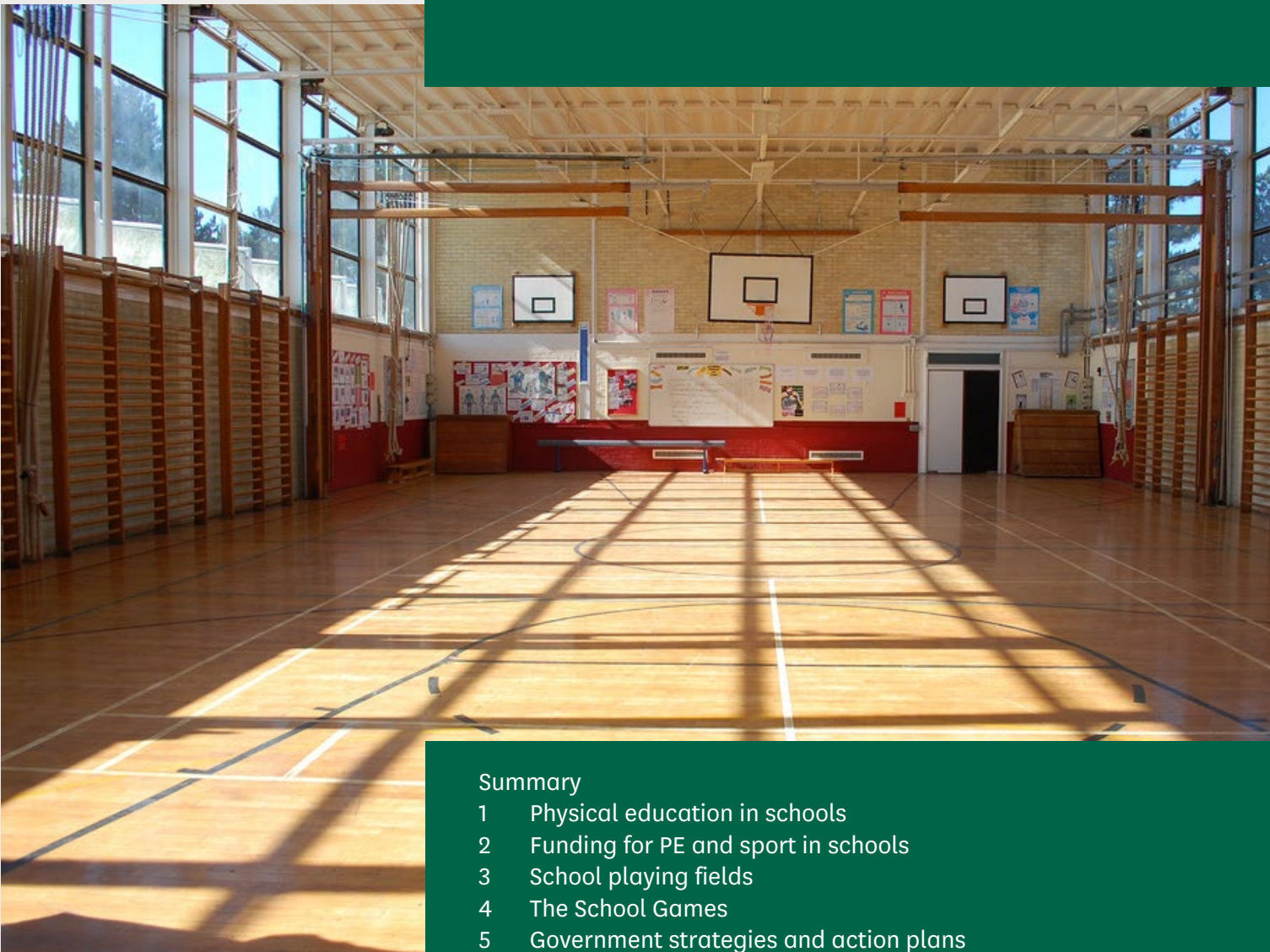


Research Briefing

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Physical education, physical activity and sport in English schools



Summary

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Summary

This briefing provides information on policies and practice relating to physical education, physical activity and sport in schools in England.

PE in the National Curriculum

PE is a compulsory subject under the National Curriculum at all key stages; [National Curriculum programmes of study](#) outline what should be taught at each key stage. Local authority maintained schools are required to follow the National Curriculum; academies and free schools do not have to follow it but are required to provide a broad and balanced curriculum that promotes the physical development of pupils.

Funding for PE and school sport

Funding for school PE and sport forms part of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), which is not broken down by subject or curriculum area.

Since financial year 2013-14, ring-fenced funding outside of DSG has also been provided to primary schools through the Primary PE and Sport Premium. From 2017-18, revenue from the soft drinks industry levy has been used to double the value of the premium from £160 million to £320 million. The Government has committed to continue providing the funding [until the end of the academic year 2024-25](#).

In February 2017, the Government announced £415 million of funding from the soft drinks industry levy would be allocated to schools in 2018-19 to “pay for facilities to support physical education, after-school activities and healthy eating.” The funding was referred to as the Healthy Schools Capital Programme. In July 2017, the then Education Secretary announced the funding available for the Programme would be reduced from £415 million to £100 million to help fund an additional £1.3 billion for the core schools budget in 2018-19 and 2019-20. The £100 million was allocated through the existing arrangements for schools capital funding in 2018-19.

School playing fields

From October 2012, new [regulations](#) have applied to the provision of outdoor space by schools. These require that suitable outdoor space must be provided to enable “pupils to play outside” and “physical education to be provided to pupils in accordance with the school curriculum”.

Local authorities and schools must seek the consent of the Secretary of State when seeking to dispose of publicly funded school land, including playing fields. [Guidance](#) on the disposal of school playing fields sets out the relevant legislation and procedure relating to the disposal of school land.

2023 Sport Strategy

In August 2023, the Government published a new sport strategy, [Get Active: a strategy for the future of sport and physical activity](#). The strategy included the Government’s aim to have 2.5 million more adults and 1 million more children classed as being active in England by 2030.

School Sport Action Plan

In July 2023, the Government published an updated [School Sport and Activity Action Plan](#).

The Plan emphasises the importance of physical activity for children, including the Chief Medical Officers’ recommendation that children and young people should engage in ‘moderate-to-vigorous physical activity’ for an average of at least 60 minutes per day across the week, and that those with disabilities should engage in 20 minutes of physical activity a day.

The plan also set out the importance of equal access to sport for boys and girls.

Data on children’s physical activity levels

In December 2022 Sport England published the latest [Active Lives Children and Young People Survey](#) about the estimated activity levels of 5-16 year olds in England in the 2021/22 academic year.

The survey estimated that around 47% of children and young people (3.4 million) were considered “active”. This means they achieved the Chief Medical Officer’s guidelines of taking part in sport and physical activity for an average

of 60 minutes or more a day. An estimated 30% did an average of less than 30 minutes per day. These were around the rates recorded prior to the Covid-19 pandemic (activity levels declined during the pandemic).

As in previous years, the survey found that boys were more likely to be active than girls, and children from the most affluent families were more likely to be active than other groups.

1 Physical education in schools

1.1 The National Curriculum

In 2010, the Coalition Government announced it would revise the PE curriculum to place more emphasis on competitive sports.¹ Under the revised National Curriculum introduced in September 2014, PE remains compulsory at all key stages. Local authority-maintained schools are required to follow the National Curriculum. Academies and free schools do not have to teach it, but are required to provide a broad and balanced curriculum that “promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils.”²

The stated aims of the National Curriculum for PE are to ensure that pupils:

- develop competence to excel in a broad range of physical activities
- are physically active for sustained periods of time
- engage in competitive sports and activities
- lead healthy, active lives.³

The National Curriculum programmes of study for PE outline what should be taught at each key stage:

Key stage 1 [ages 5-7]

[...]

Pupils should be taught to:

- master basic movements including running, jumping, throwing and catching, as well as developing balance, agility and co-ordination, and begin to apply these in a range of activities
- participate in team games, developing simple tactics for attacking and defending

¹ [Education Secretary’s letter to the Chair of the Youth Sport Trust](#), October 2010; [New approach for school sports: decentralising power, incentivising competition, trusting teachers](#), Department for Education, 20 December 2010.

² Academies Act 2010.

³ Department for Education, [National curriculum in England: physical education programmes of study](#), September 2013; [HC Deb 28 June 2011 c 763-4W](#).

- perform dances using simple movement patterns

Key stage 2 [ages 7-11]

[...]

Pupils should be taught to:

- use running, jumping, throwing and catching in isolation and in combination
- play competitive games, modified where appropriate [for example, badminton, basketball, cricket, football, hockey, netball, rounders and tennis]⁴, and apply basic principles suitable for attacking and defending
- develop flexibility, strength, technique, control and balance [for example, through athletics and gymnastics]
- perform dances using a range of movement patterns
- take part in outdoor and adventurous activity challenges both individually and within a team
- compare their performances with previous ones and demonstrate improvement to achieve their personal best

Swimming and water safety

All schools must provide swimming instruction either in key stage 1 or key stage 2.

In particular, pupils should be taught to:

- swim competently, confidently and proficiently over a distance of at least 25 metres
- use a range of strokes effectively [for example, front crawl, backstroke and breaststroke]
- perform safe self-rescue in different water-based situations

1 Support for swimming at school

The Government's 2015 Sport Strategy, [Sporting Future](#) (see section 5.1), stated that a working group would be established in early 2016 to advise on how to ensure no child leaves school unable to meet a minimum capability in swimming. The [report of the Curriculum Swimming and Water Safety Review](#)

⁴ Schools are not required to teach the example content in square brackets.

[Group](#) was published in July 2017. The report made 16 recommendations aimed at ensuring “all children leave primary school with an appropriate level of swimming and water safety ability.”⁵ In the second annual report on its Sport Strategy, published in January 2018, the Government stated that it had set up a cross-Government implementation group to review and implement the report’s recommendations.⁶

On 25 October 2018, the Department for Education (DfE) announced that primary schools would be given extra support to ensure all children reached the expected swimming standard by the end of primary schooling.⁷ The support included encouragement for schools to use the PE and Sport Premium (see section 2.1) for extra lessons for children who hadn’t met the expected level after core swimming lessons; extra training for teachers provided by Swim England; extra guidance, also provided by Swim England; and a drive to boost partnerships with independent schools.

Since the 2017/18 academic year, as part of reporting on their use of the PE and Sport Premium, schools have been required to publish the percentage of year 6 pupils who met the National Curriculum requirements relating to swimming.⁸

The Active Lives Children survey for the 2021/22 academic year (see section 6.2 for a summary of the findings), estimated that around 72% of Year 7 pupils (first year of secondary school) met [the government guideline](#) of swimming at least 25m unaided. This was a decline of around four percentage points compared with the rate recorded in the previous year, and a decline of around six percentage points compared with prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.⁹

Key stage 3 [ages 11-14]

[...]

Pupils should be taught to:

- use a range of tactics and strategies to overcome opponents in direct competition through team and individual games [for example, badminton, basketball, cricket, football, hockey, netball, rounders, rugby and tennis]
- develop their technique and improve their performance in other competitive sports [for example, athletics and gymnastics]

⁵ [Swim Group report to improve swimming and water safety in schools](#), Swim England, 24 July 2017.

⁶ HM Government, [Sporting Future: Second Annual Report](#), January 2018, p10.

⁷ Department for Education, ‘[Drive to ensure all children can swim by end of primary school](#)’, 25 October 2018.

⁸ [PE and sport premium for primary schools](#), Gov.uk, 24 October 2017.

⁹ Sport England, [Active Lives Children and Young People Survey Academic Year 2021/22 Report](#), December 2022; Sport England, [Active Lives Children and Young People Survey Academic Year 2020/21 Report](#), December 2021

- perform dances using advanced dance techniques in a range of dance styles and forms
- take part in outdoor and adventurous activities which present intellectual and physical challenges and be encouraged to work in a team, building on trust and developing skills to solve problems, either individually or as a group
- analyse their performances compared to previous ones and demonstrate improvement to achieve their personal best
- take part in competitive sports and activities outside school through community links or sports clubs

Key stage 4 [ages 14-16]

[...]

Pupils should be taught to:

- use and develop a variety of tactics and strategies to overcome opponents in team and individual games [for example, badminton, basketball, cricket, football, hockey, netball, rounders, rugby and tennis]
- develop their technique and improve their performance in other competitive sports [for example, athletics and gymnastics] or other physical activities [for example, dance]
- take part in further outdoor and adventurous activities in a range of environments which present intellectual and physical challenges and which encourage pupils to work in a team, building on trust and developing skills to solve problems, either individually or as a group
- evaluate their performances compared to previous ones and demonstrate improvement across a range of physical activities to achieve their personal best
- continue to take part regularly in competitive sports and activities outside school through community links or sports clubs.¹⁰

¹⁰ Department for Education, [National curriculum in England: physical education programmes of study](#), September 2013.

2 GCSE, AS, and A level PE

As part of the [extensive reforms carried out by the Coalition and Conservative Governments](#), subject content for reformed [GCSE PE](#), and [AS and A Level PE](#) in England was published in January 2015, for first teaching from September 2016.

Both sets of subject content include a list of activities in which students can be assessed as part of the qualifications – [the physical education activity list](#). In October 2018, the Department for Education (DfE) launched a [consultation](#) inviting proposals to add activities to the physical education activity list. The DfE’s response was published in September 2019. It listed the new activities that will be added to the physical education activity list, and incorporated into GCSE, AS and A level specifications, from September 2020.¹¹

1.2

Time spent teaching physical education

The Education Act 2002 prohibits the Secretary of State for Education from prescribing the amount of time to be spent on any curriculum subject, including PE.¹² In the [School Sport Action Plan](#), the Government encourages “all schools to deliver a minimum of 2 hours’ PE time during the school day every week alongside equal access to sport for girls and boys.”¹³

The Government’s [Childhood Obesity Action Plan](#), published in August 2016 (see section 5.2), announced that a new healthy rating scheme for primary schools would be introduced from September 2017, which physical activity would be a key part of. Following delays, the [rating system](#) was launched in July 2019. The section of the scheme concerned with physical activity measures the number of minutes of PE in school by each year group, as reported by schools through the survey.¹⁴

¹¹ Department for Education, [Review of GCSE, AS and A Level physical education activity list](#), last updated 10 September 2019.

¹² [HC Deb 15 July 2013 c 518W](#); Education Act 2002, section 87(4).

¹³ Department for Education, [School sport and activity plan](#), July 2023, p9

¹⁴ Department for Education, [Healthy schools rating scheme](#), 8 July 2019.

3 Two hour target

The former Labour Government's Physical Education and Sport Strategy aimed to increase the percentage of school children in England participating in two hours a week of PE.¹⁵ In October 2010, the Coalition Government ended the requirements of the strategy, including the requirement for schools to report how much time was being spent on PE. The then Secretary of State said, however, that he expected "every school to want to maintain, as a minimum, the current levels of provision for PE and sport each week for every pupil."¹⁶ In a February 2013 report, Ofsted recommended that primary schools should spend at least two hours a week on core PE.¹⁷

The Department for Education does not publish data about the average number of hours of physical education taught in schools. However, the annual School Workforce Census records the total number of hours taught by qualified teachers in individual subjects in a typical week in state-funded secondary schools in England (equivalent data for primary schools is not published). This measure is affected by the number of qualified teachers in physical education, as well as other factors such as pupil numbers, and school closures/openings.

Between 2010 and 2019 the number of hours of physical education taught in a typical week fell in each year, but in recent years the number of hours has generally followed an upward trend.

In a typical week in November 2022, around 286,000 hours of physical education were taught, an increase from around 281,600 in 2018 but a reduction from around 333,800 in November 2010. This equates to a 14% decline in hours taught over the whole period and a 2% increase since 2018. This compares with a 3% decline in all subjects over the period and a 6% increase since 2018.¹⁸

In August 2023, the BBC reported on the decrease in hours of physical education taught in 2022 compared with the previous year and compared with 2012. The article included reactions to the data from campaign groups

¹⁵ Department for Education and Skills and Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Learning through PE and Sport](#), March 2003, p2.

¹⁶ Department for Education, [Refocusing sport in schools to build a lasting legacy of the 2012 Games](#), press release, 20 October 2010. See also, [The Department comments on school sport target](#), Department for Education, 8 August 2012.

¹⁷ Ofsted, [Beyond 2012 – outstanding physical education for all](#), February 2013, p8.

¹⁸ Department for Education, [School Workforce in England: November 2010](#), updated March 2020 (Main tables, Table 12); Department for Education, [School Workforce in England: November 2022](#), updated September 2023. Also see: [PQ169642](#), 11 September 2018.

such as [Youth Sport Trust](#) who said that the decrease in hours taught were a “further threat to the wellbeing of young people”.

Equal access to PE

In March 2023, the Government announced that schools would be asked to [ensure boys and girls have the same opportunities during PE](#), with the [School Games Mark](#) awarded to schools who could demonstrate their delivery against the Government ambitions of parity between the sexes in school sport.¹⁹

The change was a response to the #LetGirlsPlay campaign championed by the England women’s football team after their success at Euro 2022.²⁰

4 Single-sex sport in schools

DfE guidance on gender separation in mixed schools states that schools should not generally separate pupils by sex. It explains, however, that section 195 of the Equality Act 2010 contains an exception, which permits single-sex sports. The guidance also makes clear that, where separate teams exist for different sexes it would be unlawful for a school to treat one group less favourably – for example, by providing a boys’ team with better resources than the girls’ team.²¹

Time spent physically active in schools

Looking at physical activity more broadly than just timetabled PE, since September 2019 the UK Chief Medical Officers have recommended that children and young people aged 5-18 should “engage in moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical activity for an average of at least 60 minutes per day across the week.” Prior to September 2019, the advice was that children should “engage in moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity for at least 60 minutes every day”.²²

The Government’s [Childhood Obesity Action Plan](#) (see section 5.2) noted the pre-September 2019 advice from the Chief Medical Officers and stated that every primary school child should “get at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity a day”, with at least 30 minutes delivered in school

¹⁹ [HC Deb 8 March 2023 \[School Sports Access and Funding\] 15-16WS](#)

²⁰ Department for Education, [School sports given huge boost to level the playing field for next generation of Lionesses](#), 8 March 2023; Schools Week, [Let all girls play football at school, say Lionesses after Euros victory](#), 3 August 2022

²¹ Department for Education, [Gender separation in mixed schools: Non-statutory guidance](#), June 2018, pp4-6.

²² Department of Health & Social Care and others, [UK Chief Medical Officers’ Physical Activity Guidelines](#), September 2019.

and the remaining 30 minutes supported by parents outside of school time.²³ The Government's [School Sport and Activity Action Plan](#), first published in July 2019 (see section 5.3) reiterated this but for all children.²⁴

²³ HM Government, [Childhood Obesity: A Plan of Action](#), August 2016, pp7-8.

²⁴ DfE, DDCMS and DHSC, [School Sport and Activity Action Plan](#), July 2019, p8.

2

Funding for PE and sport in schools

Funding for school sport and PE forms part of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), which is not broken down by subject or curriculum area. Additional funding is, however, also provided outside of DSG.

2.1

The PE and Sport Premium

Since 2013, annual ring-fenced funding has been provided to primary schools through the Primary PE and Sport Premium.²⁵ The Government has committed to continue providing the funding [until the end of the academic year 2024-25](#).²⁶

[Department for Education \(DfE\) guidance](#) provides information on how schools should use PE and Sport Premium funding and how they are held to account for its use. This states that schools must use the funding “to make additional and sustainable improvements to the PE, sport and physical activity they provide.” It should not be used to employ coaches or specialist teachers to cover planning preparation and assessment arrangement, or to teach the minimum requirement of the National Curriculum.

Ofsted assesses how schools use the PE and Sport Premium as part of the inspection process. Schools must also publish details of how they use the funding on their websites, along with the impact it has had on pupils’ PE and sport participation and attainment.

The guidance states that for the year 2023 to 2024, the amounts payable will be:

- schools with 16 or fewer [eligible pupils](#)²⁷ will receive £1,000 per pupil
- schools with 17 or more eligible pupils will receive £16,000 and an additional payment of £10 per pupil

²⁵ [Primary school sport funding](#), Department for Education, 17 April 2013.

²⁶ [HC Deb 8 March 2023 \[School Sports Access and Funding\] 15=16WS](#)

²⁷ Most schools with primary-age pupils receive the PE and sport premium. The exceptions are nursery schools, studio schools, university technical colleges, and independent schools, except for non-maintained special schools

Department for Education research report (2018)

Between 20 September and 12 October 2018, the Department for Education (DfE) surveyed a sample of primary schools in England to see how they were using the PE and Sport Premium; their views on the outcomes it had; and what if any difference the doubling of the Premium from September 2017 had.

A [research report](#) on the survey results was published in July 2019. The report emphasised the importance of noting certain limitations with its analysis, including that the data was gathered in response to an on-line survey and the information provided was based on perceptions and had not been otherwise verified.

The report's key findings included that since 2016-17:

- Almost 90% of respondents thought that the confidence, knowledge, and/or skills of all staff in teaching PE had increased a little or a lot.
- More than 80% thought the level of competitive sport offered had increased a little or a lot. Over 60% thought it had been increased for all pupils.
- Around 80% thought the proportion of pupils doing 30 minutes of exercise a day in school had increased a little or a lot.
- Over 90% indicated there was now a broader range of PE and sport being offered to all pupils.
- There had been an increase in the curriculum time spent in PE in around a third of schools.

In terms of the use of the Premium, most commonly schools reported they used it to buy new equipment or improve facilities, upskill existing staff, and/or increase extracurricular sport.

The main constraints in delivering physical activity were reported as “lack of space or facilities” (half of responses), and a lack of teacher skills and experience or confidence (a quarter of responses). Unprompted, a “notable minority” also specified a “lack of curriculum time.”²⁸

An earlier research report into the use of the Premium was published by the DfE in November 2015: [The PE and sport premium: an investigation in primary schools: Research report](#).²⁹

Ofsted report (2018)

Ofsted's July 2018 report on [physical activity in schools](#) (see section 6.3) noted that schools often used their PE and Sport Premium funding to bring in specialists to support the school in a number of ways, including:

²⁸ Department for Education, [Primary PE and Sport Premium Survey: Research Report](#), July 2019, pp6-9.

²⁹ Department for Education, [PE and sport premium: an investigation in primary schools](#), September 2015

- ongoing continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers
- particular PE teaching in areas the school has identified as weaker
- all or some of the after-school clubs.

The report additionally stated that schools were often using the Premium to fund planning, preparation and assessment cover, which, it noted, government guidance explicitly prohibits.³⁰

An [earlier report](#) published by Ofsted in 2014 examined best practice in the use of the PE and Sport Premium based on inspection visits to 22 primary schools known to be performing well in PE.³¹

APPG report (2019)

In February 2019 the All Party Parliamentary Group on a Fit and Healthy Childhood published a report on the Primary PE and Sport Premium.³² The report argued there has been “little critical appraisal of the [Primary PE and Sport Premium] funding” and that the report aimed to “begin a necessary process and in doing so, brings together evidence from across the sector to consider the future of the [Primary PE and Sport Premium] post 2018.”

The report identified an increasing tendency for schools to use their Premium funding to employ sports coaches to deliver curriculum PE. Such a shift towards “outsourcing physical education” can, the report said, “compromise the quality of learning and introduce a randomised ‘postcode lottery’ approach to the subject.” It added that schools reliant on “outsourcing the PE curriculum” need to consider how they plan to sustain this model if the funding ceases.³³

The report also argued that the PE and Sport Premium currently “fails to encourage the development of programmes that have the capacity to reach all pupils, not just those with sporting talent.” It should, the report recommended, be renamed the Primary Physical Education and Physical Activity Grant to help “liberate head teachers from the (mistaken) mindset that the resources can only be spent on PE or sports lessons.”³⁴

Other recommendations made by the report included that:

- Head teachers should be held accountable for the investment, with those who are non-compliant interviewed by the DfE to determine if the funding should be given to a third party to manage for the school.
- The DfE should “end the practice of outsourcing the sampling of school performance to market research companies whose report findings are

³⁰ Ofsted, [Obesity, healthy eating and physical activity in primary schools](#), July 2018, p17.

³¹ Ofsted, [The PE and sport premium for primary schools](#), October 2014

³² A Schools Week article included a summary of the report with responses from the DfE and Ofsted: [Take PE and sports premium cash off schools that misspend it, urges new report](#), 19 February 2019.

³³ APPG on a fit and healthy childhood, [The Primary PE and Sport Premium](#), February 2019, pp29-30.

³⁴ As above, pp19-20.

based upon school self-review without any meaningful on-site inspection of reported standards.”

- An independent organisation should be appointed to review the spend to ensure that an accountability system is in place.
- A statutory evaluation tool for the monitoring of the Premium should be introduced.
- Ofsted should ensure all inspections include an explicit focus on the effectiveness and monitoring of the Premium.³⁵

School Sport and Activity Action Plan (2019)

The [School Sport and Activity Action Plan](#), published in July 2019 (see section 5.3), highlighted the positive outcomes identified by the PE and Sport Premium survey. However, it acknowledged that this is not always the case and more can be done “to make sure that schools are using the funding appropriately and as effectively as possible.” The Plan stated that the Government would look at how best to build on existing support for schools to ensure they have “a toolkit to support effective use of the...Premium.” Guidance on the Premium would also be updated, it said, “to reflect the ambitions and actions in this plan, to help schools to understand the outcomes they should be aiming for and ways they could try to reach them.”³⁶

5 Sport England training for secondary teachers

In September 2018, Sport England announced it would invest £13.5 million in a teacher training programme, run in partnership with the Teaching Schools Council, to offer free training to 17,000 secondary school PE teachers by 2021.³⁷ This followed on from a commitment in Sport England’s five year strategy, [Towards an Active Nation, published in May 2016, to](#) “offer specialist training to at least two teachers in every secondary school by 2020.” The strategy said the aim of the training would be “to better meet the needs of all children, irrespective of their level of sporting ability, and to involve them in shaping the sporting opportunities that are provided.”³⁸

The strategy also stated that Sport England would:

- Improve the experience that children get in school through supporting the effective use of Primary PE and Sport Premium funding and its investment in the School Games.

³⁵ As above, pp7-10.

³⁶ DfE, DDCMS and DHSC, [School Sport and Activity Action Plan](#), July 2019, p15.

³⁷ [New Teacher Training to Target Attitudes to PE in Schools](#), Sport England, 24 September 2018.

³⁸ Sport England, [Towards an Active Nation: Strategy 2016-2021](#), May 2016, p21.

- Help to ensure there is a good “sports activity offer” before and after the school day by supporting satellite clubs and exploring Government investment in breakfast clubs.
- Recognise the importance of transitions between primary and secondary school (and then to further education and higher education), with an “increased focus on supporting inactive children and students to take up sport and exercise.”
- Measure the engagement of children between the ages of 5–14 outside school through questioning parents in the Active Lives survey.³⁹

2.2

Soft drinks industry levy funding

In addition to increasing funding for the Primary PE and Sport Premium (see section 2.1 above), Budget 2016 announced that revenue from the soft drinks industry levy would, among other things, be used to:

Provide up to £285 million a year to give 25% of secondary schools increased opportunity to extend their school day to offer a wider range of activities for pupils, including more sport.⁴⁰

More information on the Levy is available in section 9 of the Library briefing on [Obesity policy in England](#).⁴¹

Healthy pupils capital fund (HPCF)

On 28 February 2017, the DfE announced that £415 million of funding from the soft drinks industry levy would be allocated to schools in 2018-19 to “pay for facilities to support physical education, after-school activities and healthy eating.” It added that schools would be able to use the funding – referred to as the healthy pupils capital fund (HPCF) – to “improve facilities for children with physical conditions or support young people struggling with mental health issues.”⁴²

A Schools Week article on 1 March 2017 stated that funding originally planned for extending the school day in secondary schools, as announced in the 2016 March Budget, would instead be used for the HPCF.⁴³ The Government’s announcement on the HPCF said the funding “built on” plans for schools to provide a longer school day:

³⁹ As above, p21.

⁴⁰ HM Treasury, [Budget 2016](#), HC901, March 2016, p33.

⁴¹ House of Commons Library, [Obesity policy in England](#)

⁴² Department for Education, [New funding to boost schools facilities and healthy lifestyles](#), 28 February 2017.

⁴³ [Government scraps longer school day pledge](#), Schools Week, 1 March 2017.

The healthy pupils capital programme will build on the government's plans for schools to provide a longer school day by changing the focus of the scheme to provide new facilities or improve existing ones to make it easier for a range of extra-curricular activities to be provided.⁴⁴

Reduction of funding for HPCF

On 17 July 2017, the Education Secretary announced an additional £1.3 billion for the core schools budget across 2018-19 and 2019-20, which would, she said, be “funded in full from efficiencies and savings that I have identified in my Department’s budget.” She went on to explain that “efficiencies and savings” from the Department’s capital budget would release £420 million, £315 million of which would come from the money originally committed for the HPCF:

Efficiencies and savings across our main capital budget can, I believe, release £420 million. The majority of this will be from healthy pupils capital funding, from which we can make savings of £315 million. This reflects reductions in forecast revenue from the soft drinks industry levy. I will be able to channel the planned budget, which remains in place, to frontline schools, while meeting our commitment that every single pound of England’s share of spending from the levy will continue to be invested in improving children’s health; that includes £100 million in 2018-19 for healthy pupils capital.⁴⁵

A subsequent response to a parliamentary question confirmed that £100 million would be invested in the HPCF in 2018-19, with the funding for one year only.⁴⁶ The funding for the PE and Sports Premium announced at the 2016 Budget remained unchanged.⁴⁷

The HPCF was allocated through the existing arrangements for schools’ capital funding in 2018-19.

⁴⁴ Department for Education, [New funding to boost schools facilities and healthy lifestyles](#), 28 February 2017.

⁴⁵ HC Deb 17 July 2017, [cc563-66](#).

⁴⁶ [PQ 107301](#), 18 October 2017.

⁴⁷ [PQ 3745](#) 24 July 2017; [HC Deb 17 July 2017, c564](#).

6 Funding for breakfast clubs and essential life skills programme

Revenue from the Soft Drinks Industry Levy has also been used to provide funding for initiatives linked to physical activity and healthy lifestyles for children more generally.

In addition to doubling the PE and Sport Premium and providing capital funding for schools, Budget 2016 said revenue from the levy would be used to “provide £10 million funding a year to expand breakfast clubs in up to 1,600 schools starting from September 2017.” More information on the funding for breakfast clubs, with £26 million allocated between 2017-18 and 2019-20, was [announced](#) by the Government in March 2018.⁴⁸

The response to a parliamentary question in September 2022 provided an [overview of spending from the Levy since 2018](#).⁴⁹

2.3

Funding for school sport partnerships

In October 2010, the Coalition Government announced it was ending the previous administration’s PE and Sport Strategy and discontinuing ring-fenced funding for School Sport Partnerships.⁵⁰ Originally, the funding was to continue until March 2011 but this was extended to August 2011 following an announcement in December 2010. It was emphasised in the December 2010 announcement that although central Government funding was ending schools could continue, if they wanted, to fund School Sport Partnerships themselves.⁵¹

A Library briefing Paper, [School Sport Partnerships](#), provides further information.⁵²

⁴⁸ Department for Education, [Funding boost to give more children healthy start to the day](#), 19 March 2018

⁴⁹ [PQ 51631 28 September 2022](#)

⁵⁰ [Refocusing sport in schools to build a lasting legacy of the 2012 games](#), Department for Education, 20 October 2010.

⁵¹ [New approach for school sports: decentralising power, incentivising competition, trusting teachers](#), Department for Education, 20 December 2010.

⁵² House of Commons Library, [School Sport Partnerships](#)

3 School playing fields

Previously, regulations on the provision of outdoor space by schools specified a minimum space to sustain team games, depending on the number and age of pupils.⁵³ However, the current regulations, which came into force in October 2012, state:

Suitable outdoor space must be provided in order to enable—

(a) physical education to be provided to pupils in accordance with the school curriculum; and

(b) pupils to play outside.⁵⁴

3.1 Disposal of playing fields

Local authorities and schools must seek the consent of the Secretary of State when seeking to dispose of publicly funded school land, including playing fields.⁵⁵ The Department for Education (DfE) publishes a list of approved applications at: [Decisions on the disposal of school land](#).⁵⁶ In 2022 (at the time of writing the latest year with complete data) applications for 20 disposals were approved.

The DfE has published guidance on [submitting a school land transaction proposal](#).⁵⁷

The Government's position on the disposal of playing field land was set out by the minister, Baroness Barron, in response to a parliamentary question in April 2022:

In instances of schools wishing to sell playing fields, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, requires applicants to demonstrate a sporting and/or playing benefit as part of any mitigation measures, and that any loss has been minimised both in quantum and quality of the land disposed of. No open school has been allowed to sell all its playing fields.

The Secretary of State for Education is keen to protect school playing fields. Schools are only able to sell or otherwise dispose of playing fields when they can demonstrate to the Secretary of State that they have explored all possible

⁵³ [Schedule 2 of The Education \(School Premises\) Regulations 1999](#), SI 1999/2

⁵⁴ [The School Premises \(England\) Regulations 2012](#), SI 2012/1943

⁵⁵ Department for Education, [Disposal or change of use of playing field and school land](#), May 2015, p7.

⁵⁶ Department for Education, [Decisions on the disposal of school land](#), 11 August 2023

⁵⁷ Department for Education, [Submit a school land transaction proposal](#), 17 May 2023

alternatives to the disposal, and that the disposal does not adversely impact upon the school's curriculum.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ [PQ H17931 \[Schools: playing fields\] 28 April 2022](#)

4 The School Games

On 28 June 2010, the then Culture Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, announced plans for a national Olympic and Paralympic-style sports competition for schools. In the statement, Mr Hunt said he wanted the School Games to “boost” the promotion of competitive sport in schools and that the initiative would be a key part of the 2012 Olympic sporting legacy.

The School Games is currently funded by Sport England and delivered by the Youth Sport Trust. It comprises of both intra and inter-school competitions, leading to a School Games county provision as well as a biennial National Finals event. There are currently 18,700 School Games registered schools taking part in Intra and Inter-school events alongside County Finals every year.⁵⁹

7 School Games Mark

The [School Games Mark](#) is a Government led awards scheme aimed at rewarding schools in England for their commitment to and participation in the School Games. Schools in England are able to assess themselves across bronze, silver and gold levels, with external validation of the gold level.

4.1 School Games Review

In its [sport strategy](#), published in December 2015 (see section 5.1 below), the Government stated it would, along with Sport England and the Youth Sport Trust, “assess the effectiveness and future priorities of the School Games” before the Level 4 Finals in 2016.⁶⁰

The [report of the School Games Review](#) was published in July 2016. The review concluded that the School Games “is well placed to make a strong contribution” to the Government’s sports strategy and made 17 recommendations aimed at maximising the “value and impact of the School Games.”⁶¹

⁵⁹ [Your School Games](#) website

⁶⁰ Department for Culture Media and Sport, [Sporting Future - A New Strategy for an Active Nation](#), December 2015, p36.

⁶¹ Sport England, [School Games Review: Executive Summary Report](#), July 2016, p1.

The report recommended that the mission and focus of the School Games should be updated to ensure “it is relevant to more children and young people and their lives today.” An appendix to the report sets out an updated mission, vision and characteristics for the Games.⁶²

Other recommendations included:

- updating guidance and training to ensure that “the need to engender a sense of competence; promote enjoyment and avoid negative and bad experience will be embedded across all levels”;
- reducing the cost of the level 4 national finals and reviewing the sports and athletes participating in them;
- increasing the number and diversity of children participating in the School Games;
- strengthening volunteering opportunities across the School Games to enable young people to volunteer after they leave school; and
- widening the criteria for the School Games Mark.⁶³

An [update on the review](#) was published in November 2016. This stated that implementation of the recommendations had begun and would be monitored by the School Games Project Board. A brief update concerning each of the 17 recommendations was also provided.⁶⁴

4.2

School Sport and Activity Action Plan

The School Sport and Activity Action Plan (see section 5.3), first published in July 2019, highlighted the School Games as an important part of the UK’s sporting legacy and said Sport England would work with the Youth Sport Trust and sporting bodies to build on the programme.

When the Plan was revised in 2023, it said the Games “remains at the heart of school sport competition with over 85% of schools registered to take part.”⁶⁵

⁶² As above, p7.

⁶³ As above, pp2-6.

⁶⁴ Sport England, [School Games Review November 2016 – update](#), November 2016.

⁶⁵ Department for Education, [School Sport and Activity Action Plan](#), July 2023, p14

5 Government strategies and action plans

5.1 2023 Sport strategy

In August 2023, the Government published a new sport strategy, [Get Active: a strategy for the future of sport and physical activity](#). This updated the previous 2015 strategy (see following section). The strategy includes the Government's aim to have 2.5 million more adults and 1 million more children classed as being active in England by 2030.

In terms of youth education, the strategy highlights measures in the [School Sport and Activity Action Plan](#) published in July 2023 (see section 5.4) and states the Government's intention to:

- We will improve the quality and access to PE and school sport for all pupils:
 - Introduce new equality criteria to the School Games Mark that encourages and recognises schools providing equal access to girls and boys.
 - Launch a review of the sport offer in schools outside of PE.
 - Continue to support active travel to and from school and Bikeability delivery in the school day.⁶⁶

5.2 2015 Sport Strategy

In July 2015 the Government published a [consultation](#) on a new sport strategy. It set out the following areas the Government wanted to address:

- a. How to make sure that the impact of the PE and Sport Premium is sustainable over the long term – in terms of both:
 - i. improved provision in primary schools
 - ii. continued participation and engagement of current primary school pupils as they progress through to secondary level

⁶⁶ Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Get Active: a strategy for the future of sport and physical activity](#), 30 August 2023

- b. How to encourage young people to be active, and the role that schools can play in supporting this;
- c. How to continue to make the School Games relevant both in encouraging competitive sport and as part of the talent pathway;
- d. How to make the sporting offer for children and young people outside of school and school hours as attractive and accessible as possible;
- e. How we can encourage sport participation in further and higher education;
- f. How to ensure that schools, community sports clubs, central government and its agencies work together as effectively as possible to maximise opportunities for young people to take part in sport and be physically active.⁶⁷

The Strategy

The consultation closed in October 2015 and the new sport strategy, [Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation](#), was published in December 2015. The strategy said the Government was “redefining what success looks like in sport by concentrating on five key outcomes: physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, individual development, social and community development and economic development.”⁶⁸

Regarding school sport, the strategy emphasised the importance of linking together the different stages of education and seeing them “as part of the wider ‘taking part’ strategy”.⁶⁹ The strategy also contained a number of Government commitments relating to school sport:

- A working group would be established in early 2016 to advise on how to ensure no child leaves school unable to meet a minimum capability in swimming (see box 1 above).⁷⁰
- The Primary PE and Sport Premium would be continued.⁷¹
- The Government would “seek to better understand the barriers and issues around the drop-off in engagement from primary to secondary as well as identify good practice, particularly for the most affected groups, such as girls.”⁷²
- The Government, along with Sport England and the Youth Sport Trust, would “assess the effectiveness and future priorities of the School Games”.⁷³ See section 3.1 above for information about the review.

The strategy also announced that the remit of Sport England would be extended so it would become responsible for sport outside school from age 5, rather than 14. In addition, the Active People Survey, which Sport England

⁶⁷ DCMS, [A New Strategy for Sport: Consultation Paper](#), August 2015, p20.

⁶⁸ HM Government, [Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation](#), December 2015, p10.

⁶⁹ As above, p32.

⁷⁰ As above, p33.

⁷¹ As above, p35.

⁷² HM Government, [Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation](#), December 2015, p33.

⁷³ As above, p36.

used to measure participation in sport and physical activity, would be replaced with a new Active Lives Survey. The strategy stated the Government would consult with Sport England and other stakeholders in the first half of 2016 to develop “the most appropriate extension of the Active Lives method for measuring children’s engagement in sport and physical activity.”⁷⁴

The strategy set out a number of key performance indicators for each output. These included, but were not limited to:

- KPI 2b - Percentage of children (5-15) physically inactive
- KPI 3b - Percentage of children (5-15) taking part in sport and physical activity at least twice in the last month
- KPI 5 – Increase in the percentage of children achieving physical literacy standards.
- KPI 6 – Increase in the percentage of children achieving swimming proficiency.
- KPI 8 – Increase in the percentage of young people (11-18) with a positive attitude towards sport and being active.⁷⁵

First annual report on the strategy

The first [annual report](#) on the sport strategy was published in February 2017.⁷⁶ As well as outlining the increased funding for the PE and Sport Premium, and the review of the School Games, the report stated that “sport in secondary schools will also benefit from Sport England’s commitment to offer specialist training for at least two teachers in every secondary school by 2020.”⁷⁷ It also said that:

- To extend the Active Lives survey to 5-15 year olds, Sport England was “developing a system to measure how children engage with sport and physical activity”, with data collection intended to start in autumn 2017.⁷⁸
- The first data from the Active Lives survey relating to the four KPIs cited above were expected to be published in the 2019 annual report.⁷⁹
- The working group had been set to up “to explore ways to ensure that no child leaves school unable to meet a minimum standard of swimming.” The [report](#) of the Curriculum Swimming and Water Safety Review Group was published in July 2017 (see box 1 above).

⁷⁴ As above, p33.

⁷⁵ As above, p78.

⁷⁶ HM Government, [Sporting Future: First Annual Report](#), February 2017.

⁷⁷ As above, p17.

⁷⁸ As above, p16.

⁷⁹ HM Government, [Sporting Future: First Annual Report](#), February 2017, p16.

Second annual report on the strategy

The second annual report on the sport strategy was published in January 2018. As well as outlining the funding for the PE and Sport Premium and the HPCF, this stated that:

- The [Active Lives: Children and Young People survey](#) had been launched in September 2017. The first set of data was published in December 2018. (see section 6.2 below).
- The Government had set up an implementation group to review and implement the recommendations of the Curriculum Swimming and Water Safety Review Group’s report (see box 1 above).⁸⁰

Third annual report on the strategy

A report on progress in the third full year of the strategy was provided in a [ministerial written statement](#) by the Minister for Sport and Civil Society, Mims Davies, in February 2019.

The Minister noted the publication of the first year’s results of the Active Lives Children Survey in December 2018 and stated that the data on children’s inactivity levels was a “was a wake up call both for government and the sector, and has prompted a substantial new focus across government on improving sport and physical activity for young people.” This would be manifested, she said, through the School Sport and Activity Action Plan to be published in spring 2019 (see section 5.3 below).⁸¹

5.3

2016 Childhood obesity action plan

In August 2016 the Government published [Childhood Obesity: A Plan for Action](#), with the aim of significantly reducing the rate of childhood obesity in England within the next 10 years.

The action plan highlighted the health benefits of physical activity and cited evidence of a link between improved academic performance, and physical activity and participation in organised sports. As set out in section 1.2 above, the plan stated that every primary school child should “get at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity a day”, with at least 30 minutes delivered in school and the remaining 30 minutes supported by parents outside of school time.

⁸⁰ HM Government, [Sporting Future: Second Annual Report](#), January 2018, p10.

⁸¹ [HCWS1311](#), 7 February 2019.

8 Public Health England Guidance on increasing physical activity in schools

Public Health England has published [advice for schools](#) (last updated July 2019) on what works in schools and colleges to increase physical activity. The advice includes practice examples and also highlights links to Ofsted inspection criteria and useful sources of support.⁸²

With regards to physical activity and sport in schools, the action plan also said:

- Public Health England will develop advice to schools for 2017-18 on how they can “work with the school nurses, health centres, healthy weight teams in local authorities and other resources, to help children develop a healthier lifestyle.”
- County Sports Partnerships have been asked to work with other providers, including National Governing Bodies of sport, “to ensure that from September 2017, every primary school in England has access to a co-ordinated offer of high quality sport and physical activity programmes, both local and national.”
- A new healthy rating scheme for primary schools will be introduced from September 2017, which physical activity will be a key part of. Following delays, the [rating system](#) was launched in July 2019.⁸³

Plan of action: chapter 2

In June 2018 the Government published chapter two of its childhood obesity action plan. Among other things, the plan announced the Government would “review how the least active children are being engaged in physical activity in and around the school day.” The review, it added, will also “consider how the Primary and PE and Sport Premium is being used.”

The action plan set out a “national ambition” for every primary school to adopt an active mile initiative, such as the Daily Mile. Such initiatives can, the plan stated, be a simple means of contributing to the recommendation that schools should deliver at least 30 minutes of the total recommended 60 daily minutes of physical activity for children. The Government would, it said, review how the PE and Sport Premium could be used to support the ambition.⁸⁴

⁸² Public Health England, [What Works in Schools and Colleges to Increase Physical Activity?](#), October 2015.

⁸³ Department for Education, [Healthy schools rating scheme](#), 8 July 2019.

⁸⁴ HM Government, [Childhood obesity: a plan for action: Chapter 2](#), June 2018, pp27-8.

5.4

School Sport Action Plan

Following an earlier announcement in October 2018, the [School Sport and Activity Action Plan](#) was first published in July 2019. The Plan was subsequently updated in July 2023.⁸⁵

The Plan applies to England only.

The Plan emphasises the importance of physical activity for children, including the Chief Medical Officers' recommendation that children and young people should engage in 'moderate-to-vigorous physical activity' for an average of at least 60 minutes per day across the week, and that those with disabilities should engage in 20 minutes of physical activity a day.

The plan also sets out the importance of equal access to sport for boys and girls:

It is right that schools should continue to decide which sports they offer so that they can meet the needs of their pupils. Schools will often separate sporting experiences for boys and girls on the grounds of safety and fairness, but they should take the time to reflect on how this affects girls and boys accessing the same sports equally.

Our expectation is that the starting point for schools should be to give girls and boys access to the same sports where they are wanted.⁸⁶

The plan also set out the Government's intention to:

- publish non-statutory guidance to help primary and secondary schools deal with the issues they face in providing high quality PE and sport, including a focus on girls' equal access and at least 2 hours of PE and sport a week, by the end of 2023
- publish [updated guidance on the Primary PE and Sport Premium](#) in summer 2023, including a tool from the Association for Physical Education and Youth Sport Trust to help schools plan, report and evaluate the use of their premium
- continue to support Drowning Prevention Week in June 2024, and make new water safety lesson resources for primary schools available
- Make a refreshed [School Games Mark](#) available in autumn 2023

The plan further states that, at the end of the Opening School Facilities programme in March 2025, Active Partnerships and consortium partners will publish a practical guide with details of how schools can effectively use their

⁸⁵ [HC Deb 19 July 2023 \[PE and School Sport\] c71WS](#)

⁸⁶ Department for Education, [School sport and activity action plan](#), July 2023, p19-20

sport facilities to increase the participation rates of some of the most inactive groups.⁸⁷

5.5 Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic

In January 2022, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the DfE, Will Quince, set out in response to a Parliamentary Question the Government's assessment of the impact of the pandemic on PE:

Will Quince: The department recognises that the extended school closures have had a substantial impact on children and young people's education.

While we do not collect detailed data on PE outcomes, we have been monitoring the effect of the COVID-19 outbreak on education. The department's school snapshot panel survey in December 2020 provided insights into the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on PE provision, showing a mixed picture. 73% of schools had changed their delivery of PE in some way, for 90% the change was around delivering different or modified activities. 19% of all schools reported increased PE time, for example due to pupils attending school in PE kit reducing changing time, and 15% of all schools reported reduced time for PE often due to the lack of appropriate inside space. The [school recovery report](#) of January 2022 shows that whilst some schools report increased hours for PE, 56% of primary schools have reported reducing hours for some subjects, such as PE.

The department's COVID-19 guidance has supported schools to continue to provide PE, sport and physical activity through COVID-19 restrictions, and online PE lessons have been available through Oak National Academy.

PE will play an important role in supporting recovery. We are continuing to support schools to provide high quality PE. Primary schools continue to receive the £320 million PE and sport premium, which is supporting improvements to the quality of the PE, sport and physical activity which they offer. In October 2021 the government also announced nearly £30 million a year will go towards improving the teaching of PE at primary school, as well as to improving and opening up school sport facilities in England.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Department for Education, [School sport and activity action plan](#), July 2023, p16

⁸⁸ [PQ 104379 \[Physical education\]. 19 January 2022](#)

6 Surveys and reports

This section provides brief information on recent surveys and reports on physical activity in schools.

6.1 Ofsted subject review of PE (2023)

In September 2023, Ofsted [published a review of PE](#), as part of a series of subject reviews. The report was based on visits to 25 primary schools and 25 secondary schools between November 2022 and June 2023.

The report's findings included:

- Most primary schools taught PE for 2 hours per week, and around half of secondary schools taught PE for 2 hours per week at both key stage 3 and key stage 4
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) were supported to achieve well in PE in just over half of the schools
- All the secondary schools taught PE or sport-related qualifications at key stage 4 and/or key stage 5
- It was not always clear how what is being taught or the order of teaching in the curriculum is supporting all pupils to know more and do more in PE – and that “as a result, many curriculums lack coherence”
- Across both primary and secondary schools, most pupils were actively participating in lessons, but the quality of what they were doing was variable
- In most of the secondary schools, the compulsory key stage 4 PE curriculum lacked rigour, balance and depth, and “rarely matches the ambition of the national curriculum”⁸⁹

The report included a series of recommendations for schools to improve weaknesses, and also for wider policy. The policy recommendations were for policy leaders to:

- 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

⁸⁹ Ofsted, [Levelling the playing field: the physical education subject report](#), September 2023

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.⁹⁰

6.2 Association of Physical Education report (2021)

In June 2021, a taskforce established by the Association of Physical Education (afPE) published a report on [The Future of Physical Education](#), which aimed to put PE at the 'heart of school life'. The taskforce was chaired by Edward Timpson, the former Children's Minister.

The review recommended the Government should carry out an "urgent review... of the status of PE as a foundation subject." It further recommended that PE should be classified as a core subject.⁹¹ The report argued that these changes would "unlock" its other recommendations to strengthen PE teaching in schools.

The existing 'core' subjects within the [National Curriculum](#) are English, Mathematics, and Science. Physical education is a 'foundation' subject within the curriculum – alongside subjects such as art, languages, and history.⁹²

6.3 Active Lives Children and Young People Survey (2022)

Sport England's most recent report [Active Lives Children and Young People Survey](#) was published in December 2022. The report summarised the activity levels of 5-16 year olds in England during the 2021/22 academic year. It is based on a survey of pupils at both state-funded and independent schools.

⁹⁰ Ofsted, [Levelling the playing field: the physical education subject report](#), September 2023

⁹¹ Association of Physical Education, [Taskforce on the future of Physical Education \(PE\): The Heart of School Life](#), June 2021, p22

⁹² Department for Education, [The National Curriculum in England: Framework document](#), December 2014, p7

The report estimated that around 47% of children and young people achieved the Chief Medical Officer's guidelines of taking part in sport and physical activity for an average of 60 minutes or more a day (defined in the report as 'being active'). This equates to around 3.4 million children. Around 23% were estimated to do an average of 30-59 minutes a day (or 1.7 million children), and around 30% were estimated to do less than 30 minutes a day (2.2 million children). These were around the average rates recorded in 2018/19 prior to the Covid-19 pandemic (activity levels declined during the pandemic).⁹³

However, Sport England highlighted that a small number of groups of children are not as active as before the pandemic. This includes children in school years 3-4 (aged seven to nine), and black boys of primary school age.

The survey findings suggested that children with higher activity levels also reported higher levels of wellbeing.

In addition, activity levels varied by some characteristics. For example:

- Whilst an estimated 52% of children from the most affluent families were active, the figure for those from the least affluent families was only 42%.
- An estimated 50% of boys were active compared with 45% of girls.
- An estimated 50% of White British children were active compared with 41% of Asian children and Black children respectively.
- The proportion of children defined as active varied by year group. An estimated 52% of pupils in years 1-2 were active, compared with 39% of pupils in years 3-4, 48% of pupils in years 5-6, 51% of pupils in years 7-8, and 47% of pupils in years 9-11.
- The proportion of children defined as active did not vary by disability status (an estimated 48% of children with disabilities and long-term health conditions were active which was the same rate as those without).⁹⁴

A [summary of the findings](#) was published by Sport England which provides additional detail.⁹⁵

6.4 Taking Part Survey (2019-20)

Taking Part is a household survey in England which has been running since 2005 and looks at participation in the cultural and sporting sectors.

⁹³ Sport England, [Active Lives Children and Young People Survey Academic Year 2021/22 Report](#), December 2022

⁹⁴ Sport England, [Active Lives Children and Young People Survey Academic Year 2021/22 Report](#), December 2022

⁹⁵ Sport England, [Children's activity levels recover to pre-pandemic levels](#), December 2022

Statistical releases from Taking Part are available at: [Taking Part: statistical releases](#).

In September 2020, the annual data on child participation was published for the period covering April 2019 to March 2020. The key findings concerning participation in competitive school sport included:

- 65% of 5-15 year olds had participated in competitive sport in school in the last 12 months.
- The proportion of 5-10 year olds who had played sport in their school in organised competitions (for example, school sports day) was around 58%.⁹⁶

6.5 Ofsted report on physical activity in schools (July 2018)

In July 2018, Ofsted published a [report](#) on obesity, healthy eating and physical activity in primary schools. The report highlighted the things that schools can do to help tackle childhood obesity, including “providing ample opportunity for children to take physical exercise during the school day – with lots of opportunities to ‘get out of breath.’ The report cautioned, however, that, while the contribution of schools is important, they cannot alone have a direct and measurable impact on children’s weight.⁹⁷

Regarding physical activity in schools, the report’s findings included:

- 69% of the 60 schools visited as part of the research had two or more hours of PE in the timetable each week.
- Many schools also organised additional activities at the whole-school level; 13 schools, for example, organised a ‘daily mile’.
- Parents surveyed as part of the research wanted to see more time for PE in the curriculum.
- Extra-curricular activities can be a good way to broaden the opportunities for children to exercise but a quarter of parents said that their child could not access all the activities they wanted.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, [Taking Part 2019-20: annual child release](#), 16 September 2020

⁹⁷ Ofsted, [Obesity, healthy eating and physical activity in primary schools](#), July 2018, p3.

⁹⁸ [Schools not ‘silver bullet’ to tackling childhood obesity](#), Ofsted. 18 July 2018.

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