YOUTH SPORT TRUST

RESEARCH

Savanta:

Class of 2035 report

2025 edition

About the Youth Sport Trust

The Youth Sport Trust is a children's charity founded in 1995 to harness the power of play and sport in children's education and development.

Our **vision** is a future where every child enjoys the life-changing benefits of play and sport

Our **mission** is to equip educators and empower young people to build bright futures

Together we create opportunities for everyone to belong and achieve

Read our 2022-35 strategy Inspiring Changemakers, Building Belonging: **www.youthsporttrust.org/strategy**

Contents

Introduction from our CEO

In 2015, our first Class of 2035 report sounded the alarm: children across the UK were moving less, living less freely, and facing a future defined by barriers restricting physical activity. A decade later, the challenge remains – urgent, visible and felt deeply by young people.

The past decade has seen significant trends and events affecting children. The Covid-19 pandemic, cost-of-living crisis, the rise of digital dominance and a narrowing of the curriculum are individually seismic events. When layered up it's no surprise children's positive attitudes and desire to be more active are not enough to change a bleak outlook. Put simply, we have an inactive generation because we are limiting their access to physical activity.

This new report takes the story forward, challenging us to consider the impact if current trends continue. It warns we risk a decade of decline, meaning by 2035 without change and through inactivity we will deliver a generation with poorer health, lower happiness and attainment, and worse life chances: a legacy of neglect.

This is not the future our children want or deserve and it is our duty to take action. Together, we can render these projections obsolete and build a brighter future where every child has access to the life-changing benefits of play and sport. Today's choices shape tomorrow's outcomes and we remain optimistic better days lie ahead.

It is important to note at the outset the 2035 scenario is informed by trends and does not take into account changes on the horizon. Our hope is the Government's proposed curriculum reboot, alongside a new PE and School Sport Partnership Network are indicative of a new era approaching. The concerning forecasts for the future only emphasise the importance of capitalising on this moment for change.

Ali Oliver MBE
Chief Executive Officer, Youth Sport Trust

Background and context

Savanta were commissioned in February 2025 by the Youth Sport Trust to conduct research exploring the future of PE, sport, and physical activity in young people's lives. This report outlines findings and recommendations following the research, informed by the policy and funding landscape at that time.

This is the third in a landmark series of reports. The Youth Sport Trust, the UK's leading children's charity for improving young people's education and development through play and sport, first launched the Class of 2035 in 2015, with a commitment to reassess the landscape every five years. Each edition has provided evidence, sparked debate, and informed action about the challenges and opportunities facing children's engagement with sport and physical activity.

Previous reports, published in 2015 and 2020, examined the benefits of PE for learning and social development, barriers to participation, and the impact of digital technologies on play and sport. Each report has also considered the scenarios for how young people's engagement with sport and play might evolve by 2035.

This third report seeks to deliver even more impactful insight - providing policymakers, practitioners, and partners with a sharper evidence base and a renewed sense of urgency. For 2025, the work takes a fresh approach to scenario planning, including the use of innovative methods such as AI to explore and test how children's development could change depending on their level of engagement with play and sport in the decade ahead.

It brings together current data analysis and is informed by the policy landscape at that time to present a comprehensive picture of PE, school sport, and broader physical activity for children and young people in 2025 and beyond. The report presents headline survey results and key findings on children's behaviours, experiences, and attitudes to activity and PE, as well as integrating scenario analysis, using survey insights and AI-driven modelling to forecast future trends.

Extrapolations in this report were developed using Savanta's AI deep research platform, which systematically reviewed and analysed a wide range of online sources — including published reports, academic journals, and news articles — to identify the main drivers shaping children's activity rates. Drawing on these mapped trends, the AI system modelled projections based on a continuation of current trends. This was then cross-checked and validated by human researchers against authoritative, published evidence to ensure credibility and alignment with sector benchmarks.

The combination of statistically rigorous quantitative data and forward-looking scenario planning creates a vision of what the landscape may look like a decade from now. This comprehensive approach ensures that the report not only documents the present reality, but also equips policymakers, educators, and practitioners with actionable insight to improve outcomes for all children and young people.

Executive summary

Executive summary

Children and young people have extremely positive attitudes towards physical activity, including PE, sport and play. However, recent years have seen stagnation, with overall physical activity levels remaining broadly static and well below recommended levels. Too many children are missing out on opportunities to be active, and the positive associated benefits.

If change is not forthcoming – in government, education, and across society – we will experience a decade of decline, meaning by 2035 a bleak picture will have deteriorated further. Not only will overall activity levels have declined, but as a result there will be significant implications for children's health and wellbeing, education and life chances.

In stark terms, we risk creating a society where a third of children are not active for even 30 minutes a day, half of children are spending more than three hours a day on screens, and diseases once associated with adulthood such as type 2 diabetes become increasingly prevalent amongst young people.

The insights contained within this report come from a nationally representative survey of children's behaviours, experiences, and attitudes towards physical activity, integrated with scenario analysis using AI-driven modelling to forecast future trends. This approach enables us to project what the landscape for children's physical activity looks like in 2035, without change. Insights you will find explored in more detail within include:

Children and young people are positive about physical activity and want to be more active

- Being physically active is associated with enjoyment and an improved sense of wellbeing
- Young people's awareness of how active they should be surpasses that of teachers and parents
- Most young people have positive experiences of PE, however the ongoing gender enjoyment and participation gap between boys and girls persists
- The picture for children with disabilities is more challenging still, with more action needed to guarantee all children access to opportunities
- The ethos of a school is a significant driver of physical activity, including whether a school values PE and encourages activity at break and lunchtimes

89%

of young people like taking part in physical activity

91%

of young people understand why being active is good for them

Executive summary

Without change, we face a decade of decline, worsening the outlook for a generation

- A lack of prioritisation means policy and funding decisions fail to deliver systemic change, or even provide the stability needed to maintain the status quo
- In schools, the status of PE plummets with reduced PE hours, fewer teachers, more lessons cancelled and lower quality experiences, aligned to budget cuts restricting choice and opportunities
- Across society, awareness of the UK's Chief Medical Officers' physical activity guidelines remains low, contributing to inertia
- Digital dominance becomes further entrenched as culture shifts from active to sedentary and screen time soars
- Pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and in deprived areas are hit hardest, with the combined effect resulting in a generation where activity levels remain low and those from under-served groups missing out most

By 2035
Based on current trends

A further
40,000
hours of PE could be lost from the curriculum, on top of the 45,000 hours already lost since the 2012 Olympics

34%
of children will fail to get even 30 minutes of physical activity a day, up from 29.6% in 2025

48%
of children will spend three hours or more on screens a day for entertainment purposes, not including homework, up from 34% in 2025

Executive summary

The impact surpasses physical activity alone and poses a severe threat to a generation's futures

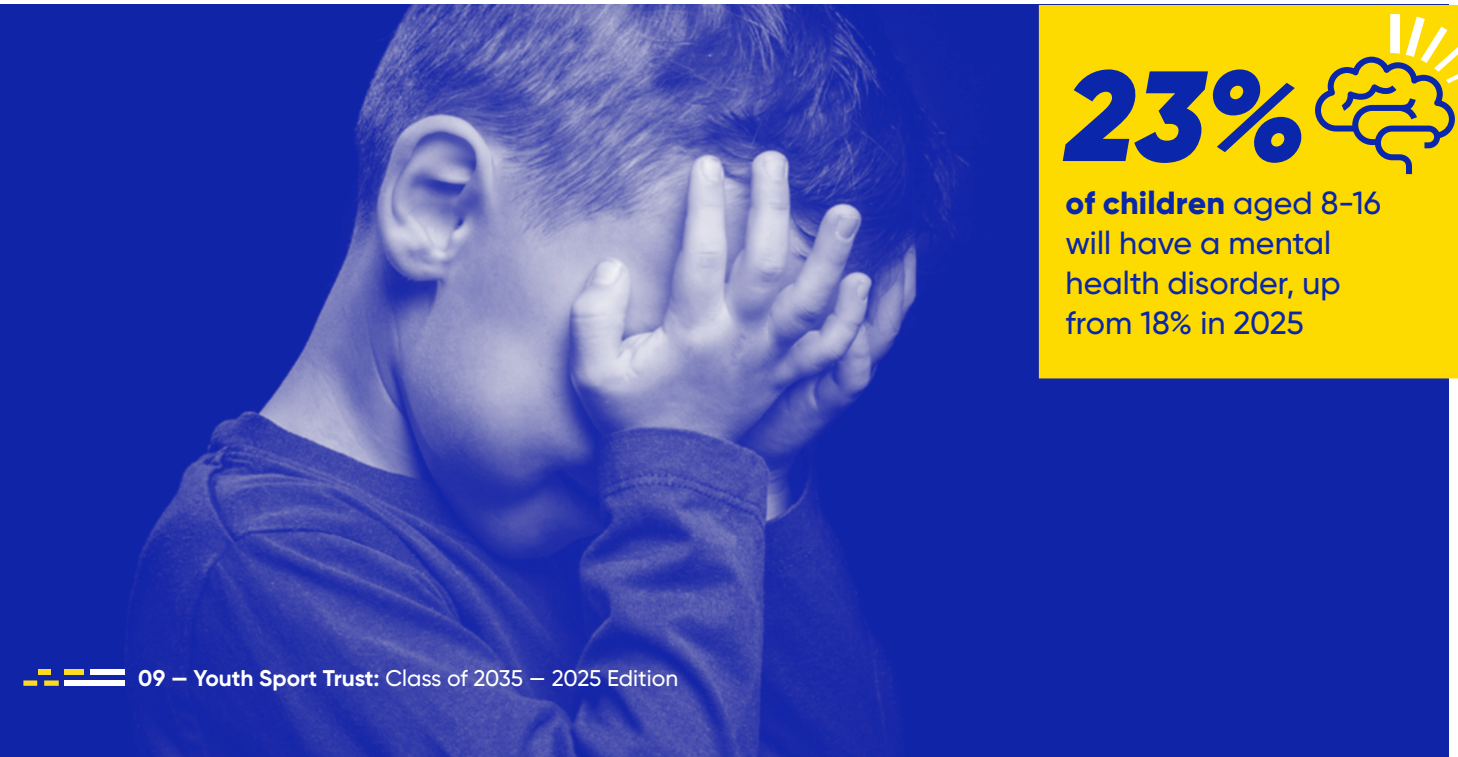
- Physical health outcomes associated with inactivity continue to rise, including obesity rates amongst 10-11-year-olds rising to 24%, increasing NHS costs
- Conditions once only associated with adulthood such as Type 2 diabetes are increasingly diagnosed in children
- The power of physical activity to improve wellbeing is neglected, contributing to increasing mental health problems and a treatment versus prevention-first approach
- Education outcomes include worse attendance, engagement, and belonging in school for the least active children
- The continued widening of gaps in participation reinforces existing inequalities

By 2035
Based on current trends

500

new diagnoses of Type 2 diabetes each year – almost double 2025 rates

Obesity rates among 10-11-year-olds rise to 24% up from 22%



23%

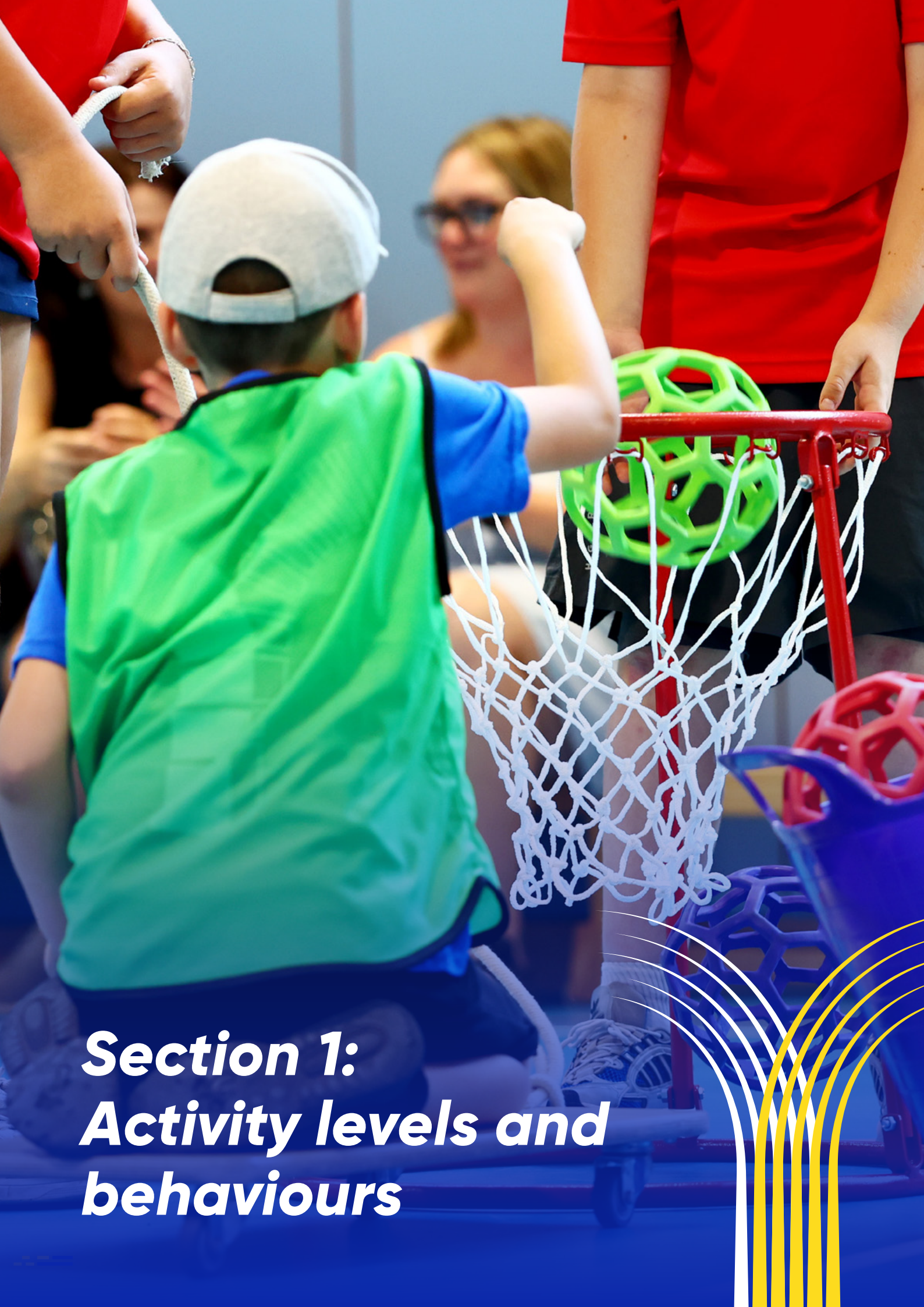
of children aged 8-16 will have a mental health disorder, up from 18% in 2025

The Children's Survey

The Children's Survey

A nationally representative survey was conducted between 12-26 March 2025 with 1,002 young people aged 5–16 across the UK. The sample was structured to reflect key national demographics, including age, gender, region, ethnicity, and socio-economic status group. To ensure reliability and minimise bias, quotas and weighting were applied based on the most recent Office for National Statistics population data (2024). Parental consent was obtained for all participants, and the survey adhered to the highest ethical standards and safeguarding guidelines.

In addition to robust sampling, the research set-up was designed for transparency and credibility. The survey instrument was piloted for clarity and age-appropriateness. Data quality was actively monitored and cross-checked for completeness and consistency. This approach ensured that the results are statistically robust and representative of children and young people nationally, providing a sound evidence base for all findings and recommendations in this report.



Section 1: Activity levels and behaviours

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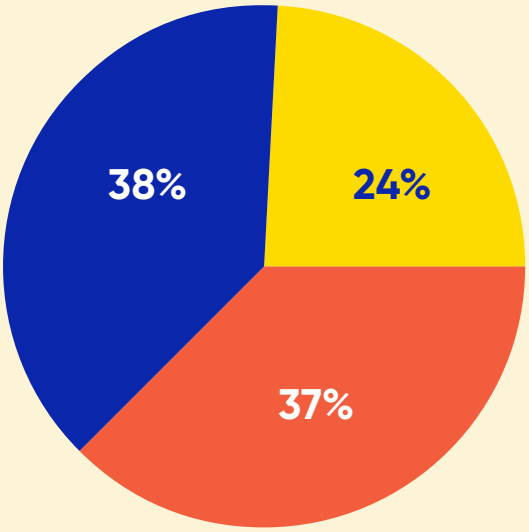
On average, how many minutes each day do you think children (ages 5 to 18) should be active?



- Less than 60 minutes
- Exactly 60 minutes
- More than 60 minutes

Three in four young people (75%) believe young people aged 5-18 should get at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day (this means activities that make you breathe harder like running, walking fast, or riding a bike).

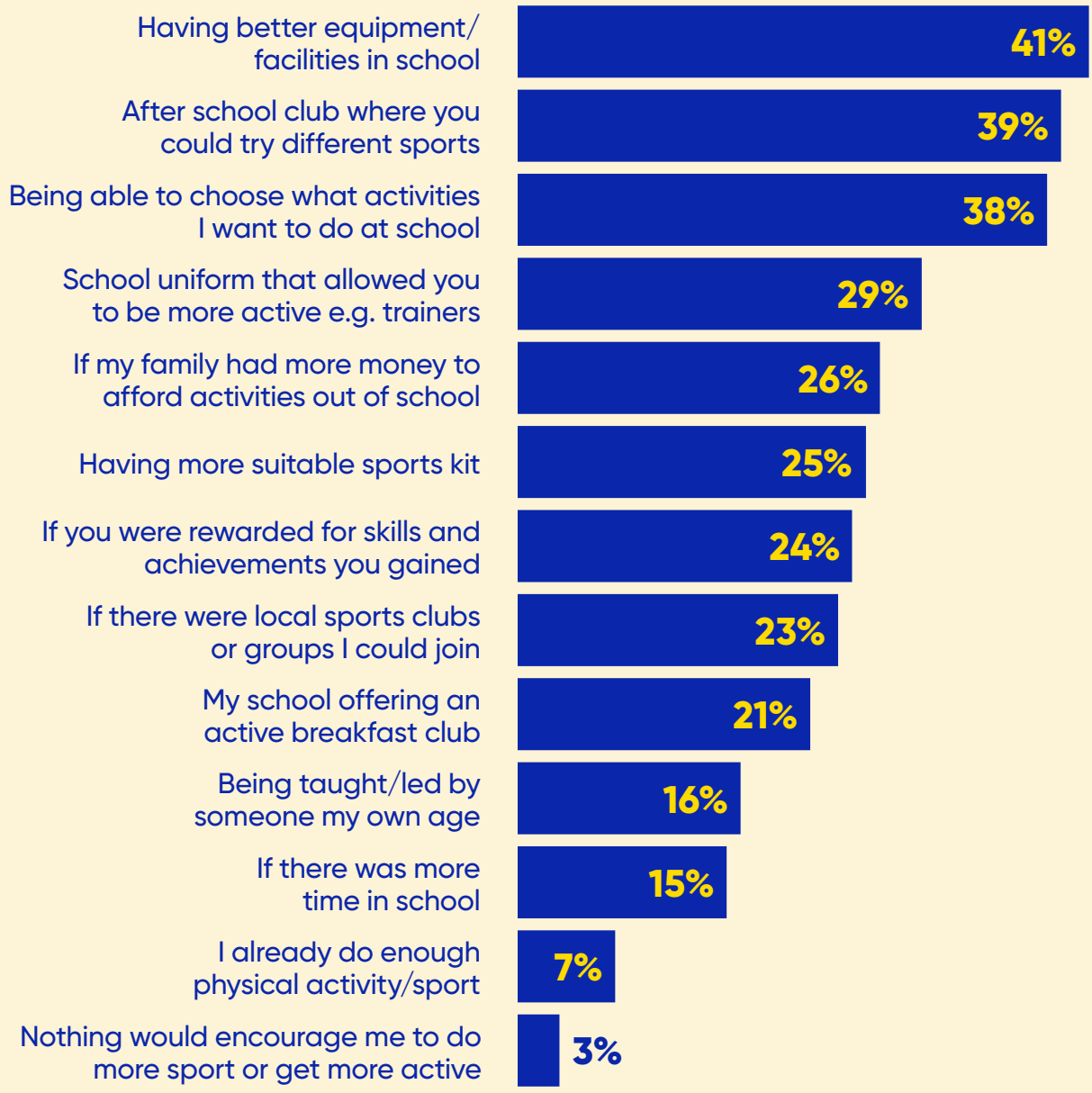
This aligns with the UK Chief Medical Officers' official recommendation, which is why it is used as the central measure in this research. Over a third of young people (37%) say exactly 60 minutes each day, while 38% think children should be active for more than 60 minutes daily.

Similar to findings from the annual Sport England Active Lives survey, our survey showed the vast majority of young people enjoy being active. Nine in ten (89%) say they like taking part in physical activity (43% 'like it a lot', 46% 'like it'), and a similar proportion (85%) say they enjoy taking part in exercise/sport outside of school (41% 'like it a lot', 44% 'like it'). Boys are significantly more likely than girls to say they enjoy these activities. There is also a clear age trend, with enjoyment decreasing as children get older.

Offering a range of opportunities and allowing children to make choices at school is important for encouraging them to be more active. The top three factors that would encourage young people to do more sport or be more active are: 'Having better equipment/ facilities in school' (41%), 'My school offering an after-school club where you could try different sports' (39%), and 'Being able to choose what activities I want to do at school' (38%). This underscores the vital role schools already have in promoting physical activity among children, while also highlighting the potential to further boost activity levels through their broad influence.

Section 1: Activity levels and behaviours

Would any of the following encourage you to do more sport or get more active?

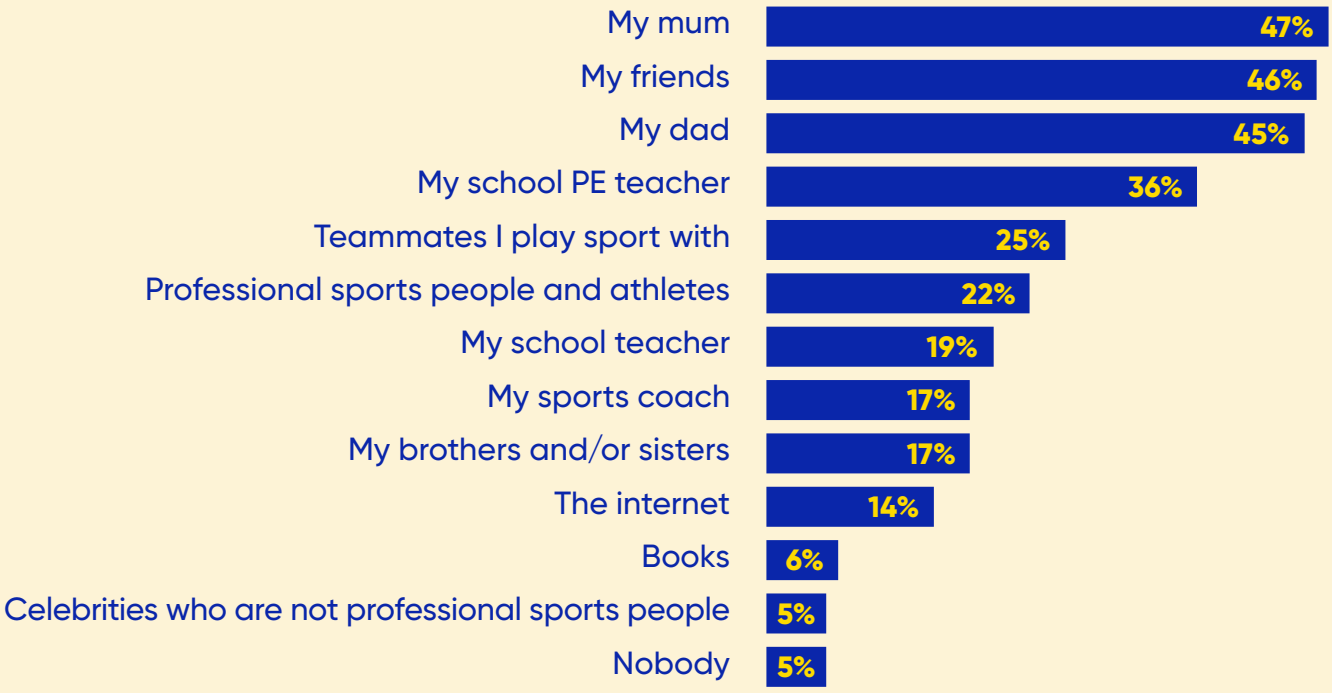


In the last six months, 58% of young people say they have attended at least one before or after school club that includes physical activity, while 32% say they have represented their school at a sporting event or festival outside of school.

Around one in four (23%) say they have done neither of these things; this is more common among girls than boys (26% vs 20%) and 15–16-year-olds (35%).

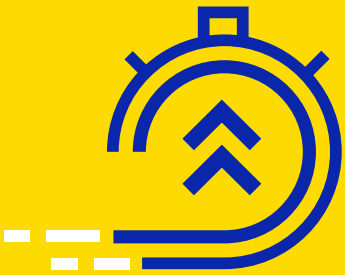
Section 1: Activity levels and behaviours

Who or what inspires you to be active?



Young people are most inspired to be active by those closest to them, including their mum (47%), their friends (46%) and their dad (45%). Their school PE teachers can also play a role (36%), as can teammates they play sport with (25%), and professional sports people/athletes (22%).

Three in five children feel they get the right amount of time for physical activity outside of school (62%), during the school day in curriculum PE lessons (60%) and after school clubs (59%), though around one in three say they would like more time to be active in each of these settings (30%, 34% and 30% respectively). Breaktime and lunchtimes are the settings most associated with not having enough time to be active, with 42% of young people saying that they would like more time.

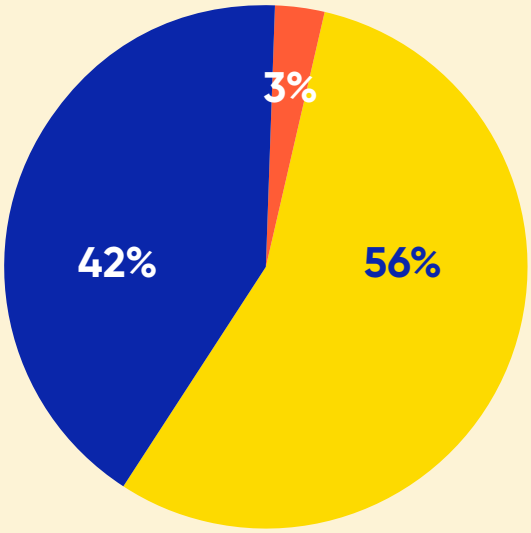


42%

of young people would like more time to be active at break and lunch time

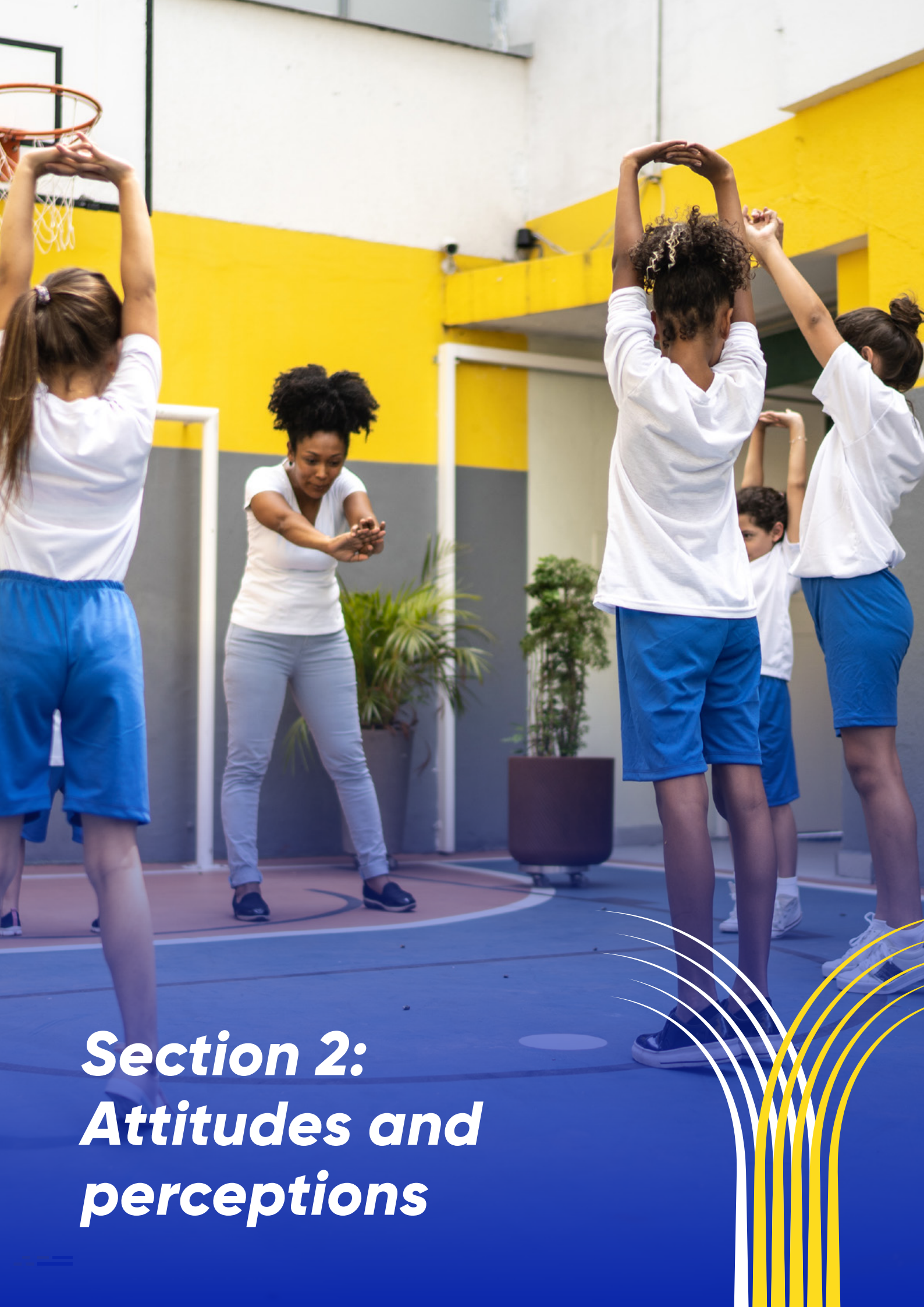
Section 1: Activity levels and behaviours

In the last week, on how many days did you do 60 minutes or more of activity that made you feel warmer and made your heartbeat faster?



Most children (98%) were active for 60 minutes on at least 1 day of the last week. Some of this activity took place in school, with one in three young people (36%) saying they take part in sport or physical activity at school outside of their mandatory PE lessons (e.g. at breakfast clubs, lunchtime sessions or after school clubs) on at least 3 days a week.

Only 1 in 10 (11%) say they never do any sport or physical activity beyond PE, although this is more common with girls (15%) and rises steadily with age, with 15–16-year-olds being the least likely to take part (20%).



Section 2: Attitudes and perceptions

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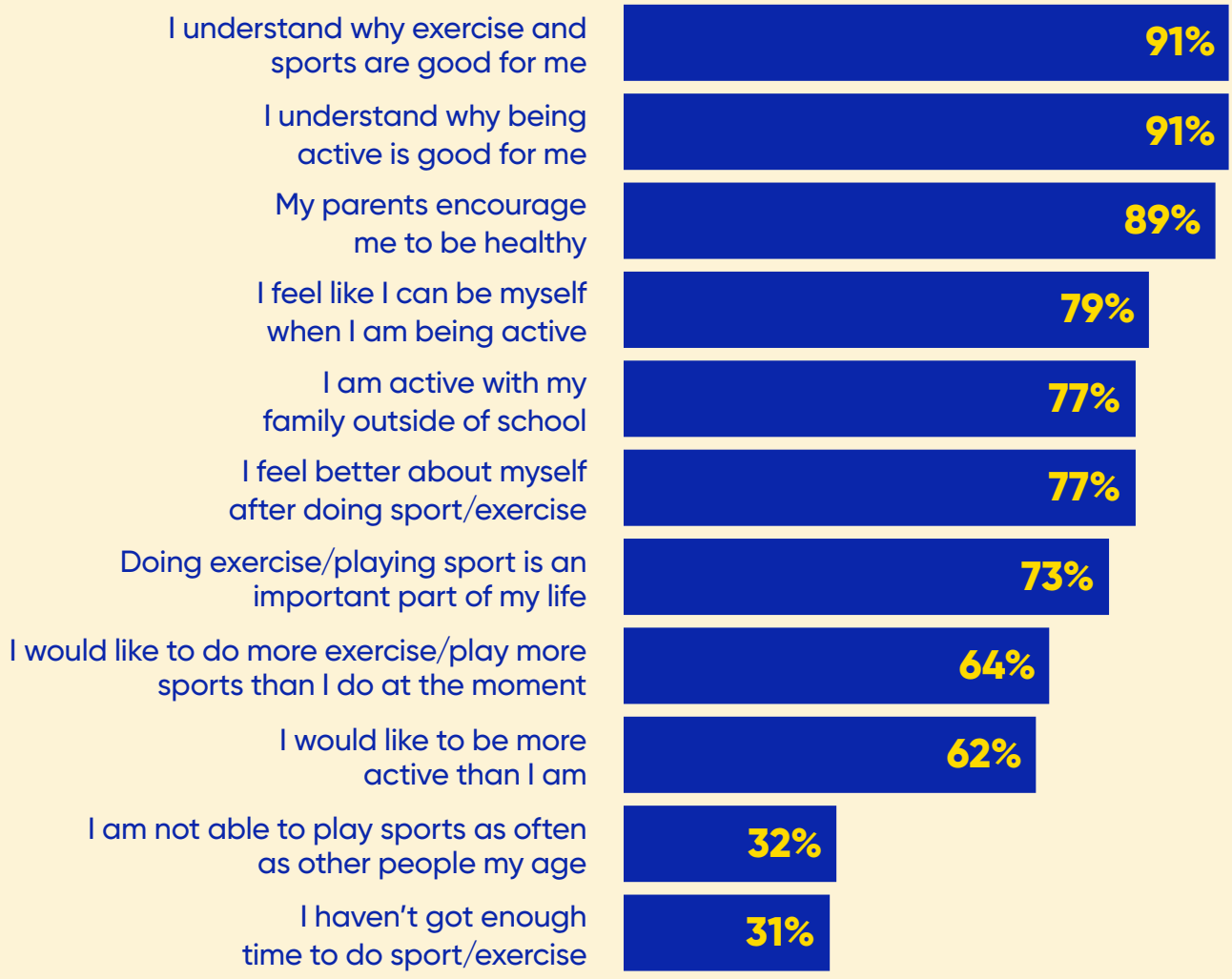
Encouragingly, most young people not only enjoy physical activity but understand why it is beneficial. Nine in ten also say their parents encourage them to be healthy (89%), suggesting their parents recognise the benefits too.

Activity also provides space for self-expression, with 79% saying they feel they can be themselves when active. Three quarters say sport makes them feel better about themselves (77%), is part of family life outside of school (77%), and an important part of their own life (73%).

For children with disabilities, however, the picture is more challenging. Only 74% say they feel they can be themselves when active, compared with 81% of their non-disabled peers. They are also less likely to feel that sport boosts their confidence or plays a central role in their lives. The awareness of their barriers to access are significant too: almost half of children with disabilities say they cannot play sport as often as others.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following?
% NET agree with statement ('Strongly agree' + 'Agree')



Section 3: School sport experience

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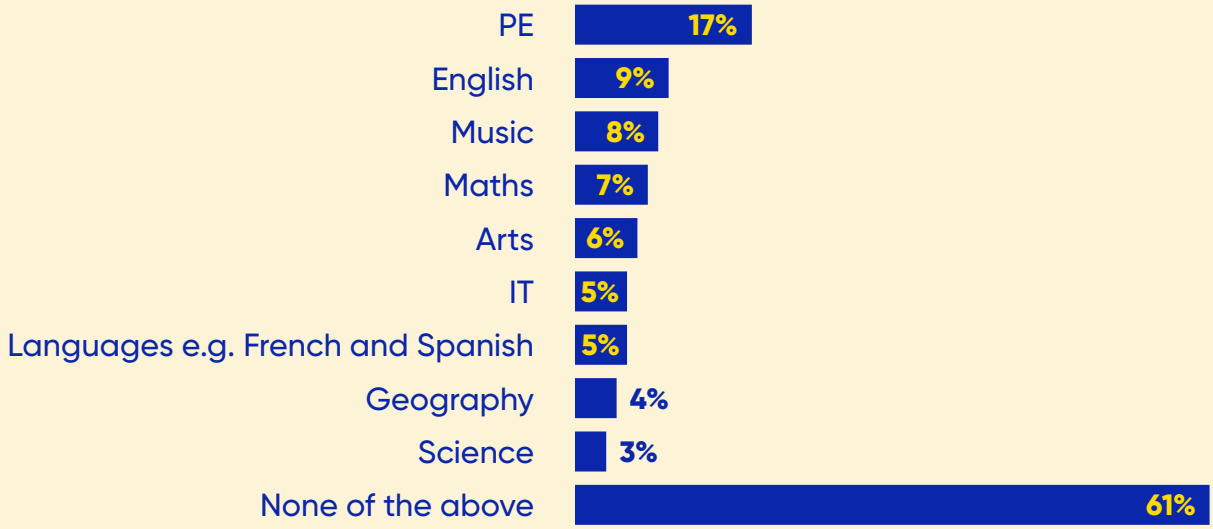
One in three young people (33%) report having had at least one school lesson cancelled during the current school year. PE is by far the most commonly cancelled lesson (17%), followed by English (9%), Music (8%), and Maths (7%).

So far in this school year, have any of the following lessons been cancelled at your school?



The main reasons PE lessons are cancelled are because teachers are not available (42%), schools do not have the available space – for example, sports halls are being used for exams (31%), there are poor weather conditions (29%), or because there is need to make time for other subjects (24%).

When PE lessons are cancelled, most young people spend the spare time on their studies, for example engaging in a study or homework session (31%), attending another academic class (30%), or using the time for self-study or reading (25%). Just one in five (21%) say they spend the spare time participating in a different physical activity or sport, indicating that cancelled PE lessons often do not get replaced with alternative opportunities to be active.

There is strong recognition from young people about the importance of PE lessons in school; 93% agree that PE lessons are important, compared to just 3% who say they are not, and 3% who say they are unsure. There is a clear age pattern here, with agreement generally decreasing as children get older.

Section 3: School sport experience

The vast majority of young people (86%) say they enjoy taking part in PE at school, with 51% saying they 'like it a lot', and 36% saying they 'like it'. Boys are significantly more likely to say they enjoy PE overall compared to girls (90% vs. 83%). Again, there is a clear age pattern, with enjoyment decreasing steadily as children get older (e.g. 97% of 5–6-year-olds say they like PE, compared to 73% of 15–16-year-olds).

Of those who dislike PE, the main reasons are that they are worried they will let the team down (19%), that they will get hurt (18%), that they are not very good at exercise/playing sports (16%), and they feel self-conscious about their body (16%). Appearance and body concerns are more prevalent among girls than boys, as are interest and motivation concerns. Disabled children are also more likely than non-disabled children to hold concerns over their appearance and body image, as well as performance and skill-related concerns.

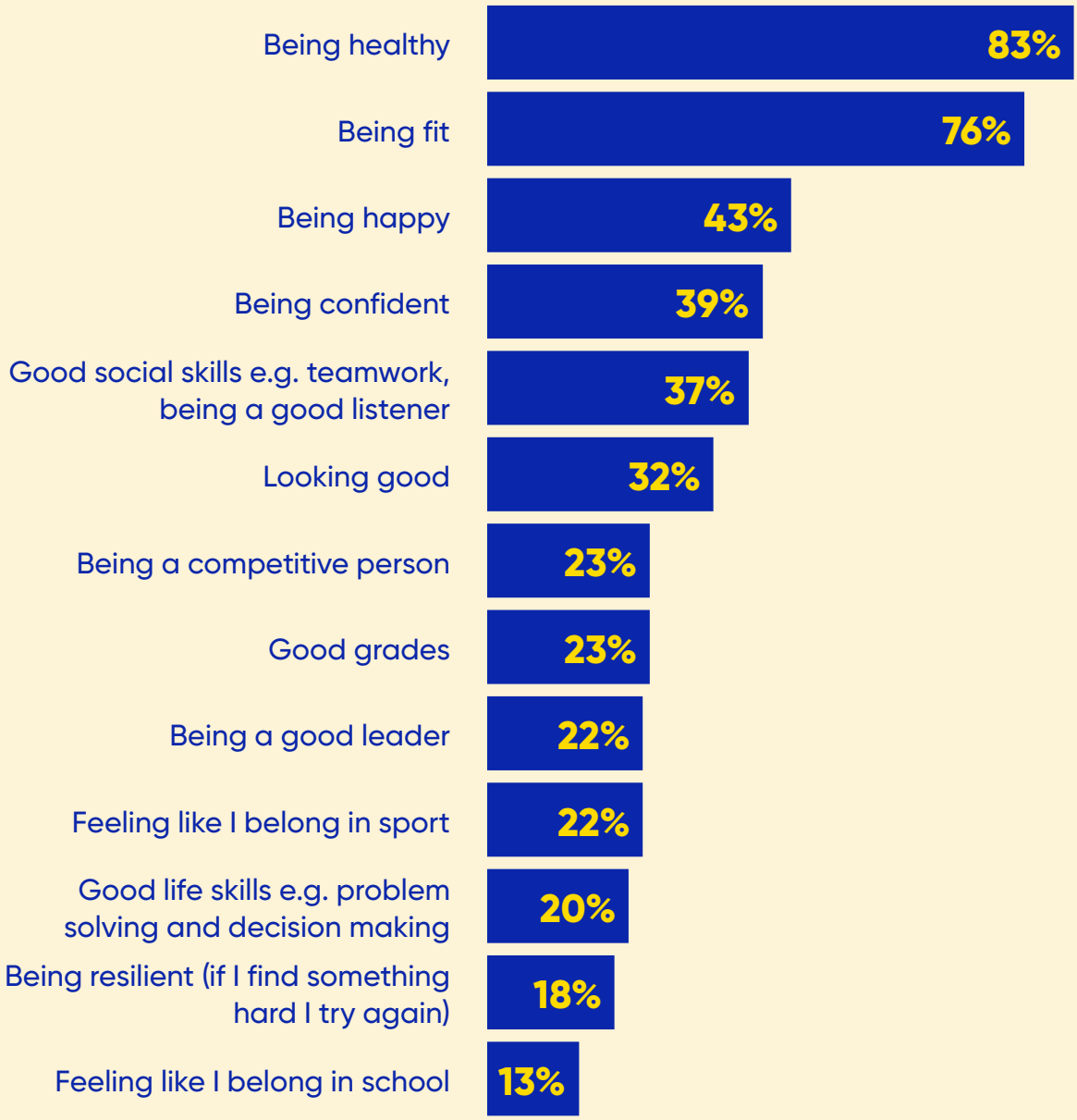
7/10

young people enjoy PE lessons as they are fun

Meanwhile, those who say they enjoy PE lessons tend to do so because they think it is fun (68%), they enjoy being part of a team (49%), they like being outside (48%), and because they feel they are good at exercise/playing sports (42%). Boys are more likely to agree with all of these statements compared to girls, highlighting an ongoing gender gap between how school PE lessons are experienced and perceived.

Section 3: School sport experience

Which of the following things do you think that being active, like playing sports and doing PE, can help you to achieve?

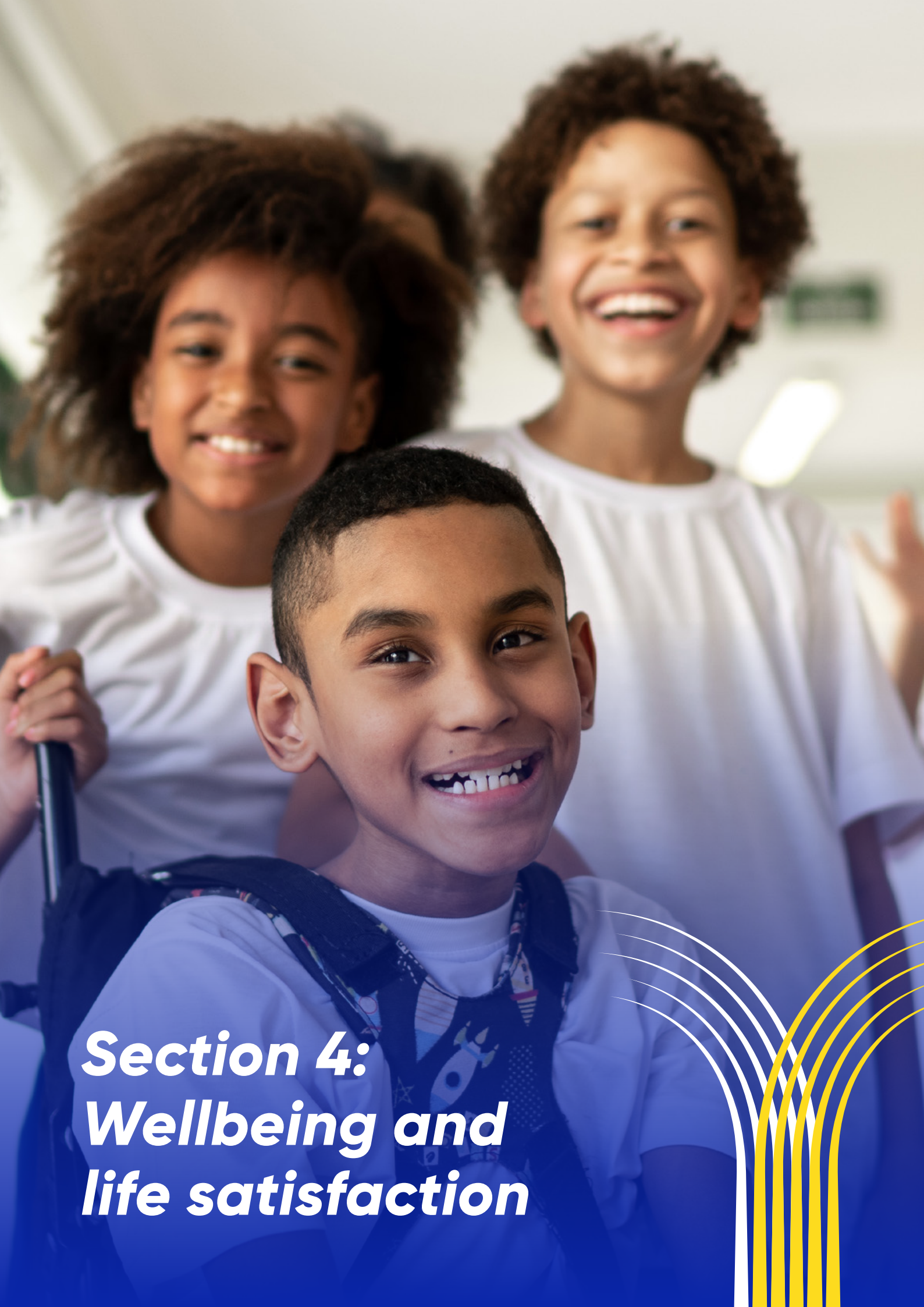


Young people tend to associate being active with physical health benefits, such as staying healthy (83%) and being fit (76%). Wellbeing and social outcomes are also recognised, though to a lesser extent, with 43% linking physical activity to feeling happy, 39% to feeling confident, and 37% to developing good social skills such as teamwork skills and being a good listener.

Section 3: School sport experience

When it comes to schools and their role, the vast majority of young people agree that their school values PE lessons (84%), encourages students to be active (81%), and encourages activity during breaktime and lunchtimes (70%). However, this sense of school support tends to decline with age, with 15–16-year-olds showing the lowest levels of agreement across all age groups. There are pathways towards improvement: two thirds of young people (64%) say they would play more sport if their school facilities/equipment were better, while one in five (19%) feel their school uniform/shoes prohibit them from being active throughout the day (e.g. are not comfy enough to move around in).

How much do you agree or disagree with the following?
% NET agree with statement ('Strongly agree' + 'Agree')



Section 4: Wellbeing and life satisfaction

Section 4: Wellbeing and life satisfaction

When asked how happy they felt yesterday on a scale of 0 to 10, the majority of young people report feeling happy, with one in four (24%) selecting 10 on the scale and two thirds (66%) selecting 8 or higher. There is a clear age trend here, with happiness ratings decreasing steadily as children get older (e.g. 74% of 5–6-year-olds select 8 or higher on the scale, compared to 56% of 15–16-year-olds).

The data also reveals a stark disparity for disabled children, who are significantly less likely than their non-disabled peers to rate their happiness at 8 or higher (49% vs. 72%). Only a small minority of children report low levels of happiness (scoring 0–3), at just 3% overall, with no notable difference by age. However, disabled children are three times more likely than non-disabled children to report low happiness (6% vs. 2%).

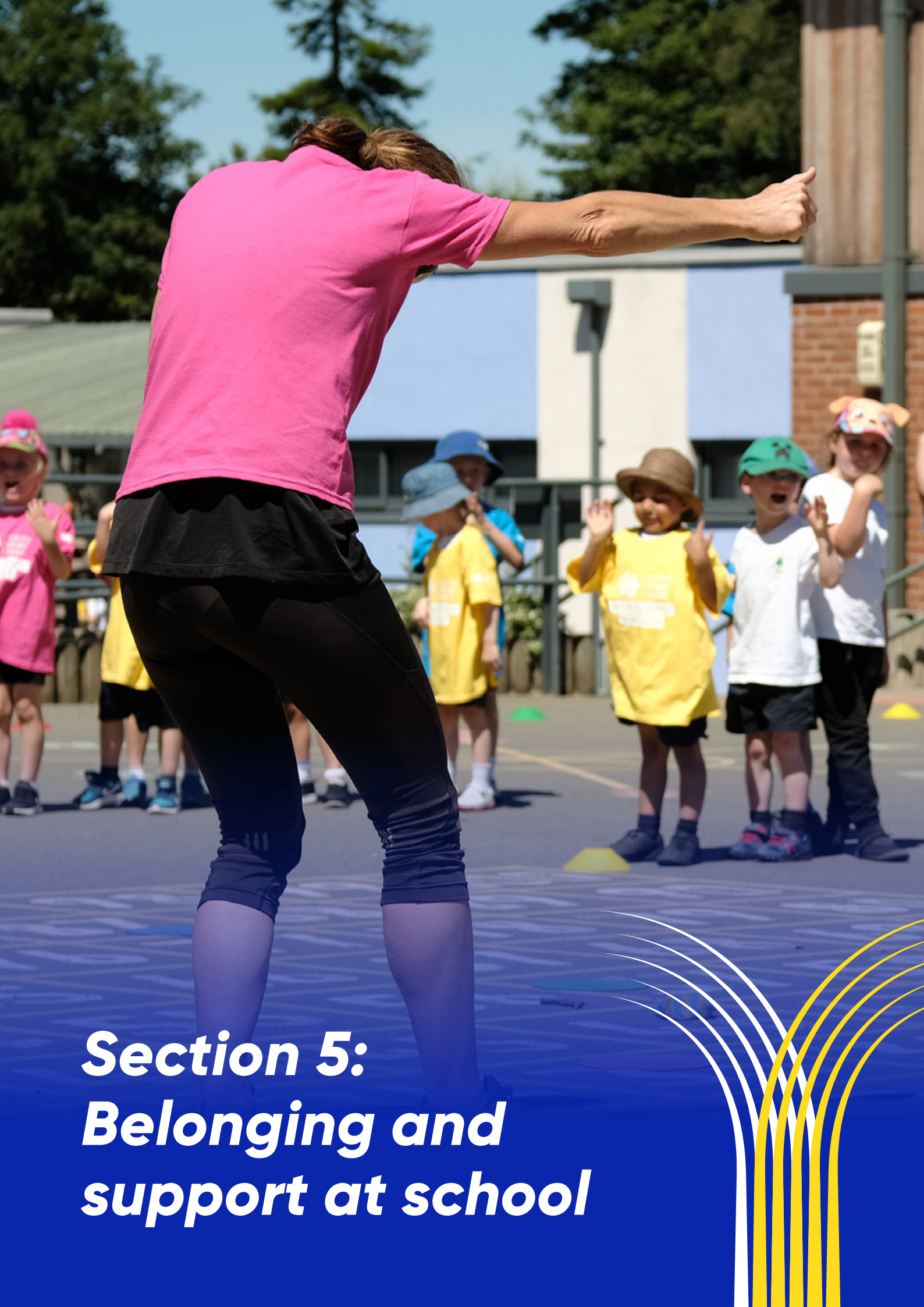
Similarly, when asked how satisfied they are with their life now on a scale of 0 to 10, the majority of young people report feeling satisfied, with one in four (24%) selecting 10 on the scale and two thirds (66%) selecting 8 or higher. Again, the age trend persists, with satisfaction ratings tending to decrease as children get older. Similarly, non-disabled people are significantly more likely to select 8 or higher than children with disabilities (72% vs. 49%).

Three quarters of young people say they talk to their family/parents when they are feeling unhappy (74%). Friends are also a source of comfort, with one in two turning to them for advice or a listening ear (49%). Interestingly, these support systems can shift with age – younger children are for example more likely to turn to their parents for support, while older children are more likely to confide in their friends. As well as talking to family and friends, young people also engage in activities such as playing video games (40%), watching TV (36%) and doing exercise (26%) when they are feeling unhappy.

A quarter **of young people** are worried about their own and their family's health

Young people are most likely to say they worry about their friendships (42%), how well they're doing at school (36%), their own health (28%), and their family's health (25%). While concerns about money, body image, mental health, and future employment are less common overall, these worries tend to increase significantly with age. Girls are also more likely than boys to worry about their friendships and how they look (46% vs. 38% and 14% vs. 9% respectively).

When it comes to future employment, young people perceive getting good grades as being most important in order to get a good job (76%). This is followed by having good social skills (e.g. teamwork skills, being a good listener) (56%), being confident (53%), and having good life skills (e.g. problem solving, decision making) (48%); all of which are skills that can be developed and strengthened through PE and physical activity.



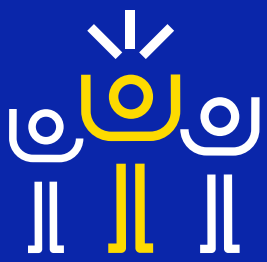
Section 5: Belonging and support at school

Section 5: Belonging and support at school

Three quarters of young people say that they always or often feel safe at school (75%). A similar proportion say they always or often get on well with their teachers (71%), although only 63% say they always or often feel like they belong at school, while 7% say they 'never' belong. Finally, three in five young people say they always or often enjoy going to school (61%). These figures tend to decrease as children get older. They are also significantly higher in non-disabled individuals compared to those with disabilities, highlighting potential inequalities and lack of support for this audience in schools.

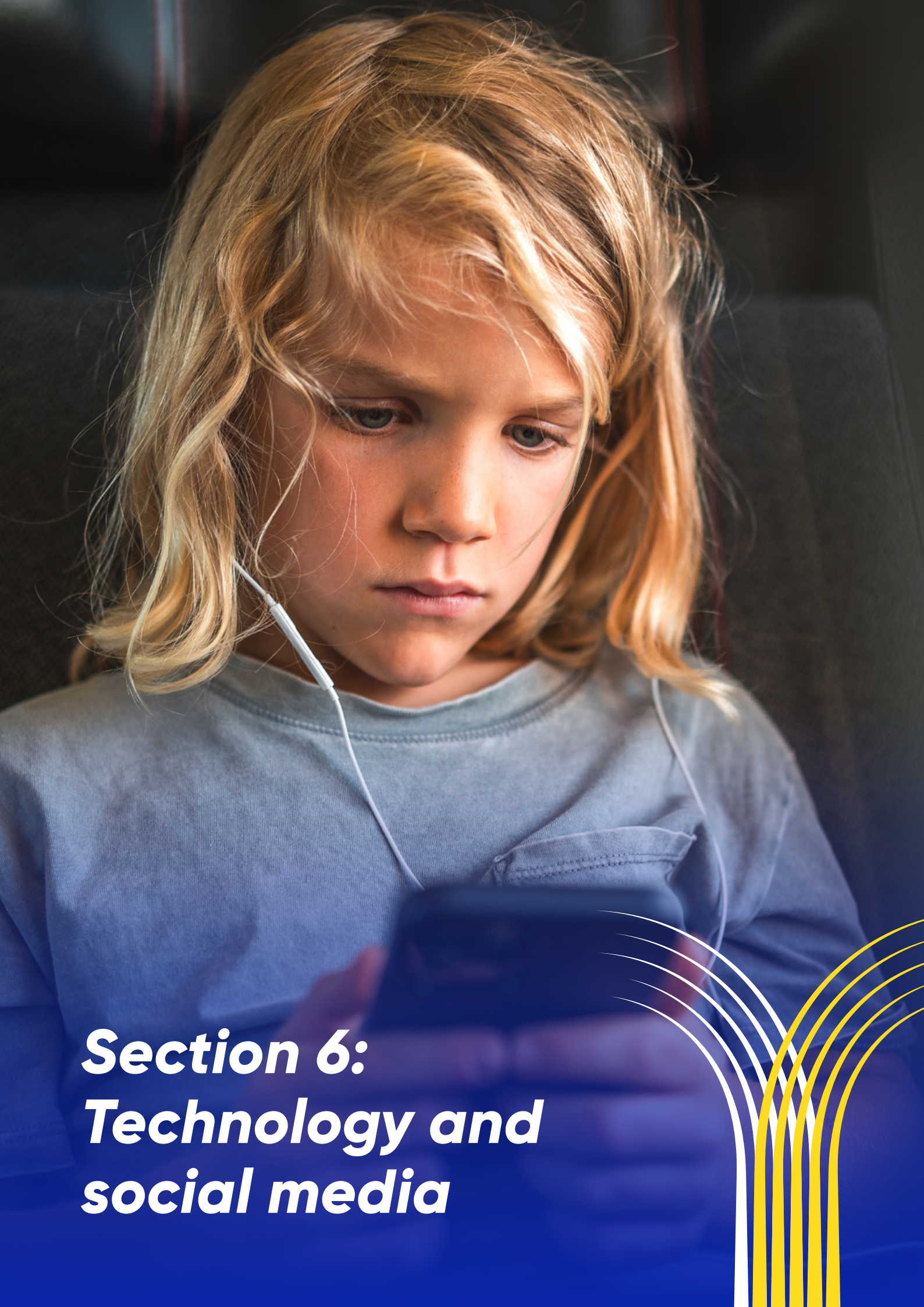
One in three

young people say they take on a leadership role in sport or physical activity (e.g. as a referee, young leader, coach or organiser) within school (35%)



One in five say they take on a leadership role in sport or physical activity outside of school (20%). This provides opportunities to develop skills that translates to employability.

Meanwhile, young people tend to agree that they know what to do to make themselves feel happy (79%), that their school cares about their wellbeing (75%) and that their school actively supports it (72%). While perceptions of school care and support tend to decrease with age, this is somewhat offset by older children being more likely to agree that they know how to make themselves feel happier. Importantly, these figures are significantly higher among non-disabled individuals. 81% say they know what to do to make themselves feel happy (vs. 72% of disabled peers), 77% feel their school cares about their wellbeing (vs. 69%), and 79% report their school actively supports their wellbeing (vs. 65%). Similarly, those with SEND and older children are more likely to say that they 'never' or 'a little bit' feel like they belong in school.



Section 6: Technology and social media

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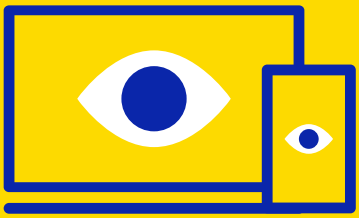
Four in five

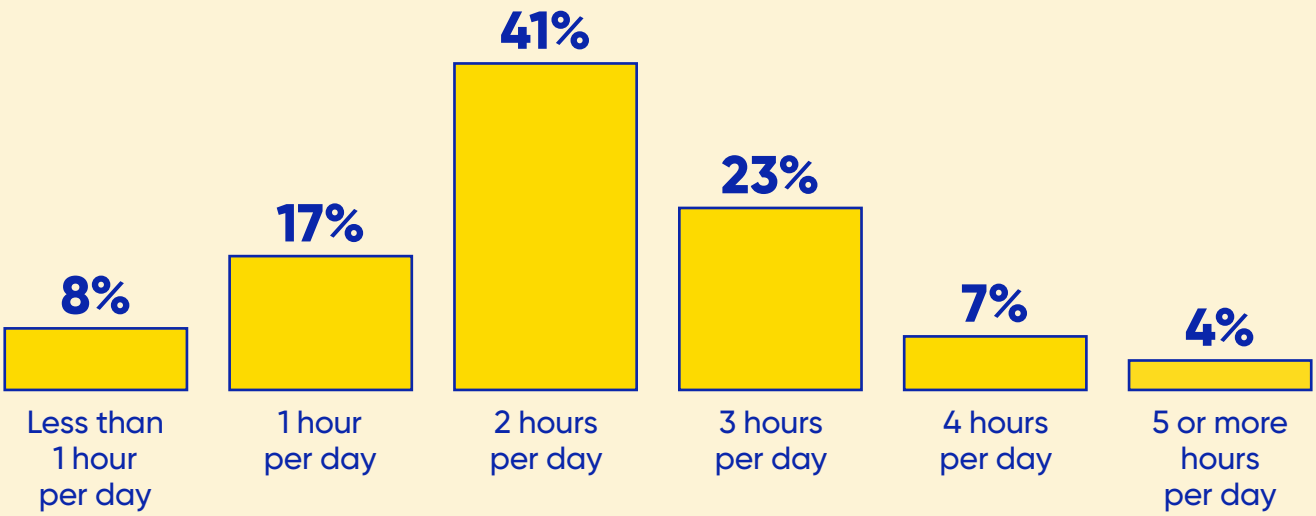
young people say they own a laptop or smartphone device that connects to the internet (which is just for them and they don't have to share with others)



Older children are far more likely to own such device (e.g. 46% of 5–6-year-olds compared to 98% of 15–16-year-olds).

On an average school day, 34% of young people say they spend at least three hours per day in front of a TV, smart phone, computer, tablet or similar electronic device (either watching shows, videos, playing games, or using social media, and excluding schoolwork).

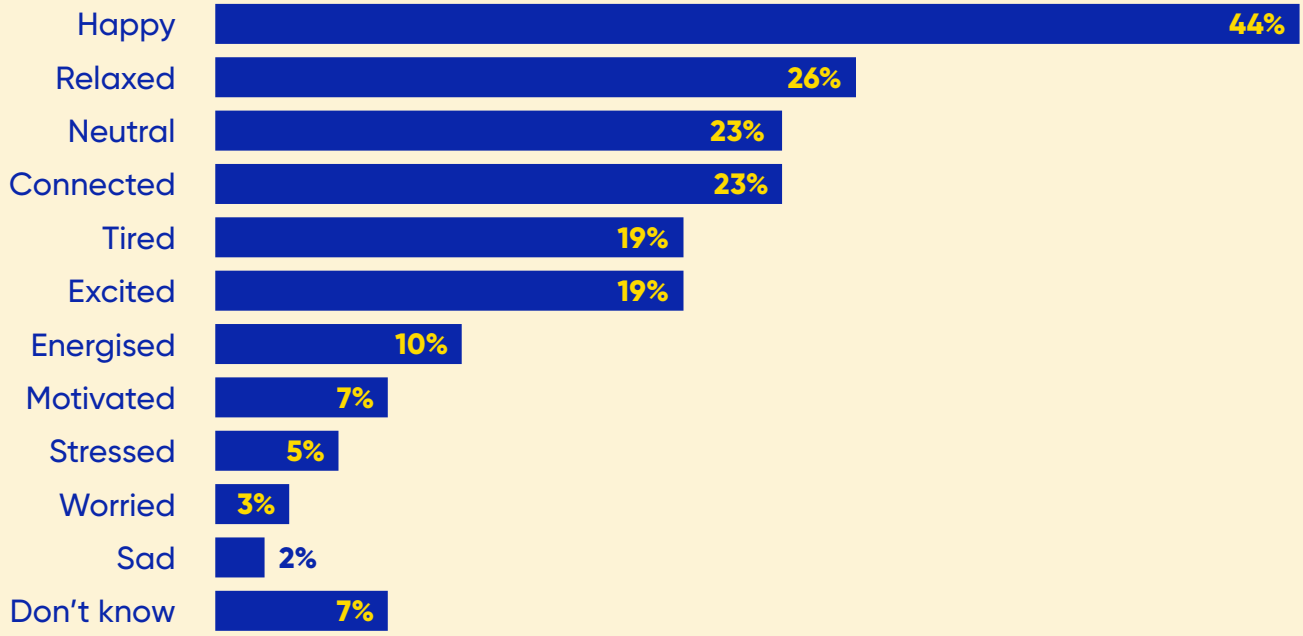
On an average school day, how many hours do you spend in front of a TV, smart phone, computer, tablet or similar electronic device when you watch shows, videos, play games, or use social media?



Digital spaces play a significant role in how young people currently connect, socialise, and spend their free time. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that 44% report feeling happy after spending time online. However, 56% did not report feeling this way, and many also report feeling neutral (23%), tired (19%), or experiencing negative emotions such as stress (5%), worry (3%), or sadness (2%).

Section 6: Technology and social media

How do you feel after you have been online?



Perhaps most significantly, **over half of young people say they'd like to spend less time online** and more time doing other things (53%). Whilst 39% say they prefer playing online to being active, 52% also say they would like to use more technology as part of their PE lessons (e.g. using smart watches and mobile phones), which highlights the opportunity to utilise the power of technology as a lever to increase engagement and participation in physical activity.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following?

% NET agree with statement ('Strongly agree' + 'Agree')

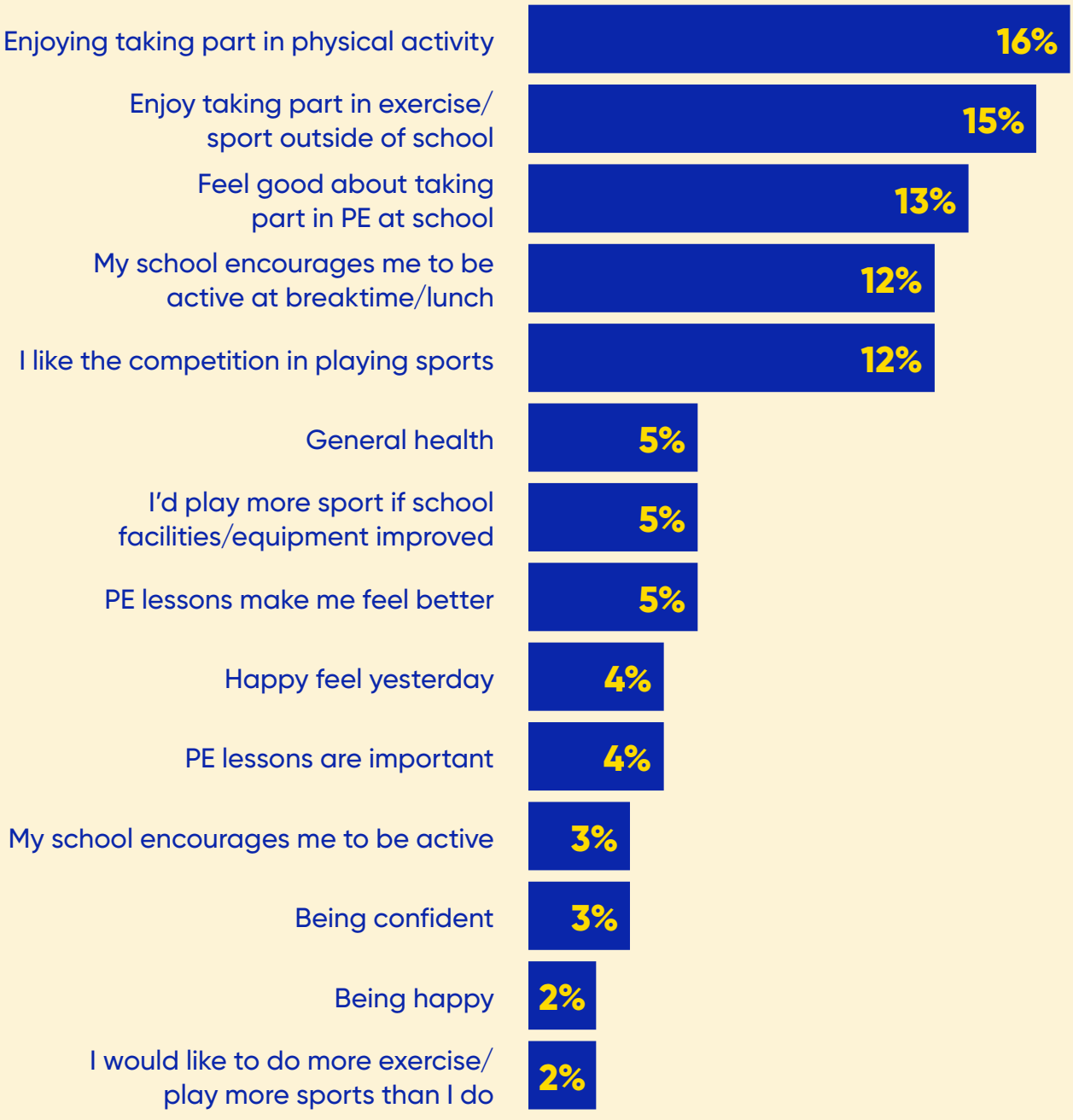
Key drivers analysis

Key drivers analysis

Savanta conducted a Key Drivers Analysis (KDA) using the results from the children's survey. KDA is a statistical approach that helps identify the factors most strongly associated with higher levels of activity among children and young people.

At a total level, five key factors stood out as being most strongly linked to higher levels of activity among children. All factors are shown in the graph below:

Factors most closely linked to higher participation in activity (%)



Key drivers analysis

Unsurprisingly, the factors most closely associated with more frequent exercise are enjoying taking part in physical activity and participating in sport and physical activity outside of school.

School-based influences are also significant: the third and fourth strongest drivers of exercise both relate to the school environment, specifically, enjoying taking part in PE, and having a school that encourages children to be active at breaktime and lunchtime. While activity outside school remains the strongest driver, these findings underline the important role that a supportive school environment can play in encouraging regular exercise among children.

Other factors identified in the Key Drivers Analysis, such as perceptions of good facilities or equipment at school, feeling better after PE lessons, and having a school that encourages physical activity, further highlight how the school setting can positively influence children's overall activity levels. Following on from the Key Drivers Analysis, Savanta conducted a 1v1 simple regression analysis on selected statements to investigate in greater detail their correlations. The findings shed further light on the role of schools in encouraging activity.

Children who say that PE lessons are important are active on 1.12 more days per week (defined as 1 hour of exercise) than those who say it is not. It should be noted that there was a high (56%) margin of error for this statement meaning there is lots of variation in the sample.

For every 1-point increase on a 5-point scale on how positive a student feels about PE, they are active on 0.44 more days per week (with a low margin of error of 11%).

For every 1-point increase on a 5-point scale on agreement that their school encourages them to be active at break/lunchtimes, students are active on 0.23 days more per week (with a low margin of error of 11%).

Overall, the findings from the Key Drivers Analysis show the close correlation between having a school environment that encourages and facilitates exercise both during lessons, at break and at lunchtimes, is statistically proven to be linked to children's activity levels.

Key drivers analysis

Looking towards solutions, the analysis reveals several areas where simple changes can lead to notable improvements in children's activity levels. These include:

- **Making PE lessons fun and accessible to all, particularly those groups who may be less likely to engage in physical activity outside of school such as girls, Black and Asian children, and children with SEND.**
- **Demonstrating the value of PE to children, teachers, schools, and parents. This could come through enhanced education about the benefits of physical activity, or by making the lessons more accessible so children can see the benefits themselves.**
- **Ensuring break and lunch times are long enough to facilitate meaningful exercise, and a school environment that actively promotes active breaktimes.**
- **Investment in facilities/equipment will lead to more opportunities to enjoy activity within school which will permeate into greater out of school activity.**
- **Schools should ensure that parents and caregivers are aware of, and involved in, their child's physical activity levels and progress in PE.**

Scenario analysis: The Class of 2035

Scenario analysis: The Class of 2035

As we stand in 2025, the current landscape of children's physical activity in the UK and trends from recent years raise serious concerns about the direction we are heading. Despite a wealth of evidence spotlighting the benefits of physical activity and daily movement, the historical halting, fragmentation of policy and investment has left deep-rooted barriers to access which, without action, could remain in place. Without urgent change, the daily lives of millions of children risk becoming a reflection of missed opportunities; while some may thrive, many will continue to be held back by systems that fail to prioritise their need to move, play and participate.

This scenario analysis captures the likely future if the current status quo persists. It is shaped not by a dramatic crisis, but by the quiet force of inaction. If negative trends evident in 2025 persist, their consequences are likely to become clearer and more visible in the lived experiences of young people over the next decade. As was stated at the outset, it is important to note this analysis does not incorporate changes to PE and enrichment announced in the Government's response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review, nor potential changes on the horizon through the forthcoming PE and School Sport Partnership Network, Enrichment Framework, and National Youth Strategy. Individually and collectively, these opportunities could have a significant positive impact but were not part of the policy landscape or trends forecast at the time of writing.

Scenario analysis: The Class of 2035

Key factors shaping children's activity in 2035

Policy and Funding

Without significant change to trends witnessed leading up to 2025, public policy on physical activity would likely remain fragmented and short-sighted in 2035. Public policy on physical activity is at a pivotal stage. To achieve lasting impact by 2035, continued coordination and long-term commitment will be essential. Ongoing uncertainty, however, can make it difficult for schools to plan effectively or embed sustainable approaches — underminding both ambition and consistency in provision for children and young people.

A continuation of the approach in recent years would risk primary schools being left with only basic provision, insufficient to transform participation or address inequalities, and nothing to support physical activity at secondary level. Existing practitioners and school, and community-based organisations will continue to play a vital role, but their efforts will be most effective within a clear and connected national framework for improving physical activity among children.

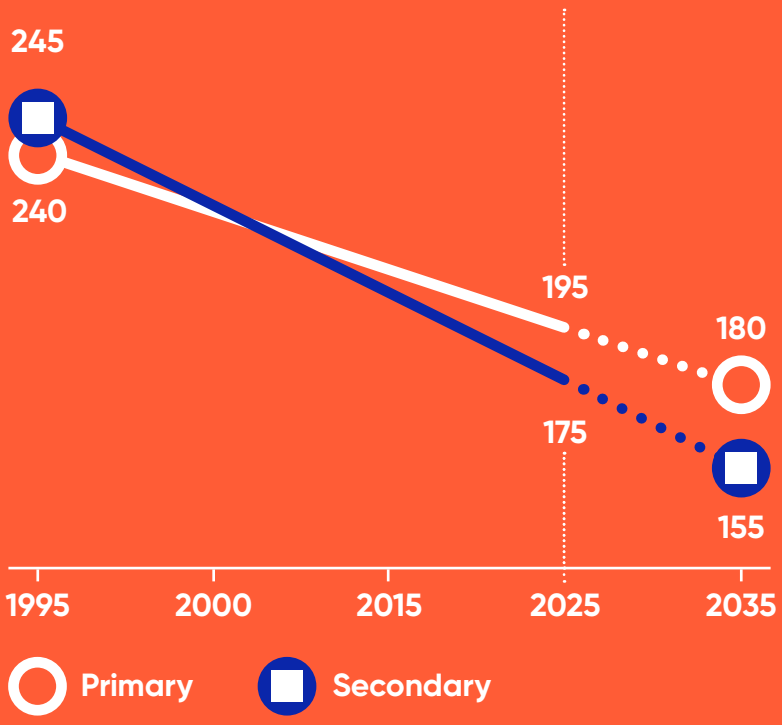
School and Community Environment

Whilst the Government's response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review points towards a more positive future for PE and enrichment, including sport, in recent years PE has lost priority within schools - reducing the overall commitment to movement and wellbeing and making it easier for academic pressures and limited resources to squeeze out opportunities for activity. This shift is already evident: there is less time allocated for unstructured play and breaktimes (Baines et al., 2019), and the perceived value of PE has reduced, leading to fewer hours being taught in schools (Department for Education, 2025).

The current policy trajectory and narrative is more positive but if this does not lead to change, compared to 1995, primary pupils in 2035 will have **60 fewer minutes of break and lunch each week** (down to 180 minutes), and secondary students will have 85 minutes less, with many schools condensing lunch breaks to as little as 45 minutes, and afternoon playtimes nearly disappearing altogether (Baines et al., 2019).

Scenario analysis: The Class of 2035

Minutes of active break and lunchtimes for primary and secondary school children (1995-2035)



Source: Extrapolated from: Baines et al. School break and lunch times and young people's social lives: A follow-up national study, 2019 data.

By 2035
Based on current trends

85

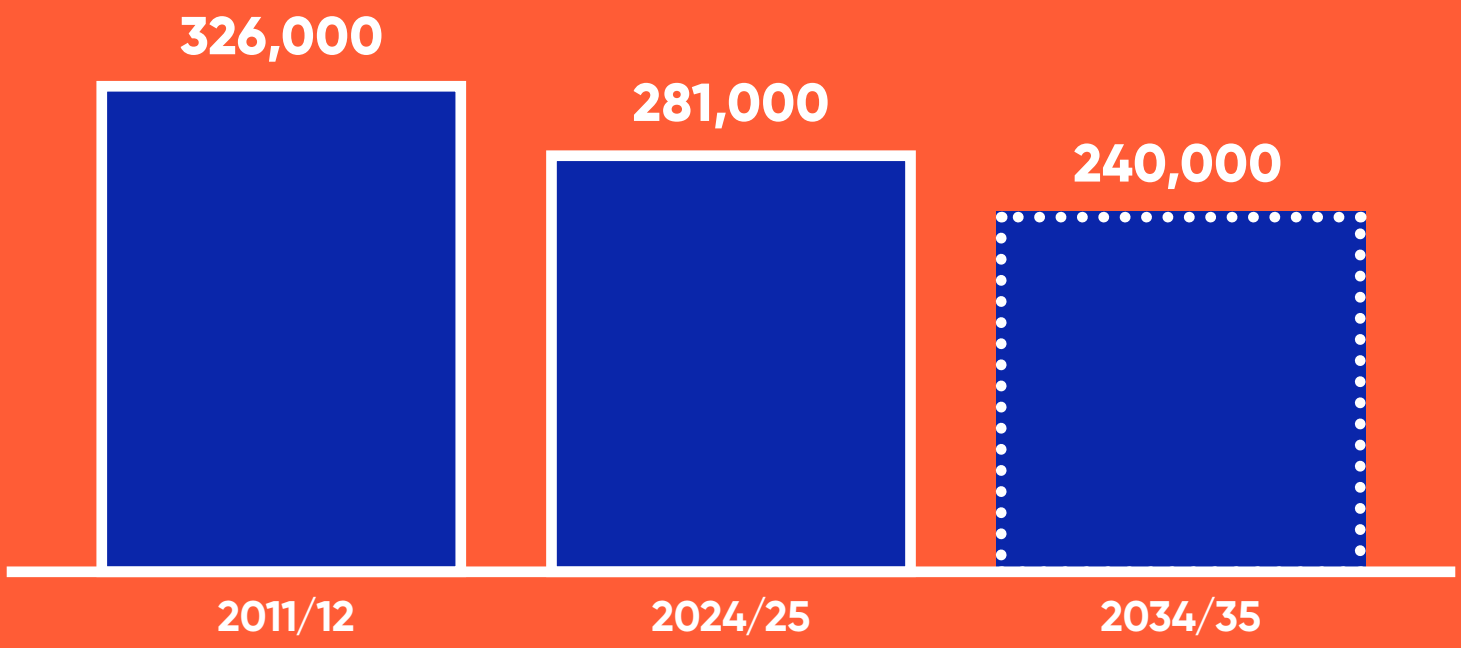
minutes per week less active breaks and lunchtimes for secondary school children

This erosion has real impact. Key Driver Analysis by Savanta (2025) shows pupils in schools which proactively support activity report much higher physical activity levels – up to an hour more vigorous activity each week for those who feel strongly encouraged by their school.

Reductions in PE provision are accelerating. Since the 2012 Olympics, 45,000 hours of PE have been lost (Department for Education, 2025), and if the trend continues, a further 40,000 could disappear by 2035 – totalling 85,000 hours cut from the curriculum. PE will remain nominally mandatory, but the lack of enforced minimum hours, ongoing curriculum squeezes, and cancelled lessons mean more than 1 in 6 (17%) children report a cancelled PE lesson so far this academic year (data collected in March 2025 via Savanta Children's Survey 2025); this could rise to half of children having a lesson cancelled over the duration of the year by 2035.

Scenario analysis: The Class of 2035

PE hours taught in schools (2011-2035)



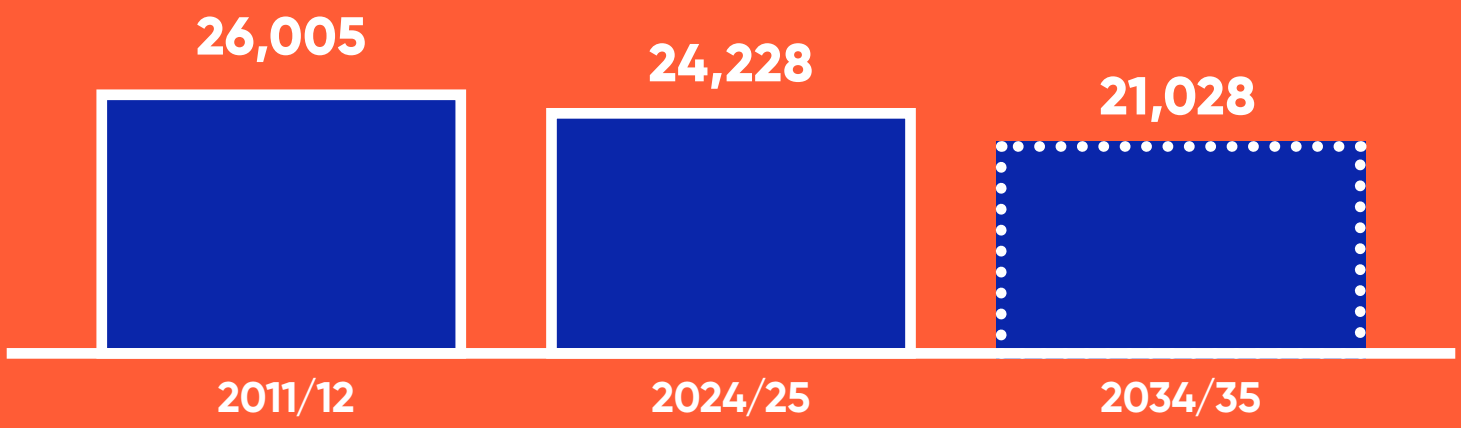
Source: Extrapolated from: Department for Education (DfE) National Curriculum Survey data, 2011–2025 data

If trends continue, budget cuts will force many schools, especially in deprived communities, to drop expensive or diverse activities, narrowing the focus to a few core sports. For some students, the prioritisation of exams could lead to almost complete disengagement from PE. The impact will be particularly acute for pupils with SEND or from marginalised backgrounds, who often see lower participation.

These issues are compounded by a shrinking workforce. The number of dedicated PE teachers has fallen from 26,005 in 2011/12 to 24,228 in 2023 — a drop of nearly 7% in just 12 years (Department for Education, 2025). If this trend continues, England could lose more than 3,200 PE teachers overall by 2035, amounting to a decline of over 13% since 2011/12. This ongoing decline leaves existing provision stretched too thin to guarantee quality positive experiences for all students.

Scenario analysis: The Class of 2035

PE teacher numbers (2011–2035)



Source: Extrapolated from: Department for Education (DfE) National Curriculum Survey data, 2011–2025 data

Awareness of guidelines

As of 2025, research continues to reveal a persistent lack of awareness of the UK Chief Medical Officers' recommendation for the minimum amount of physical activity that children should be doing per day (60 minutes). National survey data shows that only around a third of parents (32%) and teachers (34%) are aware of the current recommendations[1].

Without a cultural shift toward valuing and understanding daily movement, lack of awareness and prioritisation perpetuate low ambition and act as a brake on collective action, leaving many children without the activity they need for a healthy future.

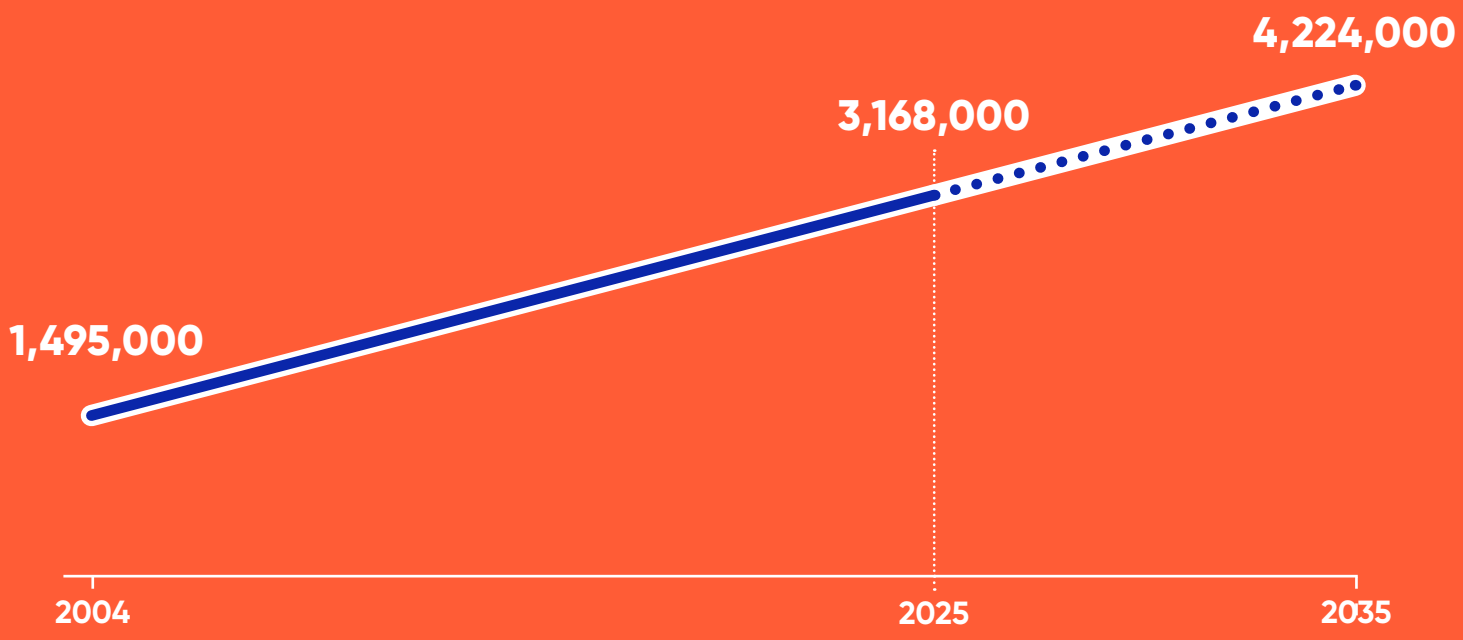
Sedentary Screen Time

Unless meaningful intervention is implemented, screen time will continue expanding its grip on children and young people. In 2025, 34% of children spend more than three hours a day on screens for entertainment purposes, not including homework (Savanta Children's Survey, 2025). If the current rate of increase is not halted, this will rise to 48% in 2035, amounting to over 4.2 million children. That is nearly half of all children - equivalent to around 13 pupils in every average classroom. This would mean, on average, children are spending almost four hours per day on screens for non-educational purposes.

1 – Youth Sport Trust (2025) PE and School Sport Report

Scenario analysis: The Class of 2035

Number of children spending more than three hours per day on screen (2004-2035)



Source: : Extrapolated from: Savanta Children's Survey, 2025 data and AI deep research on historic trends on children's screen time.

High levels of recreational screen use are closely linked to lower levels of physical activity, with Savanta's 2025 survey revealing clear correlations between higher rates of screen time and lower levels of physical activity, as well as lower levels of happiness, confidence, and feelings of belonging at school.

Neurodiversity and SEND

Autism diagnoses in children in the UK increased by over 700% from 1998-2018[2], while ADHD prevalence increased from 1.4% in 2000 to 3.5% in 2018[3]. Both look set to continue to rise into 2035. As diagnoses of neurodivergence rise, many children face barriers to physical activity — autistic and pupils with ADHD are significantly less active than their peers due to sensory, social, and provision challenges. This has a clear impact on mental health, as physical activity and unstructured play protect against anxiety and support attention and social engagement. Without inclusive, adapted opportunities in PE and play, participation and health gaps will widen. With school break times and free play at record lows, these risks extend to all pupils, making accessible physical activity increasingly vital by 2035.

Despite growing numbers, mainstream physical activity environments remain poorly equipped to meet neurodiverse and pupils with SEND needs. While targeted interventions such as Inclusion 2028[4] — a Department for Education funded programme aimed at improving the quality of PE and school sport provision for pupils with SEND — are positive steps, current investment is not keeping pace with sharply rising need. This means too many young people with SEND continue to miss out on meaningful opportunities to be active.

Guidelines for physical activity rates for those with SEND also miss important nuances. In 2025, just 30% of children with SEND achieve at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day, compared to 55% of children without. 30% of children with SEND are active for less than 30 minutes a day, compared to 21% of their peers (Savanta Children's Survey, 2025). Current UK's Chief Medical Officers' physical activity guidance for all children with SEND is for 20 minutes of activity per day. This broad guidance fails to recognise differences in in the ability to be active among people with SEND and may set targets which are too low for many. Unless targeted interventions are expanded to reach all young people with SEND, including creating guidelines that recognise the breadth of ability to be active among those young people with SEND, the gap in participation between children with SEND and their peers will likely grow.

2 — Russell, et al., (2022) Time trends in autism diagnosis over 20 years: a UK population based cohort study. Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry

3 — McKechnie, et al., (2023) Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder diagnoses and prescriptions in UK primary care, 2000-2018: a population-based cohort study. BJPsych Open

4 — Youth Sport Trust – Inclusion 2028

Physical activity levels and health

By 2035, unless significant systemic change is made, physical activity is likely to be defined by growing inequality and missed potential. Rather than closing, participation gaps are at risk of widening. Without targeted, inclusive interventions being embedded into policy design, groups that have historically been left behind, including girls, ethnic minorities, and children with SEND, are likely to continue experiencing lower quality delivery of activity schemes and programmes, leading to worsening engagement with physical activity (Sport England, 2023).

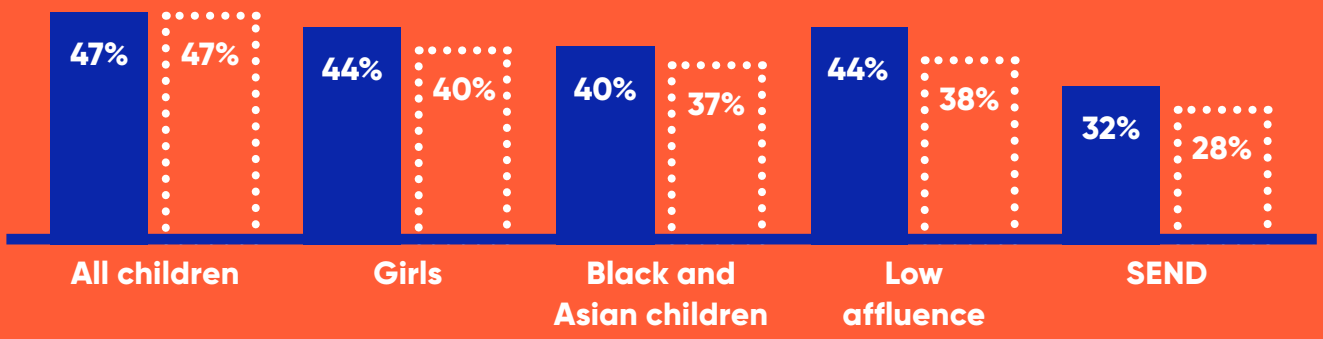
Just 47% of children in England will meet the 60-minute daily activity guideline, reflecting a decade of stagnation of physical activity levels. Activity levels among the traditionally most active groups (such as young boys of a white ethnicity) may increase slightly, while traditionally marginalised groups will become increasingly disadvantaged.

Significant participation gaps are projected to widen further: only 40% of girls, 37% of Black and Asian children, 38% of those from low-affluence households, and 28% of children with SEND or disabilities will hit recommended activity levels.

Regional divides will persist, with the North East and North West continuing to report the lowest rates—up to 10 percentage points below London and the South.

More than one in three (34%) children will fail to get even 30 minutes of physical activity a day, falling far short of the minimum recommendation of 60 minutes per day.

Percentage meeting 60-minute daily physical activity guidelines (2025 and 2035)



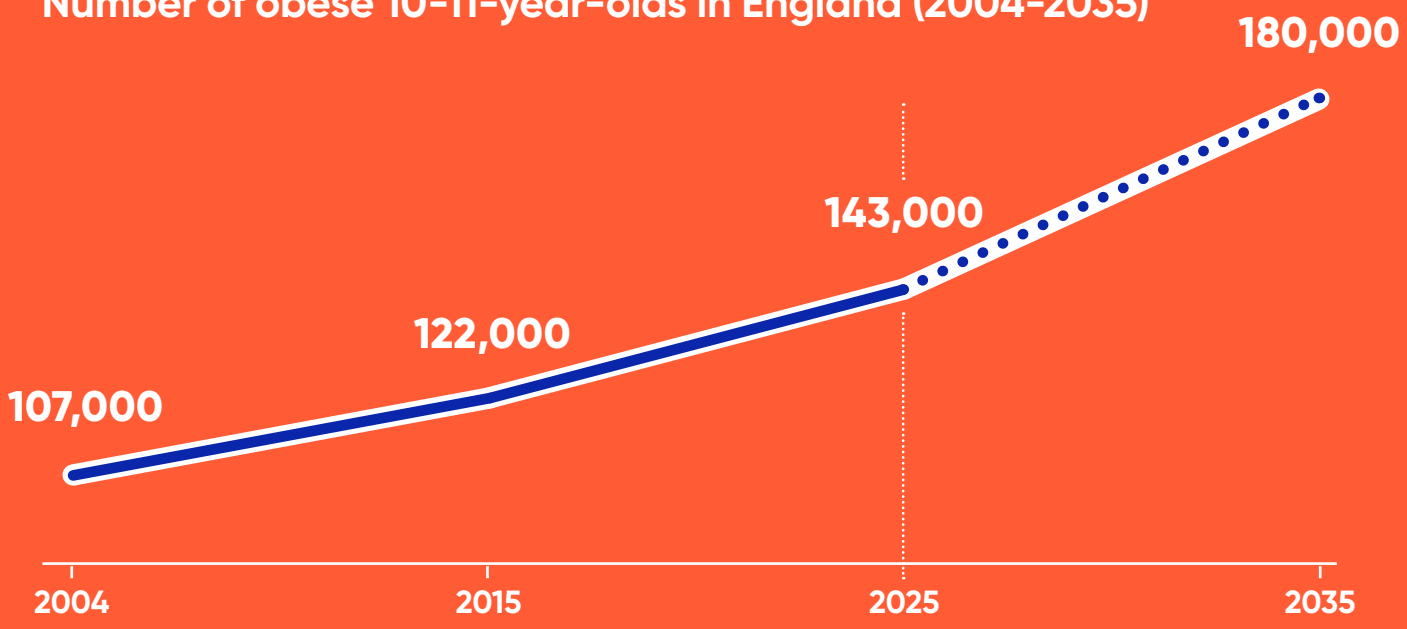
Source: Extrapolated from: Sport England, Active Lives Children and Young People Survey, 2023/24 data

Wider outcomes

If trends continue, insufficient engagement in daily movement could affect nearly one in three children by 2035, approximately 2.5 million nationwide, with widespread impacts on physical health and society.

Obesity rates among 10-11-year-olds will surge to 24% by 2035, with more than 180,000 children classified as clinically obese, up from 22% in 2025[5]. This amounts to more than double the combined annual intake of secondary schools in Manchester and Birmingham. Inactivity-related health concerns including headaches, sleep disruption and fatigue, which are associated with low physical activity, are likely to become more prominent[6]. Conditions once associated only with adulthood, such as Type 2 diabetes, may increasingly be diagnosed in children, with almost 500 new diagnoses per year and cumulative cases of more than 3,500 (extrapolated from NHS digital, 2024). This would mark a notable rise on the 268 new diagnoses per year and 2,160 cumulative cases[7].

Number of obese 10-11-year-olds in England (2004-2035)



Source extrapolated from: NHS Digital, National Child Measurement Programme, 2023/24 data

5 — House of Commons Library (2025) Obesity Statistics

6 — Public Health England (2014) Everybody active, every day

7 — NHS Digital (2023) National Diabetes Audit 2021-22, Young People with Type 2 Diabetes

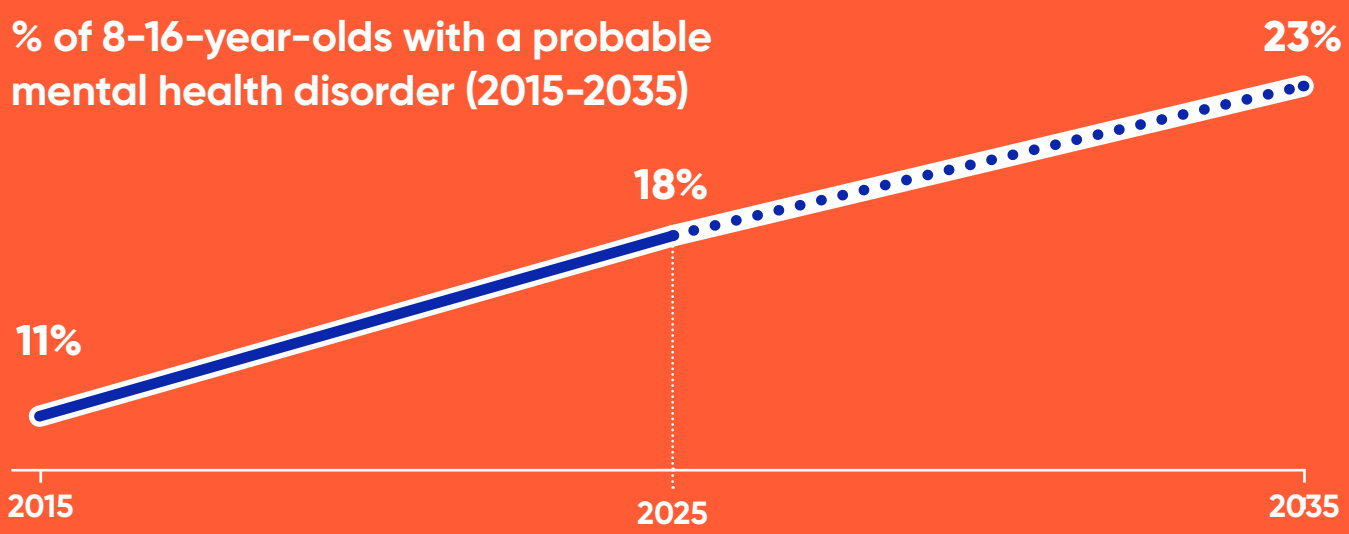
Societal and economic costs

With physical activity rates falling and inactivity-related illnesses increasing, further burden is placed on an already stretched NHS. The combined NHS and economic burden from inactivity and obesity is expected to surpass £1.3 billion annually by 2035 (up from £800m annually in 2025) and is on track to meet worst-case forecasts made in 2015 that the annual direct and indirect costs of inactivity and obesity could reach £9.7 billion by 2050 (extrapolated from: Public Health England, 2017). The return on investment for physical activity, when considering wider social and wellbeing benefits, is far greater than conventional health savings alone. For every £1 invested in children's activity, especially free school-based opportunities, society stands to gain up to £6 in social value, as measured in improvements in wellbeing, educational outcomes, and future productivity (extrapolated from: Sport England, 2023). Despite this high potential, limited provision means many of these benefits are not realised, with deprived areas feeling the effects most acutely as already overstretched local government and NHS services struggle to cope, further exacerbating inequality.

Mental wellbeing

In a scenario where the potential of physical activity is not fully harnessed, the positive impact on mental wellbeing will remain unrealised. Based on current trends, around one in four (23%) children aged 8 to 16 could have a mental health disorder by 2035, up from 18% in 2025 (NHS Digital, 2022). Anxiety, loneliness and disengagement are expected to remain endemic, especially for girls, children with SEND, and those from minority ethnic groups.

% of 8-16-year-olds with a probable mental health disorder (2015-2035)



Source: extrapolated from NHS Digital, Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2023 data

School outcomes

Declining levels of activity will continue to impact school outcomes. By 2035, if no clear policy changes are implemented, a generation may emerge with weakened educational engagement, with over one million learning days lost each year to physical inactivity[8]. Much of this loss is driven by increased absence from school, caused by both physical health problems, such as obesity and chronic illness, and rising mental health challenges associated with inactivity (Public Health England, 2014).

Children who are active are 25% less likely to be absent

It is established that children who are active are 25% less likely to be absent, are more likely to enjoy higher self-confidence, and report a stronger sense of belonging at school (Savanta children's survey, 2025). If current trends continue and levels of physical activity decline, it will result in a cohort of young people with higher absenteeism, reduced self-confidence, and a diminished sense of belonging within the school environment. As a result, the academic attainment gap between the most and least advantaged students — a gap measured at over 19 months in 2023[9] — is likely to widen further, reaching 20 to 21 months by 2035.

8 — Department for Education (2025) Pupil absence in schools in England

9 — Education Policy Institute, 2024 – Education Policy Institute (2024) Annual Report

Conclusions

By exploring where current trends lead to in 2035, this report gives us a destination to actively avoid. There is no single actor with the power to deliver change, however across a number of sectors lie opportunities to act which cumulatively can ensure the 2035 projection is not realised.

For Government, at a time of significant policy change, development and implementation, there is an opportunity to fully embrace the potential of physical activity to improve children and young people's health, happiness, and life chances. Our hope is the recent response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review and introduction of a new PE and School Sport Partnership Network are the green shoots of recovery which indicate a brighter future lies ahead. However, we cannot rest on our laurels and must ensure opportunities to drive change are not lost. Embedding physical activity across different policy areas, improving through cross-government working and ambition, and moving away from short-term funding can help increase the prioritisation placed on physical activity not just in government and education, but crucially more widely across society. With the Government seeking to make progress in its missions and ambitions, now is the opportune moment for political leaders to act and capitalise on the power of sport and play to transform lives.

In education, there is a need to protect and increase the role of physical activity (including PE) within schools. As the key driver analysis informing the writing of this report reveals, schools can drive an increase in activity levels by making PE fun and accessible to all (particularly those least likely to be active outside the school day), highlighting the value of PE and physical activity to children, teachers, and parents and carers, and providing opportunities to be active across the day including through break and lunch times, aligned to access to facilities which encourage active moments across the day. Through a whole school approach, educators can develop school environments where children are active and well, realising the benefits for school outcomes and children's development more widely.

Meanwhile, the need to increase societal awareness of how active children and young people should be continued. Children report the role their mum, dad, and friends play in inspiring physical activity; however, we can further leverage the power of family and friends to increase physical activity levels by raising awareness across society of the UK Chief Medical Officers' recommendations.

Finally, we should act in response to young voices and learn from their ideas to increase participation, particularly to target those at greatest risk of being inactive in childhood. One constant theme resonating from this generation is the importance of empowerment, reflected in this report through the call for opportunities to try different sports and activities in school, and make choices to inform their journey through physical activity. As we look towards 2035, charting a different course means learning from those with lived experience, and giving children and young people the platform and power to steer us can help us reach a more positive destination for this and future generations alike.

Methodology

1 Children's survey methodology

The central quantitative component of this research was an online survey of children aged 5–16 across the UK. The design aimed for national representativeness by applying demographic quotas across age, gender, region, and socio-economic status (SEG). A total sample of 1,002 respondents was targeted to ensure sufficient statistical reliability for subgroup analyses.

Recruitment and consent: Participants were recruited via their parents, with explicit parental consent and child assent obtained prior to participation, in full adherence to the Market Research Society (MRS) guidelines, ESOMAR code, and UK safeguarding legislation. For younger children aged 5-16, parents assisted in survey delivery.

Survey design and delivery: The survey was conducted using Savanta's secure online platform, employing a computer-assisted web interviewing (CAWI) approach for accessibility and reliability. The instrument included attitudinal, behavioural, and demographic items, piloted for age-appropriateness and comprehension. Survey duration was approximately 15 minutes to balance depth with engagement.

Data quality: Responses were monitored for completion, flat-lining, and inconsistent answers, with exclusions applied as needed. Data were weighted post-collection to reflect national population profiles.

2 AI deep research methodology

Extrapolations in this report were developed using Savanta's AI deep research platform, which systematically reviewed and analysed a wide range of online sources—including published reports, academic journals, and news articles—to identify the main drivers shaping children's activity rates. Drawing on these mapped trends, the AI system modelled a 2035 projection. All modelled outcomes were cross-checked and validated by human researchers against authoritative published evidence to ensure credibility and alignment with sector benchmarks:

AI-driven evidence synthesis: Large Language Models and data mining tools were used to extract, summarise, and synthesise data from thousands of sector reports, academic studies, health databases, and relevant grey literature.

Scenario analysis: The AI models integrated survey findings with longitudinal datasets (e.g., Sport England, NHS Digital, Ofcom, ONS) to extrapolate trajectories and build an evidence-based scenario narrative for 2035.

Iterative validation: AI-generated findings were iteratively reviewed and sense-checked with subject experts from Youth Sport Trust and Savanta, ensuring insights were robust, nuanced, and policy-relevant.

Methodology

3 Extrapolation and scenario modelling

Projections and scenario statistics for 2035 were derived by layering historical and current data trends with thematic assumptions and rates identified via both survey and AI analysis:

Trend extrapolation: Linear and non-linear modelling was used to project prevalence rates based on historic trends (typically 0.2–1.0 percentage point change per annum per group), adjusting for step changes observed in recent years (e.g. post-COVID, technology adoption).

Population scaling: Where estimates required conversion from percentages to absolute child numbers, the most recent ONS/Department for Education population projections for the relevant age groups were applied.

Scenario logic: Projected with current average annual changes continuing, barring major policy intervention.

All statistical extrapolations followed best-practice transparent assumption-setting, with each scenario and number checked against sector benchmarks and validated with Youth Sport Trust and Savanta data scientists.

4 Key drivers analysis

For this analysis, the dependent variable selected was question 7 (In the last week, on how many days did you do 60 minutes or more of activity that made you feel warmer and made your heartbeat faster? It does not have to be 60 minutes in one go; you can add together different bits of activity you do in one day.) In total, five models were produced:

- An overall model, mapping all respondents.
- A 'low activity' model among children participating in exercise on 0-2 days per week.
- A 'medium activity' model among children participating in exercise on 3-4 days per week.
- A 'high activity' model among children participating in exercise on 5+ days per week.

A follow-up '1v1 simple regression analysis' was only conducted on five specific attributes (Q12 – do you think PE lessons are important?; Q13 – how do you feel about taking part in PE at school?; Q16_9 – confidence levels; Q16_10 happiness levels; Q17_4 agreement that their school encourages them to be active at breaktime/lunchtime).

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