

Reaching the Key Stage 2 standard in swimming

Standards and provision including the impact on swimming of the Physical Education and School Club Links strategy

This survey was designed to assess the impact of recent government initiatives to improve the standards and provision of swimming at Key Stage 2. Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and Additional Inspectors visited 30 primary schools in 17 school sport partnerships to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of provision in primary schools, with a particular focus on the impact of the then Department for Education and Skills' national top-up swimming programme for pupils who have difficulty reaching the Key Stage 2 standard of swimming 25 metres unaided.

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Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Executive summary | 4 |
| Key findings | 5 |
| Recommendations | 6 |
| Standards and achievement in swimming | 6 |
| The quality of teaching | 7 |
| The curriculum for swimming | 9 |
| Leadership and management | 9 |
| Inclusion | 10 |
| The top-up programme | 11 |
| Case study | 11 |
| Notes | 13 |
| Further information | 14 |
| Annex | 15 |

Executive summary

In November 2000, Ofsted reported on standards and provision for swimming at Key Stage 2. This was followed by the establishment of the then Department for Education and Skills (DFES) Swimming Advisory Group in January 2001, the Government's swimming strategy in 2002 and the DfES swimming charter in 2003. The charter provided guidance for all those involved in planning and implementing provision for swimming.

This follow-up survey was designed to assess the impact of these initiatives. It evaluated the quality and effectiveness of provision in primary schools, with a particular focus on the impact of the (then) DfES's national top-up swimming programme for pupils who have difficulty reaching the Key Stage 2 standard.

Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and Additional Inspectors visited 30 primary schools in 17 school sport partnerships.¹ The schools were selected from within partnerships which had received additional funding under the Physical Education, School Sport and Club Links (PESSCL) strategy to boost the quality and effectiveness of provision for swimming in primary schools. It was intended that the funding should have a positive impact on increasing the proportion of pupils who are able to meet the end of Key Stage 2 expectation by swimming 25 metres unaided.

Provision for swimming was good in the majority of schools and partnerships visited. In almost every case, the schools had opted to enter into a service-level agreement so that the local authority managed and coordinated provision. In the best examples of provision, excellent liaison between the school, partnership and local authority ensured that the provision matched pupils' needs and interests; teachers were sensitive to potential religious and/or cultural issues. Schools were generally very positive about what was provided, but with some concerns about aspects such as assessment and the match of teaching to pupils' differing needs.

In the schools visited where the provision for swimming was inadequate, a key factor was the lack of time allocated to it.

Top-up funding was generally used to good effect to develop pupils' confidence in the water and the swimming skills of those who were unable to swim 25 metres. In most schools, the swimming programme concentrated on Year 4 pupils, followed by top-up provision and booster classes in Years 5 and 6. However, despite these programmes, too many pupils failed to reach the 25 metre target; this was

¹ School sport partnerships are local networks for the various strands of the Physical Education, School Sport and Club Links (PESSCL) strategy. They are based at a hub or host school, linked to neighbouring primary and secondary schools, the local community, clubs, and other providers of sport and sport development. Each partnership is overseen by a partnership development manager.

associated with weaker teaching, insufficient curriculum time, poor assessment and ineffective deployment of funding.

The report makes a number of recommendations, particularly related to maximising participation for all groups and ensuring that more pupils are able to swim 25 metres by the time they leave primary school.

Key findings

- Most pupils in the schools visited reached the expected standard, swimming 25 metres unaided.
- The quality and overall effectiveness of provision for swimming were good in the majority of the schools visited. Where there was low achievement, this reflected one or more of the following: an inappropriate curriculum; lack of time allocated for swimming; ineffective teaching; and poor leadership and management, including a failure to tackle known weaknesses.
- The majority of the teaching was good. Often, teachers were well qualified swimming instructors, trained by the local authority. Assessment was the weakest aspect of teaching. One in five of the lessons seen gave insufficient attention to the needs of the pupils least able to swim or those that had the least experience of swimming; too few schools tracked pupils' progress thoroughly.
- Participation rates were high. Pupils enjoyed swimming and it had a positive impact on their personal development and well-being.
- Good attention was paid in most instances to ensuring that appropriate account was taken of cultural issues. However, there was some evidence to suggest that pupils from some black minority ethnic groups often started with less experience of swimming than other groups and made the least progress.
- In a small number of local authorities, staff did not take into account the different needs of particular groups of pupils, including those with profound and/or severe physical disabilities and, occasionally, pupils with complex social and emotional needs.
- Top-up swimming sessions were usually offered to pupils who were unable to swim the expected distance. In half the schools visited, the impact of the national top-up programme was inadequate so that a significant minority of pupils entered Key Stage 3 unable to swim the expected 25 metres. Top-up sessions held outside term time constrained attendance, even where free transport was provided.
- The quality of swimming pools was generally good but, in three local authorities, centralising provision meant that pupils spent over twice as long travelling to the pool as they spent swimming.
- Very few partnerships had set an explicit target relating to the proportion of pupils who should meet the end of Key Stage 2 expectation for swimming.

Recommendations

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) should:

- require all partnerships to have a target for the proportion of pupils that will meet the end of Key Stage 2 expectation for swimming; and to monitor progress towards those targets
- encourage the use of the guidance provided to help partnerships and schools organise, plan and implement the top-up programme
- improve the effectiveness of the top-up programme and extend it into Key Stage 3 to benefit the significant minority of pupils who currently fail to meet the expectation at the end of Key Stage 2.

Local authorities should:

- provide top-up sessions in term time to encourage good attendance and maximise participation
- ensure that staff who teach are appropriately trained to work with the full range of learners, including those with learning difficulties and/ or disabilities.

Partnerships should:

- ensure that talented pupils have opportunities to continue to develop their swimming outside the curriculum
- promote better liaison and collaboration amongst schools, local authorities and themselves to tackle known weaknesses.

Schools should:

- understand that responsibility still sits with them even if the local authority is organising provision for them
- ensure that provision matches need and has an impact, particularly in providing for the groups of pupils identified as making least progress
- make sufficient curriculum time available for swimming
- track pupils' progress and inform secondary schools about pupils who have not met the expectation for swimming by the end of Key Stage 2.

Standards and achievement in swimming

1. The standards reached by pupils were good in 9 of the 30 schools visited, satisfactory in 16, but inadequate in 5. In most of the schools, many pupils started as novice swimmers with little confidence in the water; by the end of the swimming programmes and top-up lessons, around three quarters of pupils in the schools visited had made good progress and met the end of Key Stage 2 expectation. The following exemplifies good progress.

At the beginning of Year 4, 60% of pupils in one school were unable to swim the expected 25m. By the end of the year, as a result of good teaching, this had reduced to 12%. These pupils benefited from additional top-up lessons in Years 5 and 6, so that a 100% success rate was achieved. The most able swimmers went on to achieve distances of more than 100m. These high standards were reflected in pupils' ability to swim without assistance for a sustained period over at least 25m, to use a range of recognised strokes on their front and back, together with personal survival skills, and pace themselves in swimming and/or floating challenges at varying distances and speeds.

Progress was excellent in terms of pupils' confidence in the water, awareness of personal survival techniques and in the development of strokes. There was no difference in relative progress of different groups of pupils.

2. In schools where some pupils failed to meet the expectation for the end of Key Stage 2, this was usually because insufficient time had been given to swimming and/or because staff had been unable to help them overcome their fear of the water. Evidence from this small sample of schools suggested that pupils from some black minority ethnic groups often started with less experience of swimming than other groups and made the least progress. Providers did not always recognise or acknowledge this in their planning. Instances of good practice included consultation with a local mosque on how to improve participation of Muslim pupils, and family swimming programmes to involve parents from black minority ethnic groups. In the lessons themselves, the progress of individual pupils was accelerated by the use of higher staff ratios and tailored personal survival activities to boost pupils' water confidence.
3. Some pupils with social and behavioural difficulties also failed to make adequate progress. This was associated with limitations in the range of strategies used by staff to promote better attitudes and behaviour.
4. Pupils' views of the swimming programmes were overwhelmingly positive. They reported that they had a better understanding of personal survival and staying safe: they knew what to do if they got into difficulty in water. They said that the swimming sessions had improved their confidence in water and encouraged them to keep fit and healthy. Some pupils reported that their self-esteem was improved when they made progress and achieved accreditation.

The quality of teaching

5. Teaching was good in over half of the schools visited and inadequate in only one. Local authority instructors were well qualified (usually to level 2) and used their good subject knowledge effectively to develop pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding of swimming. The few schools that had their own swimming

pools employed private, but equally well qualified and effective, swimming teachers. The initial land-based water safety classes gave pupils the confidence to begin activity in the water. Staff used a range of teaching approaches to engage and motivate pupils; they responded well to positive reinforcement, support and guidance from staff. High teacher to pupil ratios (1:15) allowed pupils to receive individual attention.

6. Teaching was often less effective with pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The swimming teachers lacked experience and confidence with these pupils and sometimes resorted to excluding them from lessons in the absence of other strategies.
7. Assessment was the weakest aspect of teaching. In general, pupils were grouped by ability and teachers adjusted the lessons to the needs of the whole group. However, the progress of individual pupils was not tracked. The lack of such records meant that there was no recognition of the progress made by those who failed to meet the expectation for the end of Key Stage 2 or the small steps in progress which the least able swimmers had made.
8. The following is an example from one of the schools where assessment was good.

The baseline assessments at the beginning of the swimming programme allowed staff to group pupils by ability. Regular feedback from teachers, peer assessment and self-assessment helped to inform pupils about the progress they were making. Formative assessments enabled staff to set appropriate individual targets for improvement. Throughout the sessions, staff maintained a continuous record of pupils' progress. Pupils making sufficient progress were promoted to the next group. At the end of the programme, the pupils were formally assessed and received one of several awards relating to their level of competence. Accreditation included the National Curriculum water skills and water safety awards, alongside the Amateur Swimming Association's (ASA) Rainbow award scheme and some swimming challenge awards.

9. Most schools in the survey did not offer accreditation, but the 11 that did followed either the ASA's Rainbow award scheme or a local authority version of it.²

² Rainbow awards comprise a collection of awards for swimming distances ranging from 5 to 5,000 metres.

The curriculum for swimming

10. The curriculum for swimming was good in over half the schools visited; in several of the schools where the curriculum was satisfactory, there were weaknesses such as the limited time available. In three schools the curriculum was inadequate. Most of the schools met the National Curriculum requirements. The responsibility for curriculum planning for swimming was usually devolved to the local authority. Although the needs of most learners were met, some schools gave insufficient attention to particular groups of learners, notably gifted and talented swimmers and the least able or experienced. The following exemplifies a good curriculum.

This school's programme was well conceived, structured and implemented and met all the requirements of the National Curriculum for swimming. Pupils had a concentrated block of swimming with daily lessons for three weeks. This promoted excellent continuity and progression in pupils' learning. It was available for all Year 4 pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. To bring them up to the desired standard, all pupils who failed to meet the end of Key Stage 2 expectation were offered a series of top-up lessons in Years 5 and 6.

11. A weakness in nine of the schools visited was that they did not allow enough time for swimming and, as a consequence, some pupils failed to meet the required standard. Schools were particularly reluctant to give more time to swimming when they had been allocated morning sessions at the pool; in particular, they were reluctant to disturb their pattern of work for literacy and numeracy. The time available was also squeezed by the need to travel some distance to the pool: in some cases, pupils spent 70 minutes travelling for just 30 minutes of swimming.
12. The swimming pools used were well equipped and staff used the additional resources which were readily available, including flotation, personal survival and surface diving aids.
13. Most schools did not offer extra-curricular swimming, although a minority of the schools in the survey had developed effective links with a local swimming club for those pupils who were interested in developing their swimming.

Leadership and management

14. The leadership and management of swimming provision by local authorities and schools were satisfactory in the majority of the schools visited, good in one third but inadequate in one in seven. In most cases, schools had entrusted responsibility for organising swimming to the local authority under a service-level agreement that included transport, curriculum planning, teaching, assessment and accreditation.

15. The following exemplifies excellent leadership in the school, the partnership and across the local authority.

Very effective collaboration existed across the school, the partnership and the local authority which ensured that the swimming programme ran smoothly and that everyone involved was working effectively to ensure that targets were met. The good support of the headteacher, who was committed to developing wider physical education and sporting opportunities, facilitated this liaison. There was a clear rationale for the strategy and all the required policies and procedures relating to safeguarding pupils were in place. The local authority had an accurate view of the quality of provision and, in particular, of the quality of teaching. All staff were routinely monitored and reassessed and a central record was kept of the standards pupils reached. There was good awareness of the strengths and areas for further development. The authority's action plans showed a coherent strategy for continued development. The primary liaison teacher, school sports coordinator and the local authority's swimming representatives worked effectively together to refine and develop the provision further. Regular partnership meetings enabled emerging issues to be discussed and ideas to be shared.

16. Although schools were usually aware of any weak provision, few actively tackled it, as they felt it was not their responsibility. So, for example, shortcomings in assessment and the quality of teaching went unchallenged, while concerns about the progress of specific groups and the timing of lessons remained unresolved.

Inclusion

17. Most schools provided swimming for all pupils. Most swimming pools had full access for pupils with disabilities and some local authorities made specific provision to recognise and respond to cultural issues. The following examples illustrate inclusive provision.

Provision was equally accessible to all pupils at the school. The teaching included extension activities for the most able learners and additional support for pupils least able to swim, allowing all pupils to experience a degree of success.

The local authority had adopted very sensitive approaches to removing potential barriers to participation and to promote equality of access for all groups, regardless of culture, gender or disability. All the authority's swimming pools met the requirement to provide access for people with disabilities. In addition, it had installed modesty panels during sessions involving Muslim girls, and pupils were taught in single sex groups.

18. Providing introductions to water confidence, based on land in the first instance, and water safety courses also promoted inclusion, particularly amongst the least experienced or least confident swimmers.
19. However, in three local authorities staff were not adequately trained to provide for pupils with profound and/or severe physical disabilities and, on occasion, pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

The top-up programme

20. The impact of the national top-up programme was good in one in five of the schools visited and satisfactory or better in half of the schools visited. However, in half the schools visited the impact was inadequate, so that too many pupils entered Key Stage 3 unable to swim the expected 25 metres. The impact of the programme was greatest in partnerships where there had been high quality consultation and collaboration between the schools involved the partnership and the local authority providers. This ensured that clear success criteria were agreed and that provision matched each school's specific needs.
21. Pupils who could not swim 25 metres by the end of Year 4 had access to top-up lessons in Years 5 and 6. In the majority of the partnerships visited, these sessions took place during holidays and, although the local authorities provided free transport to and from the venues, attendance rates were lower than if the sessions had taken place in term time. Insufficient curriculum time, ineffective use of funding and some weaker teaching also affected success rates.
22. The following case study shows many of the characteristics of good top-up programmes.

Case study

St Mary's and Pickering Sport Partnerships in association with Hull Leisure and Priory Primary School and Hall Road Primary School

All the schools within the authority had a success rate which was at or above the national average, often from a very low starting point, for meeting the Key Stage 2 expectation for swimming.

Arrangements within the partnerships were characterised by very effective liaison between the local authority, the partnerships and the schools. They ensured that each partner was aware of its responsibilities and could work together to provide high quality swimming, raise standards and promote good achievement amongst all the pupils that participated.

In Hull, the local authority was responsible for all the swimming provision in its primary schools. This was a strategic decision to centralise operations and assure economies of scale. The partnership development

managers, school sports coordinators and primary link teachers were all involved in designing a suitable service-level agreement with the local authority's swimming service to provide curriculum planning, transport, hire of facilities and the teaching and assessment of pupils. Provision was also made for quality assurance of the programme, based upon agreed success criteria. As part of monitoring and evaluation, arrangements were in place for the local authority, partnership and the two schools to review the impact of the programme regularly. This was helping to ensure coherent and effective delivery and management.

At the end of each summer term, the swimming service contacted the individual schools and asked about the experience of, and competence in, swimming of the Year 3 pupils who would be moving to Year 4 in the following autumn term. The information was used for initial planning. At the same time, the local authority, in conjunction with the school and the partnership, agreed provisional dates for swimming sessions. The swimming service carefully considered the timing of sessions to avoid undue clashes with important activities that schools might have organised. Conscious efforts were made to avoid impinging on the teaching of literacy and numeracy, since this was widely recognised as a non-negotiable part of the provision for pupils in Hull. This was because of lower levels of literacy and numeracy on entry to primary school and the need to boost standards in these areas. Well before the start of the programme, all parties agreed dates, times and content of the sessions, along with the procedures for assessment and accreditation. This allowed the schools to be active partners, rather than simply recipients of provision. By the end of the summer term, all the necessary arrangements were in place.

At the beginning of the autumn term of Year 4, pupils took part in a land-based six-week water safety and personal survival course, which served as good preparation for the formal swimming lessons. A formal assessment, undertaken by the swimming service at the beginning of the water-based sessions, established pupils' levels of competence and confidence. Instructors and swimming teachers considered this assessment alongside the information previously supplied by the school in the summer term and grouped pupils according to ability. This arrangement was flexible and enabled pupils to have teaching which matched their experiences and which challenged and supported them.

The instructors who led the teaching and learning were trained by the local authority and required to hold at least a level 2 qualification, endorsed by the ASA. Groups were usually no more than 37, with four staff allocated to each group. Pupils benefited from these relatively small groups. Standard provision was three staff per class, but the additional

funding from the top-up programme funded an extra teacher, with a positive impact on learning.

The curriculum was a hybrid of the National Curriculum for swimming and the ASA's swimming curriculum, which was adapted to meet the needs of each school's pupils. Instructors maintained accurate monitoring and assessment records to reflect pupils' progress. At the end of the programme, pupils' achievements were gauged by measuring the progress they had made since the initial assessment. All pupils received some form of accreditation, which recognised their progress, even if they had not met the Key Stage 2 expectation. Badges and certificates acknowledged distances achieved ranging from five to over 100 metres.

The local authority was sensitive to potential barriers to participation and had policies in place to mitigate non-participation because of race, sex or disability. There was full access for individuals with disabilities in all the pools and changing facilities. The coordinator for the swimming development unit liaised with local religious leaders to ensure that cultural customs relating to Muslim girls were not compromised. Same-sex classes and teachers could be organised if required, and modesty blinds were erected to prevent observers. This meant that participation rates were very high.

Pupils said that they enjoyed these sessions and, overwhelmingly, felt that they had made good progress. Their good progress was confirmed by the assessment records. The small numbers of pupils who remained unable to swim 25 metres by the end of the swimming programme were targeted for top-up sessions in Years 5 and 6. By the end of these sessions, all but a handful of pupils could swim 25 metres unaided.

Notes

A Public Service Agreement target shared between the DCSF and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has been set to increase to 85% by 2008 the percentage of 5–16-year-olds who spend at least two hours each week on high quality physical education and school sport within and beyond the curriculum.

School sport partnerships are the local networks that have been established to plan strategy for and coordinate delivery of the various strands of the national strategy for PESSCL. They are based at a hub or host school, which links with neighbouring primary and secondary schools, the local community, clubs, and other providers of sport and sport development to roll out the strategy and meet the objectives. Each partnership is overseen by a partnership development manager. Primary link teachers and secondary school sports coordinators are given time to implement the strategy.

The survey was conducted between January and March 2007. It focused specifically on the quality and effectiveness of swimming provision in primary schools. Her Majesty's Inspectors and Additional Inspectors visited 30 schools in 12 local authorities and 17 different partnerships. Some of the larger local authorities contained several partnerships. Schools were drawn from Kingston upon Hull, West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, Greater London, Middlesex, Oxfordshire, East Midlands, Bedfordshire, Kent, Essex and North Lincolnshire.

The sample was selected from schools, identified by the then DfES, as being within school sport partnerships which had received additional funding to boost the quality and effectiveness of provision for swimming in primary schools. It was intended that the funding should have a positive impact on increasing the proportion of pupils that met the end of Key Stage 2 expectation for swimming, in particular the ability to swim 25 metres unaided.

Inspectors scrutinised documentation about swimming, such as schemes of work, curriculum plans, development plans and assessment procedures. In addition, they held discussions with a range of key staff, including local authority swimming officials, partnership development managers, headteachers and primary link teachers, and school sports coordinators.

Further information

Publications

Swimming in Key Stage 2: an inspection report on standards and provision, Ofsted, 2000.

Swimming charter (PE/SC), DfES, 2003.

www.teachernet.gov.uk/doc/5885/Swimming%20charter.pdf

Websites

www.qca.org.uk

<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/subjects/pe/nationalstrategy/Swimming/>

www.britishswimming.org

Annex

The following schools were visited as part of this survey

Althorpe and Keadby Primary School, North Lincolnshire
Eldon Junior School, Enfield
Firs Estate Primary, City of Derby
Five Elms Primary School, Barking and Dagenham
Hall Road Primary School, Kingston upon Hull
High Fernley Primary School, Bradford
John Hampden Primary School, Oxfordshire
Low Ash Primary School, Bradford
Lowfield Community Primary School, Sheffield
Manor Junior School, Barking and Dagenham
Normanton Altoft Junior School, Wakefield
Priory Primary School, Kingston upon Hull
Pye Bank C of E Primary School, Sheffield
Ryecroft Primary School, Leeds
Sandal Endowed C of E Junior School, Wakefield
Sir William Burrough Primary School, Tower Hamlets
Springfield Primary School, Sheffield
St Anne's Catholic Primary School, Bradford
St Luke's Primary School, North Lincolnshire
St Stephen's Catholic Primary School, Bexley
Stanley St Peters CE Primary School, Wakefield
Stocks Lane Primary School, Bradford
Tatsfield Primary School, Bromley
Warden Hill Junior School, Luton
Warren Junior School, Barking and Dagenham
Westbourne Primary School, Bradford
William Austin Junior School, Luton
William Rhodes Primary, Derbyshire
Winteringham Primary School, North Lincolnshire
Wycliffe C of E Primary School, Bradford