pupils were benefiting from the extracurricular activities.

50. Several schools provided a range of meaningful PE-related leadership opportunities for pupils.

In one school, the pupil-elected 'school sports council' played an active role in getting the whole school community involved in PE and sport-related activities. With the support of staff, pupils designed and set up a whole-school 'active calendar'. Pupils visited classes across the school to share their plans with the school community. They also planned and led playground activities. In another school, pupils designed and led a parent workshop to provide important information on how to make healthy, active lifestyle choices in the local community.

Secondary findings

Curriculum

Summary of the research review in relation to curriculum

The curriculum sets out what pupils should be taught. A high-quality curriculum in PE is one that meets all pupils' needs by identifying the knowledge required to participate in physical activity and sport and to make informed decisions about how to live a healthy, active life. It is important that all pupils are taught a curriculum that matches the breadth and ambition of the national curriculum.

Schools need to decide:

- what to teach pupils, so that they achieve the aims of the national curriculum
- how to structure the curriculum
- which sports and physical activities should be included

Three forms of knowledge can support schools in making these decisions:

- motor competence
- rules, strategies and tactics
- healthy participation

In our research review, we highlighted that it is important to allocate sufficient time in the curriculum to secure pupils' declarative and procedural knowledge before they move on to more complex knowledge.

51. While Ofsted does not set out how much time should be allocated to teaching PE each week, the AfPE recommends 2 hours of timetabled PE per week; as of March 2023, the government is also asking schools to offer a minimum of 2 hours curriculum PE time. [\[footnote 14\]](#) We found that around half of the schools visited met this recommendation for both key stage 3 and key stage 4. Time allocated to teach PE significantly reduces at key stage 4 in many schools. In these schools, meeting the breadth and ambition of the key stage 4 curriculum was less likely.

52. In some schools, the curriculum was informed by what pupils had retained from

primary school. In these schools, teachers had an accurate picture of pupils' starting points and had made the necessary adjustments to their curriculum. However, in nearly three-quarters of schools, pupils' starting points in PE had not been identified. This meant that some pupils struggled to learn the key stage 3 curriculum because of gaps in their prior knowledge.

53. In many schools, leaders described their vision for PE in terms of developing a love of sport and finding a pathway for physical activity beyond school. However, in some schools, there were not yet clear, shared expectations about precisely what was important to teach and when to teach it to support all pupils to meet these broad outcomes. For example, some curriculums focused on developing broad leadership and teamwork skills through PE. In these schools it was not always clear what specific knowledge pupils were to be taught in each topic, activity or sport to help them learn effective leadership or teamwork.

54. Other schools set more specific goals and it was clear how the curriculum was designed to meet them. The clarity and specificity of the curriculum helpfully informed teacher planning, pedagogy decisions and assessment.

One school broke down each high-level outcome of the national curriculum, identifying what would be taught so that all pupils could realistically demonstrate success. For example, in key stage 3, 'perform dances using advanced dance techniques within a range of dance styles and forms'. The school chose 2 styles of dance, which pupils revisited in each year of key stage 3. All pupils were taught to perform and link movements involving extension, flexion and rotation.

The movements intentionally revisited and refined what some pupils had been taught in key stage 2. With increased success, pupils were taught more complex movement patterns within the same two styles of dance. Pupils were taught explicitly about dynamics, including stillness, balance, speed and levels associated with different movement patterns within each dance unit. They were also taught important features of posture, strength and coordination. Within each unit, pupils practiced and received feedback to improve the quality of their participation.

The curriculum was clearly sequenced to check pupils' understanding and provide time for refinement prior to introducing new knowledge. This meant that all pupils were able to meet the ambitious high-level outcomes.

55. In most schools, leaders had thought carefully about the declarative and procedural knowledge to teach pupils to support them to make informed decisions about their own healthy, active lives. In some of these schools, pupils were taught specifically context-related content about how to participate healthily. This included knowledge related to the short- and long-term impact of exercise and ways to participate in sport and physical activity beyond timetabled lessons. The identified knowledge to be taught had been carefully sequenced and connected and compared with different activities in the curriculum. Examples included warm-ups across different activities and the impacts of participation in different types of activities.

56. Some schools had also made clear and appropriate links to science, PSHE and the cooking and nutrition component of design technology (DT) to teach pupils important and relevant knowledge about how to live a healthy, active life.

In one school, for each topic within the PE curriculum, pupils considered the same 'big question': 'How can we participate healthily?' They were taught important declarative knowledge about the physical, mental and social health benefits of participating in physical activity.

This content was always carefully aligned with the procedural knowledge being taught within each unit. For example, the school had chosen to teach football in Year 7 to 'support pupils to use and develop a variety of tactics and strategies to overcome opponents in team games'. In this particular unit, pupils were taught essential foundational knowledge to develop their motor competence and knowledge of a small range of rules, strategies and tactics. They were also taught key knowledge about physical and mental preparation for participation in football, and knowledge to help them understand how to work successfully as a team in football. This content, together, supported pupils to answer the 'big question'. The 'big question' provided a common approach to explore similarities and contrasts between different types of sports and physical activities. It also provided a clear focus for teachers to identify the most crucial knowledge they needed for planning, to guide their pedagogical decisions and on which to assess pupils.

57. A few schools had carefully chosen sports and physical activities that would help pupils to achieve clearly identified end points. Teaching was sequenced to ensure that knowledge developed from simple to complex over time. For example, to meet

the national curriculum high-level outcome of 'to use a range of tactics and strategies to overcome opponents in direct competition through team and individual games', leaders in a school first identified what they considered realistic success would look like for pupils in this outcome. They then identified the important knowledge that pupils would need to demonstrate success. They sequenced it, building on what pupils had learned in key stage 2, through providing deliberate opportunities to revisit and refine knowledge around attack and defence. At this point, leaders selected a small range of appropriate sports and physical activities to teach the important knowledge.

58. However, in many schools, decisions on which physical activities and sports to include in the curriculum was heavily informed by extracurricular competitions. This meant that some of the sports and physical activities included were not always the most appropriate for teaching the knowledge that leaders wanted all pupils to know and remember. As a result, some curriculums did not support all pupils to make progress because what was taught was often not meaningfully connected to other content in the curriculum.

59. Some of the schools were following a trust- or hub-wide curriculum; however, most schools had designed their own curriculum. Most schools provided equitable opportunities within their curriculum. Many pupils with SEND were taught the same curriculum with support and adaptations in lessons. In schools where pupils were taught in single-sex or attainment groupings, they were all taught through the same sports and activities, although sometimes in a slightly different order. For example, as with the primary schools visited, if football was part of the PE curriculum, it was present for all in their timetabled PE lessons. In many schools the slight differences in order did not negatively impact what pupils demonstrated they had learned in PE.

60. However, not all school curriculums matched the ambition of the national curriculum. In just over a third of schools, dance in key stage 3 was not taught at all, or was not taught to all as part of the PE or performing arts curriculum. In over half of the schools, OAA was not taught at all, or was only taught to some pupils.

61. There was a lack of balance in many schools' curriculums. The activities in the curriculum were dominated by invasion-based games, such as football, basketball and netball. Other activities to be taught to match the ambition of the national curriculum, if taught, were often given significantly less curriculum time and content was rarely revisited over time.

62. Many schools had invested significant efforts in developing the breadth of the curriculum. However, the extensive breadth in some cases meant that pupils frequently moved on to new topics, even if they had not yet secured important

foundational knowledge. This was because, in many of the schools, the curriculum design was based on sports and experiences. Not all schools had sufficiently considered what was most important for all pupils to know and do, how pupils would best learn that knowledge, or what pupils had learned previously and would go on to learn. As in the primary schools visited, the average number of sports and physical activities that pupils were exposed to within an academic year was 10.

A school had structured their curriculum around teaching important knowledge through the following sports and activities for Year 8:

- September to December: football, circuit training, table tennis and volleyball
- January to April: dance, gymnastics, OAA and basketball
- April to July: athletics and rounders

Although many of these activities were revisited in subsequent years, the knowledge that pupils were taught in basketball in Year 8 had not been remembered in Year 9 when they revisited basketball. For example, in Year 8, pupils were taught methods of passing, dribbling and shooting, and the conventions of full-sized games. This meant that, for many pupils, there was a considerable amount of new knowledge within this unit. The expectation in Year 9 was for pupils to revisit the knowledge they had been taught in Year 8 and perform each skill to a better standard. However, many pupils struggled to demonstrate, for example, key features of shooting in basketball that they had been taught in Year 8. This was because not all pupils had the time to practise and build competence and confidence before moving on to a different activity. In addition, there were very limited examples of explicit links between different sports and physical activities that provided opportunities to revisit and refine important knowledge. This meant that many pupils were unable to make meaningful connections between new knowledge and prior knowledge. As a result, many pupils did not competently and confidently learn what was taught or understand why what they were being taught was important.

63. In many schools, the important declarative knowledge to be taught had been clearly identified, defined and appropriately linked to the procedural knowledge that was to be taught. Importantly, pupils had explicit opportunities to revisit important declarative and procedural knowledge across the forms of knowledge within

different activities. For example, some schools had carefully considered how, through the activities within the curriculum, pupils would be taught important rules, strategies and tactics to help them to participate successfully.

In one school, the PE department had carefully mapped important vocabulary across each unit taught from Year 7 to Year 11. This strengthened pupils' understanding by helping them to compare and contrast the new knowledge with what they had already been taught. For example, 'flexibility' was taught and applied in netball, gymnastics and athletics. This provided pupils with a broad understanding of the importance of flexibility.

64. In many schools, it was not clear precisely what was taught in key stage 4 to meet clear, specific and ambitious end points. For example, the knowledge to be taught within each topic, sport or physical activity had not always been clearly identified. This meant that pupils' experiences of PE in key stage 4 varied considerably within schools and between schools.

65. Nearly all schools allowed pupils some choice about what to do in the key stage 4 PE curriculum. This ranged from pupils choosing which activities they wanted to participate in at key stage 4, to deciding which activities they wanted to participate in during lessons. The choices pupils were offered did not always match the ambition of the national curriculum, and so the curriculum in some schools limited pupils' knowledge of PE. Furthermore, in schools where the key stage 3 curriculum lacked balance, pupils' decisions about their key stage 4 curriculum were not always well informed. For some pupils, the weaknesses in the key stage 3 curriculum also meant that they were not well supported to choose a PE- or sport-related qualification in key stage 4.

66. All schools taught a PE- or sport-related qualification in key stage 4 or key stage 5. The knowledge to be taught was clearly set out and sequenced coherently. The curriculum specified where pupils would revisit and secure what they had already learned. As a result, the curriculum for PE- and sport- related qualifications in PE was stronger than the compulsory PE curriculum at key stage 4.

What pupils remember and can do

Summary of the research review in relation to what pupils remember and can do

Timetabled PE lessons might be the only opportunity for some pupils to learn the knowledge they need to make informed decisions about participating in physical activity and sport and leading a healthy, active life. In our research review, we highlighted the need to ensure that all pupils, including pupils with SEND, are being well supported to achieve ambitious outcomes.

67. As was the case in many primary schools visited, the vision for PE in the secondary schools visited was not being implemented consistently. This resulted in unevenness within and across schools in the extent to which pupils were knowing and doing more in PE.

68. The outcomes for pupils with SEND were variable. In schools where pupils with SEND achieved better outcomes in PE, staff tailored support to pupils' needs, and this helped them to learn the content being taught. The exact support depended on the nature of the SEND. For some pupils this meant specific visual aids to provide them with clear instructions or more frequent physical demonstrations. Other pupils were supported with appropriately adapted equipment and carefully scaffolded activities that helped them to achieve success in smaller steps.

69. In a few schools, not all pupils were taught a broad and ambitious curriculum. Where the curriculum was unbalanced, pupils had bigger gaps in their knowledge and less depth of knowledge. It also meant that pupils' perceptions of what PE is and what they learn was very different from those who did study a more balanced curriculum.

70. In a few schools, some pupils did not always attend their compulsory PE lessons. Most leaders were clear that it was not a deliberate decision to sacrifice PE time for additional support or interventions. However, some pupils, teachers and leaders had different views about how often, and for what reasons, pupils missed PE lessons. For instance, some teachers and pupils discussed how timetabled PE lessons were missed so that pupils could spend extra time on other subjects in key stage 4. For some pupils, this meant that they had significantly less time to learn the PE curriculum.

71. More generally, the quality of pupils' participation in lessons varied. Some pupils did not have the knowledge they needed to participate as intended. One pupil spoken with reported that PE was 'good if you are sporty'. This view was shared by

other pupils across some schools. Many of these pupils had significant gaps in their prior learning and were not being appropriately supported to know and do more in lessons. They did not receive the high-quality instruction, targeted practice and feedback needed to reduce their misconceptions. This meant that they were being 'moved through' the curriculum without securing important knowledge needed to learn more complex content. For these pupils, each time they revisited a particular activity they had the same gaps in knowledge and misconceptions, which reduced their participation.

72. In most schools, pupils could confidently discuss the declarative knowledge that they had learned using clear and accurate terminology. Many pupils showed strengths in their verbal recall from invasion games and could confidently discuss the different rules, strategies and tactics involved. In fewer schools, pupils could confidently and competently discuss similar important conventions associated with participation in activities other than invasion games.

73. Pupils shared differing perceptions of PE. Most pupils enjoyed working in teams with friends during PE lessons. Some enjoyed 'a break from learning', while others described PE as an opportunity to 'relax with friends'. It was not always clear from pupils' responses whether they valued the subject or understood its purpose within the curriculum.

74. Similarly, pupils' conceptions of what it is to be 'good' in PE varied across schools visited. Some pupils discussed 'being athletic' and some discussed 'being a team player'. Although most pupils had been taught compulsory PE from key stage 1, their understanding of developing competence in PE was sometimes limited.

75. Many pupils had a clear and detailed understanding of the importance of social and mental health. They discussed how to make healthy choices, providing examples from PSHE, science, the cooking and nutrition component of DT and what they had learned about social and mental health through participating in physical activity and sport beyond school. However, some pupils were less sure about the physical benefits of participating in physical activity.

76. A PE- or sport-related qualification was taught at key stage 4 in all schools and at key stage 5 in some schools. Many pupils benefited from a clearly organised curriculum with regular checks of their knowledge. They remembered the content that they had been taught and were able to reflect on their strengths and areas for development. Some pupils used subject-specific terminology in their written work. When spoken with, many pupils gave accurate and relevant examples to show the depth of their knowledge.

Pedagogy and assessment

Summary of the research review in relation to pedagogy and assessment

High-quality PE teaching enables pupils to remember the curriculum in the long term and develop competence in physical activity. Teachers need high levels of subject expertise so that they can identify pupils' misconceptions quickly and plan instructions, explanations, practice and feedback to reduce the likelihood of these becoming embedded. Practice is important because it enables pupils to consolidate their understanding. For all pupils to benefit from purposeful practice, they need to have the prerequisite knowledge to access the current content. For some pupils this might mean that they receive additional support. Teachers also need to communicate high expectations for pupils' engagement during practice. As pupils improve and demonstrate that they know more and can do more, the support they receive can be reduced. Knowledgeable PE teachers also monitor practice carefully so that they can make timely adjustments.

For more pupils to achieve well, teachers need to communicate their expectations clearly and plan frequent opportunities to check pupils' understanding. The research highlights that it can be detrimental to pupils' progress if assessment is not well aligned to the curriculum. It is also important that pupils have time to respond to feedback to increase their competence before moving on to more complex learning.

77. In most schools visited, there were high ambitions for pupils, but these were not always translating into consistently high-quality lessons. Lower attainers were often not well supported, because the pedagogical approaches selected to teach important content did not account for their gaps in prior learning or misconceptions.

78. In all schools, PE was taught by subject specialists. They tended to have strong subject knowledge. They understood what was being taught and gave pupils clear and precise explanations, using ambitious vocabulary. In some schools, pupils were well supported to use a broad range of subject-specific language when giving their own responses, analyses and evaluations.

79. In many lessons teachers were highly skilled at asking incisive questions and eliciting detailed responses from pupils. Teachers used question-and-answer episodes within lessons to identify pupils' misconceptions across the three forms of knowledge – for example, to check pupils could recall the important features of each phase of a high jump or to check if pupils had remembered what to do next. When misconceptions in verbal recall were identified, teachers corrected them quickly

before moving on in the lesson.

80. In around half of the schools, pupils benefited from high-quality and timely physical demonstrations. These gave pupils a clear mental model of what they needed to do. In schools where these demonstrations were very successful, teachers had broken them down into smaller, manageable segments when required. In addition, teachers frequently asked questions to check pupils' understanding. However, in other schools, what pupils needed to do to be successful was not always clearly communicated and understood by all pupils. Some lower-attaining pupils would also have benefited from more frequent demonstrations. In these schools, pupils did not know what they were expected to demonstrate to be successful.

81. In just under half of the schools, the time provided for practice was purposeful for all pupils. This was because:

- Pupils were expected to try their best. Teachers had high expectations for all pupils to participate fully and make the required effort. For example, where the task required pupils to place both hands flat on the floor and this was within their capabilities, teachers corrected those who brushed the floor with their fingertips rather than complete the expected movement. Teachers modelled clear expectations for pupils' quality of movement and provided clear feedback to pupils to improve the quality of their movement.
- Teachers had checked that pupils had the knowledge they needed to be successful during practice time. Importantly, pupils had the required motor competence to participate in the practice activity. For example, a warm-up activity checked that all pupils could physically demonstrate the long barrier technique. Verbal instructions and demonstrations were given to remind some pupils of the key teaching points and success criteria. Pupils who could demonstrate the technique were moved onto a more complex task. Those who could not yet do so participated in a short, highly focused activity which allowed them additional time to practice and receive high quality feedback from the teacher, to increase their quality of movement, before joining the rest of the group.
- Practice activities were tightly focused on the most important knowledge to be learned. In some cases, pupils were given specific visual and verbal reminders to appropriately cue their attention during the earlier stages of knowledge acquisition. This enabled more pupils to participate fully in practice episodes and reduced the amount of time spent not engaged in learning or spent reinforcing misconceptions while working independently or as part of a small group. Similarly, in a key stage 4 qualification lesson visited, during an independent writing task, a small number of pupils were provided with a bank of words they had to use in their task.

- Pupils who needed additional support to participate successfully were quickly identified and supported appropriately. They received additional high-quality instruction, practice and feedback. Where required, the space, task, equipment and/or people (the STEP framework) were also adapted to appropriately support all pupils to meet the intended outcomes of the task.^[footnote 15] With success, support for pupils was reduced.
- Pupils had enough time to build their knowledge before moving on to more complex content or applying their knowledge to a game or competitive situation. This ensured that the quality of their movement was not compromised because they had the working memory available to focus on key components of the content to be learned.

In one school, a group of pupils were practising batting in cricket. Pupils had been grouped carefully to practise what they had been taught. One group were fed by an accurate underarm bowl, another group were fed a shorter-distance predictable overarm bowl, and a third, more competent group, were fed a less predictable full-length overarm bowl. In each group, pupils received a ball that allowed them to practise their batting. The batters from the group fed by the underarm bowl were taught and practised playing a wide variety of shots and placing the ball into space. As their success increased, they were moved on to respond to a less predictable ball.

82. In two thirds of schools, many pupils did not have enough knowledge to participate fully in the competitive activities seen during lesson visits. This was often because they had not developed the essential movement patterns well enough to adapt them in a pressurised environment. This meant that the quality of participation was sometimes poor.

83. In just over half of the schools, pupils with SEND were supported well to make progress through the curriculum. For example, one school had developed clear and predictable routines to start each PE lesson. This helped a small group of pupils with specific social, emotional and mental health needs to manage their anxiety and understand the teaching. Similarly, another school had carefully considered the most appropriate strategies to support pupils with a range of specific needs in PE. They used agreed visual cues across lessons to support communication and alternative approaches to verbal communication when pupils were being asked questions. Staff had worked with the SENDCo and pupils with SEND to make sure the strategies would work well in the PE space. All staff were well trained to tailor support

appropriately for the pupils. Some schools used different frameworks to support pupils in PE, such as TREE or STEP.^[footnote 16] However, in many other schools, the quality of support for pupils with SEND was too variable. As in the primary schools visited, information for staff on how to support a pupil or pupils with SEND either was not always used or was considered unhelpful. This meant that some pupils with SEND were not well supported to make progress through the curriculum.

84. In many lessons, teachers' feedback did not help pupils to know more and do more. As in the primary schools, this mainly happened because:

- verbal or written feedback was not always actionable (pupils were not clear on what they needed to do); for example, comments such as 'add more detail' left pupils unclear about whether they might need to provide an example or use specific vocabulary
- verbal or written feedback was not manageable (the knowledge required to respond successfully was beyond pupils' current capability); for example, pupils encouraged to 'be more creative' did not always have the knowledge to respond creatively.

85. In a few schools, teachers used technology effectively to provide incisive feedback and help pupils to learn. For example, teachers recorded sections of pupils' participation in lessons to help them to understand their strengths and areas for improvement.

86. Schools used a range of assessment approaches in PE. Some checked whether pupils had learned what had been taught. But many did not, and there were some common weaknesses.

- In some schools, the important declarative and procedural knowledge that pupils needed to know to meet assessment objectives had not been identified. This meant that there were differences between classes in what was being assessed. This affected the accuracy and reliability of assessment information that was used to make judgements about pupils.
- In some schools, assessment focused on broad skills and did not identify whether pupils' underlying knowledge was secure. This meant that the information teachers were using to inform subsequent teaching was often not precise and aligned to the curriculum.
- The assessment approach selected to check for understanding was not always appropriate. For example, in some schools, small-sided games often assessed knowledge beyond what pupils had been taught.

A school had carefully planned out what would be taught in athletics. They had prioritised athletics within the curriculum so that it was taught each year. They agreed to this because they felt that athletics provided pupils with opportunities to develop their throwing, jumping and running techniques while also providing a rich opportunity to teach and revisit different fitness components, such as speed, strength and stamina, that they taught through each curriculum topic.

Year on year, specific techniques were revisited and developed. The curriculum specified the essential knowledge that they wanted all pupils to know and remember and they assessed pupils on this. It included checking pupils' declarative and procedural knowledge through a variety of assessment approaches. Declarative knowledge across the three forms of knowledge was checked regularly through lesson quizzes, question-and-answer episodes and monitored peer-to-peer evaluations. Teachers used this information, together with information they collated about pupils' procedural knowledge through observation, to accurately identify what content might need to be revisited or retaught.

Not everything taught was assessed. The PE department had agreed on what specifically was important for pupils to know and do within each athletics unit in readiness for the next steps of learning. Teachers regularly shared examples in departmental meetings to moderate their assessment findings. This helped the department to develop a consistent understanding of success.

87. In most qualification lessons visited, assessment was meaningfully informing teaching. Teachers regularly checked pupils understanding and adapted their teaching to reduce the likelihood of misconceptions becoming embedded. Most pupils could confidently discuss their strengths and they knew what to do to improve.

School-wide systems and policies

Summary of the research review in relation to school-wide systems and policies

It is generally agreed that PE makes a unique contribution to the school curriculum. However, there are school-wide actions that need to be taken to make sure pupils benefit from a clear, coherent and highly effective PE curriculum. The research highlights the important role of effective subject and school leadership, including robust checking that the intended curriculum is being enacted. In addition, the research is clear about the importance of specific CPD to support all staff to teach high-quality PE. A carefully crafted curriculum complemented by extracurricular activities provision is also important, as it can broaden and deepen pupils' experience of PE.

88. In most schools visited, a broad range of subject-specific professional development was available to all PE teachers. As a result, teachers had secure subject knowledge across the range of topics that featured in their curriculum. However, in some schools, despite the presence of available CPD, the curriculum did not match the ambition of the national curriculum.

89. In just under half of the schools, pupils with SEND were not well supported to achieve well in PE. In schools where provision was stronger, there were some common features:

- Staff received bespoke CPD on supporting pupils with particular needs in PE. The training focused on increasing their subject knowledge, for example in FMS. It also focused on improving their pedagogical content knowledge, for example how to give high-quality step-by-step instructions, adapt practice activities, and give meaningful feedback.
- Information on supporting pupils with SEND was precise and up to date. It helped staff to understand pupils' needs, targets and strategies required to support them appropriately in PE.
- In schools where pupils with SEND were taught in smaller and more focused groups, knowledgeable staff supported them to achieve ambitious goals.

90. In some schools, the curriculum was not regularly or rigorously evaluated. This had an impact on:

- Quality of implementation: some schools did not take a formal approach to evaluating the curriculum in action. This meant that they were unaware of the variation in how effectively teachers were implementing the curriculum. Lesson visits, for example, often focused on whether the curriculum was being taught and not on the quality of what pupils knew and could do as a result of it.
- Balance of the curriculum offer: some pupils' experience and understanding of PE

was limited because the curriculum was not designed to match the breadth and ambition of the national curriculum.

- Withdrawal from PE: there were a few schools where pupils were not taught PE because they attended planned interventions instead or were spending additional time in other curriculum areas. What pupils missed in PE lessons was not always accurately monitored.

91. In some schools, school-wide decisions around assessment had a negative impact on PE. The whole-school-assessment approach did not provide the flexibility required for teachers to check whether pupils were developing competence in PE as they progressed through the curriculum. This was often not the case for PE- and sport-related qualifications, where the whole-school-assessment approach worked more effectively.

92. All schools offered a range of extracurricular sports and physical activities. Most clubs did not require a fee to attend and, often, where a fee was required to participate, schools paid for disadvantaged pupils to attend. Many schools had successfully linked their extracurricular provision with opportunities within the local community to participate in sport and physical activity. However, in just over half of the schools, pupils' extracurricular attendance was not monitored. This meant that it was unclear which pupils were attending and whether any pupil groups might be underrepresented. The lack of evaluation might be limiting opportunities to improve or adapt the extracurricular offer to make it more desirable and inclusive.

One school used attendance data from extracurricular activities and anonymised pupil questionnaires to identify possible barriers to participation. The school identified that girls' participation was significantly lower than boys. They also identified that disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND were underrepresented across all extra-curricular activities.

The anonymised surveys highlighted specific barriers, some which the school felt were 'quick and easy to minimise without over-stretching the department'. As a result, they designed clubs and activities to reduce the barriers they had discovered. 'Girls-Gym' provided a single-sex space to complement other gym opportunities and was one of the best-attended extracurricular activities by girls, particularly those with SEND and disadvantaged girls.

Another school had distributed praise postcards that specifically invited pupils to attend selected extracurricular opportunities. This led to a sustained

increase in attendance at extracurricular clubs. Pupils from this school reported that the praise postcards helped them 'to feel welcome at clubs'. Another school raised awareness of the breadth of sports and physical activity opportunities in the local area by organising trips to watch sports that the pupils might not have seen before, such as wheelchair basketball.

Annex A: Key terms used in this report

In this report, we use much of the same terminology as we did in the PE research review. Below, we explain how we have used this terminology.

Physical education (PE), sport and physical activity (PA) are not synonymous.

- PE is a national curriculum subject, which is compulsory from key stages 1 to 4. [\[footnote 17\]](#) It has its roots in physical development in EYFS. Children in the Reception Year of school follow the statutory EYFS framework. Neither the national curriculum nor the EYFS framework is designed by Ofsted. The national curriculum explains the purpose of study and provides 4 aims for the subject. Schools that are academies must design or adopt a curriculum that is at least as broad and ambitious as the national curriculum. The AfPE defines PE as '... physical activity, with children experiencing a broad range of activities, including sport and dance.'[\[footnote 18\]](#) Ofsted does not mandate the sports and physical activities that are included in each school's curriculum. It also does not determine how much time schools should devote to timetabled PE in the curriculum.
- Sport: according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), sport 'covers a range of activities performed within a set of rules and undertaken as part of leisure or competition. Sporting activities involve physical activity carried out by teams or individuals and may be supported by an institutional framework, such as a sporting agency.'[\[footnote 19\]](#) Pupils might participate in sport as part of their PE lessons.
- PA: the WHO defines physical activity as 'a broad term that covers a behaviour that involves large muscle movements for various purposes, performed throughout the day. These movements can range from lifestyle activities to sports.' Examples include recreational cycling, walking, dancing, swimming and yoga. Pupils might participate in physical activity as part of their PE lessons.

Extracurricular: extracurricular activities go beyond sport and physical activities. In this report, when we refer to 'extracurricular' we mean physical activity or sport-

related activities and clubs that pupils can participate in that are in addition to timetabled PE lessons. These might include, but are not limited to, before-school clubs, lunchtime clubs and after-school clubs, representing the school in inter-school competitions and sport-related leadership opportunities.

Knowledge: We discuss 2 forms of knowledge that underpin skill development:

- Declarative knowledge: declarative knowledge in this report refers to ‘know what’ knowledge in relation to motor competence; rules, tactics and strategies; and healthy participation. This knowledge is not a list of disconnected facts; it is explicitly linked to the content being taught. Declarative knowledge can be communicated verbally or in writing.
- Procedural knowledge: procedural knowledge in this report refers to ‘know how’ knowledge in relation to motor competence; rules, tactics and strategies; and healthy participation. This knowledge in a PE setting is best put into practice through physical demonstration or physical participation.

Forms of knowledge: These are a way to help us to navigate the complex aims of the national curriculum, particularly around the word ‘competence’ and what it means to get better in PE.

- Motor competence: a person’s ability to execute a variety of motor actions, including the coordination of fine and gross motor skills. These are necessary to participate in activities in everyday life, including play and physical activity. Without secure foundations in motor competence, pupils’ current and future involvement in physical activity and sport can be hindered.
- Rules, strategies and tactics: intelligent movement requires pupils to move in accordance with the demands of the context, which is informed by their knowledge of the relevant conventions and conditions of the activity. As novices, pupils need to be explicitly taught the knowledge that informs and successfully directs their movement: that is, knowledge of rules, strategies and tactics.
- Healthy participation: this is useful and useable knowledge that supports pupils to lead healthy, active lives. PE plays a vital role in connecting important ideas about health to physical activity.

Leaders: those with responsibility for PE in schools. During the visits, we spoke with members of the senior leadership team, such as headteachers and senior leaders with line management responsibilities for PE; and middle leaders, such as subject leaders for PE.

Staff teaching PE: a collective term to acknowledge that not all staff teaching PE in the schools visited hold teaching qualifications.

Special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND): A child of compulsory school age or a young person has a learning difficulty or disability if he or she:

- has significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age, or
- has a disability which prevents or hinders him or her from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream schools or mainstream post-16 institutions. [\[footnote 20\]](#)

Pupils with SEND are not a homogenous group. PE might present different barriers to participation and learning from other subjects for some pupils with SEND. Any references to pupil groups, such as high or low attainers, will include pupils with SEND unless specifically stated.

Annex B: Methodological note

This thematic report draws on findings from research visits to 25 primary and 25 secondary schools across England. These visits were carried out between November 2022 and June 2023.

We identified a balanced sample of schools to visit in terms of:

- pupil numbers
- levels of deprivation
- school location (urban and rural)
- current overall effectiveness grades, excluding inadequate schools

Participation was voluntary. If a school declined to take part, it was replaced by an alternative school with similar characteristics.

Research visits were for a single school day, by a single inspector with relevant expertise in PE. Wherever possible, inspectors spoke with senior and subject leaders, visited PE lessons, spoke to pupils, spoke to staff who had taught the PE lessons visited and, where appropriate, looked at a sample of pupils' work.

Inspectors did not make any judgements about the quality of PE in individual schools. However, the range of evidence gathered across these visits enabled us to identify common themes in PE. When analysing this evidence, we drew on the conception of quality in PE which we outlined in our PE research review. This

enabled us to consider how PE in English schools relates to our best evidence about how schools can ensure high-quality PE for all pupils.

Figure 1: Additional contextual information collected from schools visited.

| | Primary (25 schools) | Secondary (25 schools) |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| Who teaches PE | Class teacher (14/25) Specialist with PE teaching qualification (2/25) Other staff without specialist teaching qualification (1/25) Lessons taught by a combination of the above 8/25 | Specialist PE teachers (in all 25 schools visited) |

1. [‘Children’s activity levels recover to pre-pandemic levels’](#), Sport England, December 2022.↵
2. [‘Active Lives Children and Young People Survey - Academic year 2021-22’](#), Sport England, December 2021.↵
3. [‘Research review series: PE’](#), Ofsted, March 2022.↵
4. Section 78 of the Education Act 2002 applies to all maintained schools. Academies are also required to offer a broad and balanced curriculum in accordance with section 1 of the Academies Act 2010.↵
5. [‘KS4 subject entry level data’](#), GOV.UK;

[Provisional entries for GCSE, AS and A level: summer 2023 exam series](#), GOV.UK.↵
6. RM Ryan and EL Deci, ‘Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: definitions, theory, practices, and future directions’, in ‘Contemporary Educational Psychology’, Volume 61, 2020; J Bureau, J Howard, J Chong and F Guay, ‘Pathways to student motivation: a meta-analysis of antecedents of autonomous and controlled motivations’, in ‘Review of Educational Research’, Volume 92, Issue 1, 2022, pages 46-72.↵
7. R Barić, J Vlašić, Jadranka and E Saša, ‘Goal Orientation and Intrinsic Motivation for Physical Education: Does Perceived Competence Matter?’ in ‘Kinesiology’, Volume 46, 2014, pages 117-126.↵
8. E Coppens, A De Meester, FJA Deconinck, K De Martelaer, L Haerens, F Bardid,

M Lenoir and E D'Hondt, 'Differences in weight status and autonomous motivation towards sports among children with various profiles of motor competence and organized sports participation', in 'Children', Volume 8, Issue 2, 2021; T Utesch, F Bardid, D Büsch and B Strauss, 'The Relationship Between Motor Competence and Physical Fitness from Early Childhood to Early Adulthood: A Meta-Analysis' in 'Sports Med', Volume 49, 2019, pages 541-551.↵

9. ['Active Lives data tables'](#), Sport England, December 2022.↵
10. ['Beyond 2012: outstanding physical education for all'](#), Ofsted, February 2013.↵
11. ['Working lives of teachers and leaders - wave 1'](#), GOV.UK, April 2023.↵
12. ['PE and sport premium for primary schools'](#), GOV.UK.↵
13. ['School sports given huge boost to level the playing field for next generation of Lionesses'](#), GOV.UK, March 2023.↵
14. ['School sports given huge boost to level the playing field for next generation of Lionesses'](#), GOV.UK, March 2023.↵
15. 'High quality Physical Education for pupils with autism', Youth Sport Trust, 2008.↵
16. 'Give it a Go: Including People with Disabilities in Sport and Physical Activity', Australian Sports Commission, 2001.↵
17. ['National curriculum in England: PE programmes of study'](#), Department for Education, September 2013.↵
18. ['Health Position Paper'](#), Association for Physical Education, October 2015.↵
19. 'Pacific physical activity guidelines for adults', World Health Organization Western Pacific Region, 2008.↵
20. ['Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0-25 years'](#), Department for Education, January 2015.↵

[↑ Back to top](#)

Is this page useful?

Yes

No

[Report a problem with this page](#)

Services and information

[Benefits](#)

[Births, death, marriages and care](#)

[Business and self-employed](#)

[Childcare and parenting](#)

[Citizenship and living in the UK](#)

[Crime, justice and the law](#)

[Disabled people](#)

[Driving and transport](#)

[Education and learning](#)

[Employing people](#)

[Environment and countryside](#)

[Housing and local services](#)

[Money and tax](#)

[Passports, travel and living abroad](#)

[Visas and immigration](#)

[Working, jobs and pensions](#)

Government activity

[Departments](#)

[News](#)

[Guidance and regulation](#)

[Research and statistics](#)

[Policy papers and consultations](#)

[Transparency](#)

[How government works](#)

[Get involved](#)

[Help](#) [Privacy](#) [Cookies](#) [Accessibility statement](#) [Contact](#) [Terms and conditions](#)

[Rhestr o Wasanaethau Cymraeg](#) [Government Digital Service](#)

OGL

All content is available under the [Open Government Licence v3.0](#), except where otherwise stated



© Crown copyright