



# ***PE and School Sport***

The Annual Report 2025

# 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](https://www.youthsporttrust.org/strategy)



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# Introduction from our CEO



As we present our latest PE and School Sport Report, the scale and complexity of the challenges facing young people are becoming clearer with every week that passes. A toxic cocktail of developmental delays and missed experiences is emerging from increased time spent online and a gamified culture that promotes instant gratification. Combined with increasingly sedentary lifestyles and reduced opportunities for self-directed play – especially outdoors or in the physical company of others. Together, these factors are manifesting in various ways, from anxiety and a loss of belonging to emotional dysregulation and disengagement from school.

The statistics for childhood obesity, mental health problems in the young and rise in gang and knife crime also warn us some things are seriously missing from childhood and in the lives of young people. We believe physical activity, play and sport have a fundamental role in building back a generation, and building forward a happier, healthier nation.

At the Youth Sport Trust, we remain deeply committed to helping create a future where every child can enjoy the life-changing benefits of sport and play. Our 2022–2035 strategy, Inspiring Changemakers, Building Belonging, continues to guide this work, and across each of our three strategic objectives, we are taking practical, targeted steps to turn insight into action.

## **Urgent Action – building back healthier, happier and more resilient young people and levelling the playing field for the most disadvantaged**

We are working with schools across the UK to develop understanding of the power of movement, play and sport to support young people's growth, physical, social and emotional development as well as supporting academic performance. By developing relationships within and across our school networks, we are building capacity, translating effective practice into common practice, and supporting settings to adopt more holistic, inclusive and strategic approaches. Our Well Schools movement has been extended to Well School Trusts, and through programmes like Healthy Movers and Active in Mind we are laying foundations from the early years and into the teenage years for healthier, happier and more resilient futures. Alongside this we are continuing our long-standing commitment to inclusion through initiatives like Girls Active, Boys in Mind and Inclusion 2028.

## **Generational Shift – balancing the demands of the digital age through the human connection of play and sport.**

We are actively amplifying what it means to be human, building complementary experiences, skills and understanding to help young people navigate life healthily in the digital age whether that be inter-personal communication, problem solving and divergent thinking, or time spent in nature.

## Introduction from our CEO

We are creating opportunities for young people to feel seen and heard through our youth voice work, encouraging them to be part of the conversation that drives change. Our life skills programmes, such as the Wimbledon Foundation Set for Success, delivered in partnership with Barclays and the Youth Sport Trust, and the Youth Sport Trust PE Life Skills Award, are equipping young people with essential skills for life and work. These initiatives help build self-confidence, as well as the social and cultural capital needed to thrive both today and in the future. Our Youth Sport Leadership training spans from playground leaders in primary schools to our UK-wide Young Ambassador programme. Through these opportunities, young changemakers use the power of sport to shape brighter futures for their peers, promoting social action and civic responsibility.

### **Societal Change – transforming societies attitudes and perceptions towards the value of physical literacy, play and sport in the education and development of young people**

We are using evidence to make a robust case for physical literacy, play and sport to be reprioritised at the heart of childhood. The charity is helping to shape policy and drive systemic change in practice. Our advocacy includes high-level political engagement, contributions to national and regional forums, and targeted campaigns, such as our annual National School Sports Week, and in partnership with our National School Sport Champion Sir Mo Farah, Mo's Mission, which is raising awareness of the Chief Medical Officers' guidance around physical activity levels in childhood, and promoting a national conversation on children's activity levels and wellbeing.

We are grateful to all those who continue to support this work, and to the young people whose voices, experiences and ambitions inspire us every day. Together, we can build brighter futures through the power of play and sport.



**Ali Oliver MBE**

Chief Executive Officer, Youth Sport Trust



# Purpose and methodology

This is the fourth annual PE and School Sport Report produced by the Youth Sport Trust. The report contains a summary of the latest research, evidence and insight on the importance and impact of PE, school sport and physical activity. The report also highlights the issues facing children and young people today.

Previous reports are available here [youthsporttrust.org/research](https://youthsporttrust.org/research)

The Youth Sport Trust has made a commitment to publish this report on an annual basis in support of our 2022-35 strategy, '[Inspiring changemakers, building belonging](#)'. The annual report will also track awareness and attitudes to PE, school sport and physical activity over the next ten years.

The report draws on the latest evidence from across the UK as well as insight from international sources. Whilst a large proportion of this report references data from England (using Sport England's Active Lives – Children and Young People Survey and others), we have incorporated available data from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland as well as beyond wherever possible. As a charity, the Youth Sport Trust works with young people aged 0-25. Where relevant, this report includes research and evidence for this age range.

Unless otherwise stated, where we refer to 'parent' data, this has been collected from parents and carers of children aged 18 or under within Great Britain by YouGov Plc on behalf of Youth Sport Trust. Similarly, unless otherwise stated, evidence on teachers' attitudes refers to data collected from primary and secondary teachers in England by Teacher Tapp, also on behalf of Youth Sport Trust. Teacher Tapp is a daily survey app that asks over 9,000 teachers questions each day and reweights the results to make them representative. This year the Youth Sport Trust also continued their longitudinal research on the 'Class of 2035', which included a national children's survey working with Savanta. All base sizes reported on in this report are a minimum of 50 respondents. Where 'Black' and 'Asian' respondents are referred to, these have unweighted base sizes of 56 and 77 respectively so should be treated as indicative.

This report is fully referenced to enable further reading and investigation of the topics raised.

## Key Definitions

**Chief Medical Officer Physical Activity Recommendations<sup>1</sup>** – these are the physical activity guidelines issued by the four Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Children aged 5-18 years-old should engage in moderate-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) for an average of at least 60 minutes per day across the week. The guidelines also advise that children should engage in a variety of types of physical activity to develop movement skills, muscular fitness and bone strength as well as minimising the amount of time being sedentary. For toddlers and pre-schoolers (aged 1-4 years-old) the recommendation is 180 minutes of physical activity per day and 30 minutes of tummy time per day for those infants under one who are not yet mobile. For disabled children and young people the recommendation is 20 minutes of physical activity per day.

**Physical Education (PE)** – the national curriculum subject. Learning to move and moving to learn. Teaching and learning is planned and progressive and makes explicit reference to physical development, whilst contributing to social, mental and emotional skills. The national curriculum for physical education in England aims to ensure that all pupils develop competence to excel in a broad range of physical activities, are physically active for sustained periods of time, engage in competitive sports and activities, and lead healthy, active lives. Under the new curriculum for Wales, PE forms part of the Health and Wellbeing area of learning.

**Sport** – a game, competition or activity needing physical effort and skill that is played or done according to rules in which an individual or team competes against others. For schools it can form part of an enrichment offer and can be intra or inter-school.

**Physical Activity** – defined as any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure and can be done at a variety of intensities, and accumulated through work, domestic chores, transportation, during leisure time, or when participating in sport, walking, cycling, active recreation and active play.

**Sedentary Behaviour** – defined as any waking behaviour while in a sitting, reclining or lying posture with low amount of energy used.



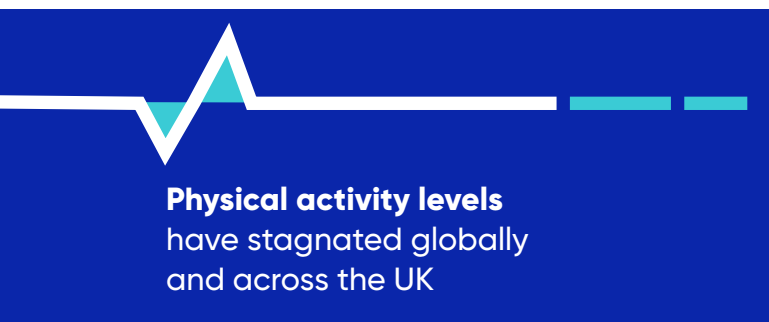
# ***State of the nation – executive summary***



## State of the nation – executive summary

Evidence shows that young people who are physically active are likely to have better physical health, mental health, social wellbeing and school outcomes.

**However, currently:**



**2.2 million**

**children and young people** in England do less than an average of 30 minutes a day

**1 in 10**

**children across the UK** are classed as obese or at risk of obesity

**1 in 10**

**young people in the UK** have low wellbeing

**ONLY 39%**

**of children and young people** with two or more characteristics of inequality meet the physical activity guidelines in England compared with 51% of those without these characteristics

### Digital distraction

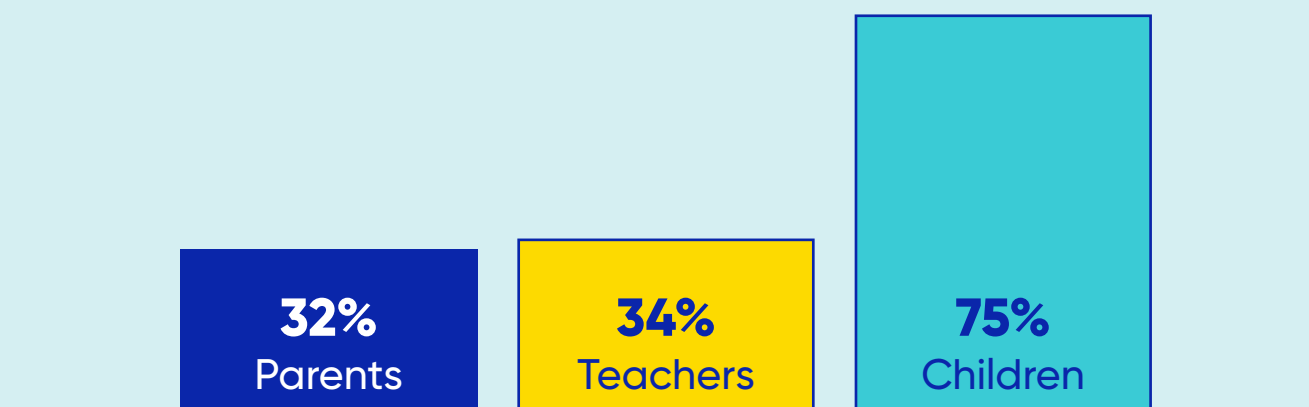
is having an impact on activity, driving up daily screen time and reducing the opportunities taken for meaningful physical activity – 70% of parents believe that as a result of digital distractions children are spending less time being active

## State of the nation – executive summary

For health benefits, the Chief Medical Officers (CMO) for the UK recommend that children aged 5–18 years-old are active for an average of 60 minutes every day across the week.

Awareness of the CMO recommendations is low amongst parents and teachers, but positively 75% of children and young people aged 5–16 years-old are aware of the recommended levels of physical activity they should be achieving. Similarly, three quarters of children and young people (73%) agree that doing exercise and playing sport are an important part of their life.

### The percentage of each group who are aware that children should be active for 60 minutes or more a day



**Sources:** **Parents** Youth Sport Trust / YouGov n=1081; **Teachers** Youth Sport Trust / Teacher Tapp n=9774; **Children** Youth Sport Trust / Savanta n=1002

Evidence shows that young people who are physically active are likely to have better physical health, mental health, social wellbeing and school outcomes.

#### Despite low awareness:

# 91%

of **parents** agree that sport and play are important aspects of every young person's education and development



# State of the nation – executive summary

Schools play an important role in providing universal access to high quality PE, school sport and physical activity for all children and young people.

Yet, pressures on schools are increasing and the status of PE, school sport and physical activity is being challenged.

Compared to 2011/12  
**PE hours have decreased.**  
**Nearly**

**45,000**

**fewer hours of PE** were  
taught in 2024/25

**and PE teachers in  
England have decreased by**

**7%**  

**17%** 

**of young people** reported cancelled  
PE lessons so far this academic year



**The amount of time** allocated to  
playtime in school is decreasing

**Poor physical development** is impacting  
school readiness – teachers report one  
in three children were not school ready



## State of the nation – executive summary

There are opportunities for PE, school sport and physical activity to play a role in addressing some of the challenges young people and schools are facing.

**71%**

**of young people** would like to be more active at school

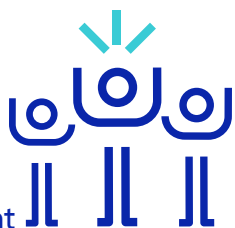


**1/3**

**Currently only a third of young people** (36%) take part in sport or physical activity at school outside of PE lessons on three or more days per week

**93%**

**of young people** think PE lessons are important



**Government support for breakfast clubs** will provide new opportunities for young people to be active



**Schools can play a role** in challenging gender stereotypes in PE, school sport and physical activity

**29%**

**of young people** agreed that if their school uniform allowed them to be more active, they would be encouraged to do more sport and get more active

**Teachers understand** the important role physical activity plays on pupil wellbeing, with 96% agreeing sport and play benefits children's mental wellbeing. Schools can prioritise pupil wellbeing – for secondary schools, pupil wellbeing was the most mentioned factor for parents when choosing a school for their child to attend

The evidence outlined within this report reinforces the Youth Sport Trust's determination to create a future where every child enjoys the life-changing benefits of play and sport.





***Why PE, school  
sport and physical  
activity matter***

# Why PE, school sport and physical activity matter

Evidence shows that young people who are physically active are likely to have better physical health, mental health, social wellbeing and school outcomes.

## With improved...



### Physical health

Better physical health and healthy weight<sup>2</sup>

Improved cardiovascular fitness, muscular fitness, cardiometabolic health, bone and functional health and reduced risk of cardiovascular disease<sup>3</sup>

Improved sleep<sup>4</sup>



### Mental wellbeing

Better mental health<sup>5</sup>

Improved Resilience<sup>6</sup>

Reduction in depressive symptoms<sup>7</sup>



### Social wellbeing

Less lonely<sup>8</sup>

Increased feeling of belonging to school<sup>9</sup>

Increased confidence to interact with others<sup>10</sup>

Wellbeing, self-belief and mental toughness<sup>11</sup>

Teamwork and communication<sup>12</sup>



### School outcomes

Improved learning and memory<sup>13</sup>

Positive links to academic attainment and emotional regulation<sup>14</sup>

Improved engagement in learning<sup>15</sup>

Extra-curricular provision could support school attendance<sup>16</sup>

# Why PE, school sport and physical activity matter

This year, further research has been released which adds to the already established evidence base for why PE, school sport and physical activity matter. Some highlighted examples are below.

## Spotlight on – physical activity and reduced loneliness<sup>18</sup>



Research was conducted in Australia looking at over 4,000 children involved in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children.

Young people were asked at age 8-9 and 20-21 years-old about their regular, individual and team sports participation in the last 12 months. Researchers found young people who continued participating in sport and particularly team sport had reduced risk of loneliness. Continued participation in sport was more beneficial for young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds, by reducing their risk of loneliness.

It is thought the benefits of team sports are a result of the group nature of participation which improves social wellbeing for children and young people.

The authors conclude that continued participation in sport should be promoted to provide social health benefits in addition to the already identified mental and physical health benefits.

## Spotlight on – physical activity and mental wellbeing<sup>17</sup>



Researchers carried out a systematic review and synthesis of evidence of 247 studies to establish which factors influence and explain the positive impact of physical activity on mental health.

Results identified key psychological, social and physical factors that mediate the relationship between physical activity and mental health. For example, factors include increasing self-esteem, self-worth and body image satisfaction.

Researchers concluded that these key factors need to be considered when developing or designing physical activity interventions to allow them to be most effective in positively impacting mental health.

# Why PE, school sport and physical activity matter

## Spotlight on – physical activity and school connectedness<sup>19</sup>



New research by the University of Manchester, in collaboration with the Youth Sport Trust, uncovered a deeper understanding of how PE, school sport and physical activity can tackle the physical, emotional and social challenges that all children and young people face. The research recruited five schools, each being involved in a comprehensive case study, with data being collected from teachers, parents and pupils.

Researchers found improved school connectedness was associated with enjoyment of PE, school sport and physical activity, with pupils who enjoyed physical activity reporting feeling better connected at school. The findings suggest physical activity offers a powerful protective factor against the challenges faced by children and young people. In particular, PE, school sport and physical activity can improve mood, reduce feelings of loneliness and improve feelings of connectedness to school.

## Spotlight on – physical activity and academic performance<sup>20</sup>



A systematic review of 19 studies looked to better understand the links between physical activity and academic performance.

The review found associations between physical activity and academic performance were primarily positive. Physical activity levels of 90 minutes plus per week were associated with improved academic performance. High intensity physical activity was most effective in improving academic performance. The optimal duration of physical activity was 30–60 minutes per session and various sports induced positive academic effects.

Findings further support that physical activity can enhance academic performance.



# Why PE, school sport and physical activity matter

## Spotlight on – physical activity and wider school outcomes<sup>21</sup>



The Sport England Teacher Training programme ran between 2019 and 2023 in over 3,000 schools in England. Evaluation activities produced a data set of over 180,000 students and staff survey responses. In 2024, additional analysis of the data was conducted by Sheffield Hallam University, in partnership with the Youth Sport Trust. The analysis aimed to understand the effect of engaging in physical activity and PE on wider school outcomes.

Both teachers and students reported positive perceptions of the benefits of physical activity on wider school outcomes, such as academic achievement, behaviour, physical health and mental health.

The analysis also found students who enjoy PE are more likely to think that being physically active has a positive effect on their schoolwork and behaviour.



**Physical  
health**



Only

**47.8%**

**of children and young people** in England achieve the Chief Medical Officers' recommended physical activity levels – in 2023/24 this was equivalent to 3.5 million young people<sup>22</sup>

**2.2  
million**

**children and young people** in England do less than an average of 30 minutes a day<sup>23</sup>

***There is a wellbeing value of***

**£4,100**

**for each 'active' young person, per year<sup>24</sup>**

**The prevalence of obesity**

**in Reception** children in England increased from 9.2% in 2022/23 to 9.6% in 2023/24 – from 13,934 to 14,803 children<sup>25</sup>



### Young people's physical activity levels remain low globally

The UK Chief Medical Officer's physical activity recommendations<sup>26</sup> echo the global guidelines, with the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommending that children and young people achieve at least an average of at least 60 minutes of moderate-vigorous-intensity physical activity per day. Globally, fewer than one in five children (19%) meet these recommended levels<sup>27,28</sup>. The economic burden of inactivity is large and WHO estimates that high income countries will be the most affected by this, with 70% of healthcare expenditure treating illness resulting from physical inactivity<sup>29</sup>.

In the UK, for toddlers and pre-schoolers (aged 1-4 years-old) the recommendation is 180 minutes of physical activity per day and 30 minutes of tummy time per day for those infants not yet mobile. For disabled children and young people, the recommendation is 20 minutes of physical activity per day.

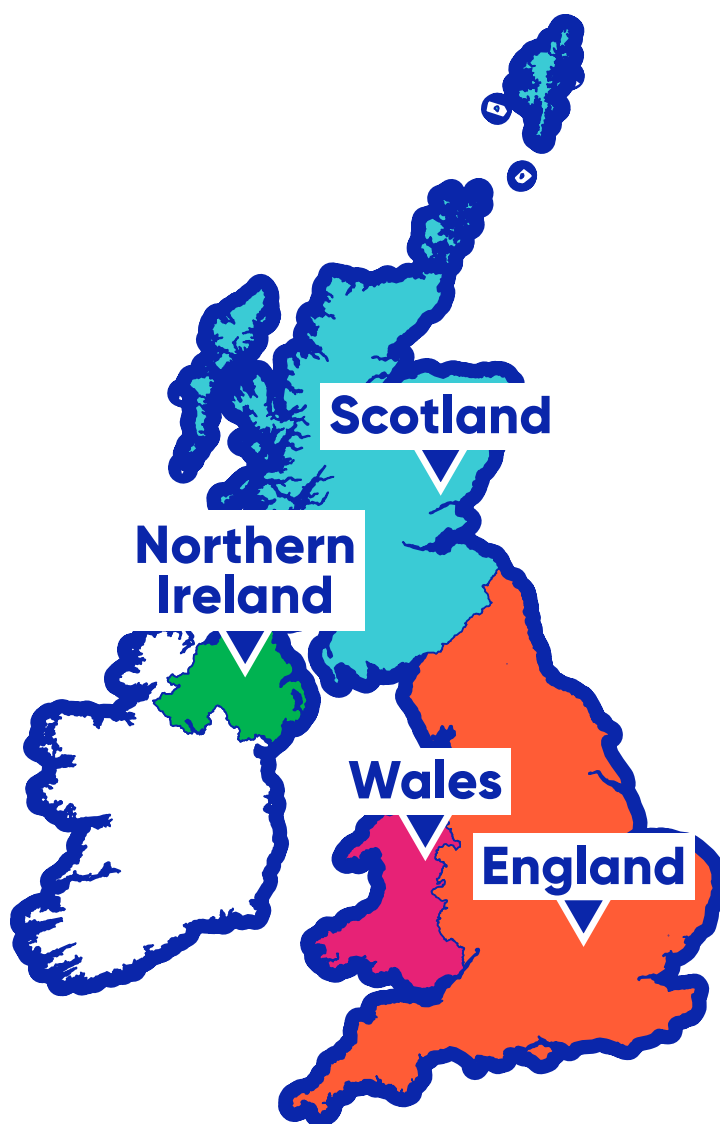
Currently, not enough children in the UK are meeting the recommended amounts of physical activity.

**England:** Sport England's Active Lives measurement programme shows very little change in young people's physical activity levels over the last few years. The latest data from 2023/24 shows that only 47.8% of young people are meeting the UK CMOs' recommended levels<sup>30</sup> and 29.6% are classed as 'less active', achieving less than an average of 30 minutes of physical activity a day.

**Wales:** Data from Wales shows an even lower proportion of children and young people in Wales achieve the recommended activity levels, at 18.3%<sup>31</sup>.

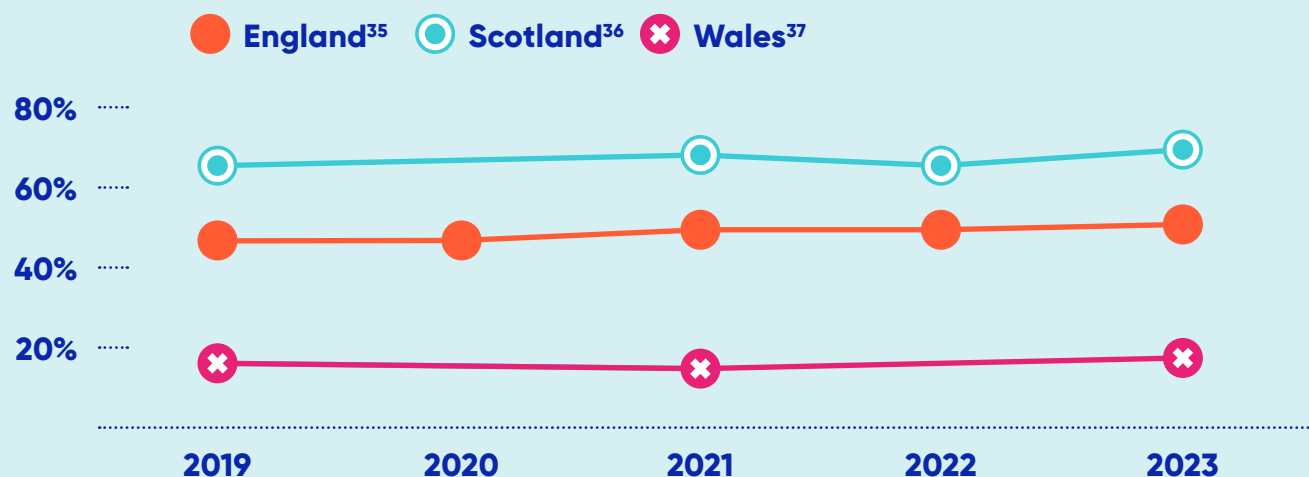
**Scotland:** The proportion of children meeting the guidelines in Scotland is reported as being much higher, with 72% of children aged 5-15 years-old achieving this in 2023<sup>32</sup>. Notably, even when school-based activity is removed, 62% of children in Scotland still meet the recommended levels.

**Northern Ireland:** The latest Northern Ireland data from 2022 suggested 17% of young people were meeting the recommended physical activity levels<sup>33</sup>.





## Physical activity levels year on year for the home countries



*The data cannot be directly compared between countries due to different approaches in measurement. Northern Ireland does not have an established annual data collection method, with the most recent data being from 2022 and previous data being from 2018<sup>38</sup>.*

As demonstrated in the chart above, the proportion of young people achieving the recommended physical activity levels has stagnated across the last few years with little change for any home nation.

Only two thirds (67%) of young people are happy with the amount of physical activity they do<sup>34</sup>. Despite this, the majority (89%) of young people agree they know why being active is good for them and 75% of young people are aware of the amount of physical activity they should be achieving each day.

## The physical health of children is a concern

The international Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study asked children to rate their health. The latest data from 2022 found that in England, nearly 80% of young people rated their health as good or excellent<sup>39</sup>. This is lower than the previous data in 2018 where 87% of young people viewed their physical health positively<sup>40</sup>.

Childhood obesity impacts quality of life and is linked to obesity in adulthood<sup>41</sup>. Obesity in childhood is associated with greater risk of diseases including type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease<sup>42</sup>. Diabetes UK data suggests that the number of children receiving treatment for type 2 diabetes in England and Wales has increased by over 50% since 2006<sup>43</sup>. The increase observed in type 2 diabetes as a consequence of obesity has been identified as a significant global healthcare challenge, with calls for Government and professional bodies to act now to address it<sup>44</sup>. The economic impact of obesity is estimated to exceed 3% of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) by 2060<sup>45</sup>.

Across the UK around one in ten children are classed as obese or at risk of obesity. Prevalence of obesity in England amongst reception pupils aged 4–5 years-old in 2023/24 was 9.6%<sup>46</sup> and 10.5% in Scotland<sup>47</sup>. The latest data for Wales and Northern Ireland is from academic year 2022/23, with 11.4% of 4–5 years-old in Wales<sup>48</sup> and 5.1% of 4–5 years-old in Northern Ireland classified as obese<sup>49</sup>.

Children from more deprived backgrounds are more likely to be living with obesity across all home nations. However, positively, there seems to be a trend in reduction in the proportion of children who are at risk of being overweight or obese compared to pre-pandemic levels.

### Spotlight on – global long-term predictions around obesity<sup>50</sup>



Recent global research modelled overweight and obesity levels across childhood and adolescence from 1990 to 2021 to provide predictions for 2050. The paper was reported in The Lancet and included data from over 180 countries.

Researchers found that globally, if trends continue, then a third (31%) of the world's children will be classified as overweight or obese by 2050.

In the UK, the number of obese young people will increase by more than half the current levels, taking obesity from 12% for girls in 2021 to 18.4% in 2050 and from 10% for boys in 2021 to 16% for boys in 2050.

When looking at both overweight and obesity levels together in the UK, nearly four in ten girls (39%) and three in ten boys (31%) aged 5–9 years-old are forecast to be overweight or obese by 2050. For 10–14 years-old the predicted prevalence is slightly higher, with 43% of girls and 38% of boys being classed as overweight or obese by 2050.

### The positive role that physical activity can have on supporting physical health

The benefits of physical activity on physical health have been well documented, with strong evidence for children including benefits to bone health, cardiovascular fitness, muscle fitness and weight status<sup>51</sup>. Positively, new research conducted in the last year has begun to consider the economic benefits of physical activity on physical health in order to demonstrate the importance not only for individual health, but for our wider NHS and economy.

## Spotlight on – the economic value of physical activity<sup>52</sup>



New research conducted by Sport England in partnership with State of Life, Sheffield Hallam University and Manchester Metropolitan University shows the annual social value of sport and physical activity is £107.2 billion for adults, children and young people taking part and volunteering in sport and physical activity.

The analysis calculated a wellbeing value of £4,100 per child or young person per year. The research also identified the role improved health from participation in sport and physical activity can have on reducing the economic burden on the NHS, health and social care<sup>53</sup>.

This supplements previous research by State of Life in partnership with the Youth Sport Trust, which found that being active for 30 minutes a day in primary school has an economic value of £1,100 per year per child for children in Years 3–6 and a value of £1,900 per year per child for children in Years 7–11. Overall, they found the economic value of physical activity in schools to be at least £4.5 billion per year and could be up to £9 billion<sup>54</sup>.

Similar social return on investment calculations have been undertaken for adults in Wales, suggesting that for every £1 invested in sport in Wales, there is a £4.44 return<sup>55</sup>.





***Deepening  
inequalities***



# Deepening inequalities

Only

39%

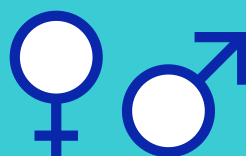
of children and young people with two or more characteristics of inequality meet the physical activity guidelines in England compared with

51%

of those without these characteristics<sup>56</sup>



Generally, those from a higher socio-economic background tend to have higher physical activity levels<sup>57,58</sup>



Globally, girls are less active than boys and this gender gap is widening across countries<sup>59</sup>

52%



of young people with a disability had attended at least one before or after school physical activity club in the last six months – they are significantly less likely to have done so than their non-disabled peers<sup>60</sup>



Children and young people of Black, Asian and other ethnicities are the least likely to be active<sup>61</sup>

Unequal access of opportunity exacerbates wider inequalities across society. Evidence suggests that the benefits of physical activity can be even higher for those with particular characteristics of inequalities<sup>62, 63</sup>. For example, research by the Youth Sport Trust and State of Life found that the wellbeing impact for physical activity at school was almost double for those children who are disabled and / or receiving Free School Meals than those who aren't<sup>64</sup>. There is a need to understand and remove barriers to ensure that all young people are able to be active and thus level the playing field. This reinforces the role of schools in providing universal access to physical activity and sport for all young people.

## Research has continued to add to the evidence base demonstrating the influence of inequalities on physical health for young people

In 2024, Sport England launched its inequalities metric<sup>65</sup>. The metric highlights the impact of intersectionality between characteristics of inequality. Having multiple characteristics of inequalities is the most powerful indicator of physical activity levels.

Key characteristics included in the metric for children and young people are: girls, other gender\*, low affluence, Asian and Black children and a lack of park, field or outdoor sports space nearby\*. Children with two or more characteristics of inequality are less likely to achieve the recommended physical activity levels – only 39% of children and young people with two or more characteristics of inequality meet the physical activity guidelines in England compared with 51% of those without these characteristics<sup>66</sup>. Having two or more characteristics of inequality was the strongest indicator of a lower level of physical activity.

### Spotlight on – qualitative research conducted in Spain focusing on physical activity inequalities in adolescents<sup>67</sup>



Researchers conducted interviews and focus groups with students, parents and teachers in Madrid with the aim of identifying factors that determine inequalities in adolescents. Results included four main themes:

1. Access to off-school structured physical activities
2. Physical activity restrictions due to socio-economic status
3. Unacknowledged privilege in upper socio-economic status adolescents
4. Gender physical activity inequalities.

Researchers highlight the importance of considering equity and gender perspectives when establishing mechanisms to increase physical activity levels.

\*For secondary aged pupils.

## Girls are still less active than boys

Data from Sport England's Active Lives survey shows a gender gap in activity levels for young people in England, with a greater proportion of boys (51%) meeting physical activity guidelines than girls (45%). In particular, this year the gender gap for children in Years 1-2 (aged 5-7 years-old) in England has widened to 7.9% from 6.3% in 2017/18. Positively, in contrast, the gender gap for Years 9-11 (aged 13-16 years-old) in England has started to narrow, to 6.8% from 9.5% in 2017/18<sup>68</sup>.

In support of the Active Lives findings, recent research by Women in Sport finds girls are less likely to say they take part in sport regularly than boys<sup>69</sup>. Girls are more likely to report they never do any sport or physical activity outside of PE lessons at school<sup>70</sup> (60% girls vs 38% boys). Girls are also less likely to say they enjoy taking part in PE compared to boys (66% girls agree vs 87% boys)<sup>71</sup>. These findings are not unique to the British context, with new research from Australia finding boys are more likely than girls to report taking part in before-school physical activity<sup>72</sup>.

A greater proportion of boys report positive feelings about being active; more boys report they feel they can be themselves when they are being active (75% boys agree vs. 52% girls agree) and that they feel good when they do physical activity (83% agree vs 66% girls agree)<sup>73</sup>. A greater proportion of boys also agree the skills they learn in PE help them in and outside of school than girls (65% vs 47%)<sup>74</sup>.

Girls are more likely to report experiencing barriers to being active, with nearly half (47%) of boys saying nothing stops them being active compared to just 29% of girls. Top barriers for girls identified through the Youth Sport Trust Girls Active survey include, lack of confidence, not liking others watching them and the weather<sup>75</sup>. For secondary aged girls, the top barrier was when they have their period.

## Spotlight on – scoping review exploring barriers and facilitators for girls' engagement in physical activity<sup>80</sup>

Researchers conducted a scoping review to explore barriers to physical activity for girls. 41 articles published between 1993 and 2024 were included.

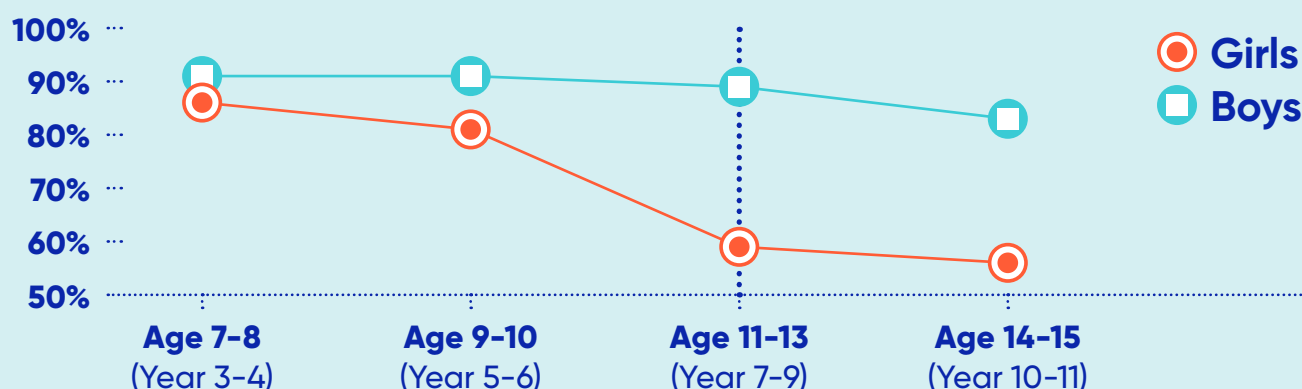
The main barriers identified were girls' relationships with their bodies and the influence of peers and teachers. The main facilitators were social interactions, family / teacher support and choice of activity. The review emphasises how these barriers and facilitators need to be considered when developing interventions to engage girls in physical activity.

Sport England's Active Lives survey continues to show a drop off in positive attitudes towards being active for girls. Being a girl, combined with other characteristics of inequality leads to the lowest proportions of young people with three or more positive attitudes<sup>76</sup>. For example, girls from an Asian background in Years 3-11 are least likely to have three or more positive attitudes towards being active<sup>77</sup>.

Similarly for PE, new research by the Youth Sport Trust found that as girls hit puberty, typically around aged 12 years-old, the proportion of girls reporting feeling confident, happy and enjoying PE drops and then continues on a downwards trend throughout their teenage years. 56% of girls aged 14-15 years-old enjoy PE compared to 86% of girls aged 7-8 years-old. In contrast, boys' experiences and attitudes remain relatively consistent across all age groups<sup>78</sup>.

## Girls and boys enjoyment of taking part in PE over time<sup>79</sup>

**56% of girls aged 14-15 enjoy PE vs 86% of girls aged 7-8**



## Spotlight on – the intersectionality of inequalities – gender and ethnicity<sup>81</sup>



Women in Sport led a piece of research aiming to understand Black girls' experiences in sport and physical activity, in order to provide greater insight on how to increase their physical activity levels.

They found several common themes in the experiences of Black girls which impacted their experiences and engagement with being physically active. This included:

- **Discrimination** and **racism**
- **Poverty**, which impacts their exposure to leisure activities
- **Responsibility**, through adultification bias where they are given responsibility earlier
- **Ambition**, where there is a desire for social mobility and future career profession
- **Safety**, where they are concerned about their physical and psychological safety.

Intersectional barriers to sport that were identified as truly unique to Black girls' experiences were barriers around their hair and masculinisation.



As a Black girl, hair is very important. I feel like that it does impact how people, especially during teenage years, trying to navigate your identity... I feel like that plays a big role in things. It's just like, how do you have your hair? Are you going to mess up your hair? How do you protect your hair while sweating and engaging in sports? There's just so much to figure out whilst trying to navigate sports in general. (Age 22)

This reinforces the need to consider the intersectionality of inequalities when approaching physical activity interventions and working with young people.





## Spotlight on – the intersectionality of inequalities – gender and disability<sup>82</sup>

Research led by Access Sport, in partnership with the Sweaty Betty Foundation, Women in Sport and Nuffield Health, surveyed disabled teenage girls to understand their experiences and attitudes towards being active.

They found:

- **64% of disabled teenage girls** do not engage in sport or exercise regularly
- **67% of disabled teenage girls** would like to be more active.

The survey also highlighted similarities in terms of barriers for disabled teenage girls as non-disabled teenage girls, with low confidence, not liking others watching them and feeling judged as the top barriers.

As a result of the research the report provides a series of recommendations for funders, commissioners, policy makers and sport / exercise providers. They have also established a toolkit resource to support stakeholders to engage disabled teenage girls in sport and exercise.

## Children from the least affluent backgrounds are less likely to be active

The UK Government estimates 4.3 million children, or 30% of all children in the UK were living in low income families in the financial year 2022/23<sup>83</sup>. This is 730,000 more children than in 2010<sup>84</sup> and has impacts on schools and education. For example, teachers report regularly paying out of their own pocket to help disadvantaged pupils in their school<sup>85</sup>.

The cost of living challenges also clearly impact on opportunities for many young people and their wellbeing. Four in ten parents (43%) agree that cost of living increases have had a long-term impact on their child's wellbeing, while one in five parents say they struggle to afford the general cost of sending their child to school<sup>86</sup>. Over half (52%) of parents responding to the Youth Sport Trust's annual parent survey agree that cost of living increases have had a negative impact on the number of opportunities their children have to be physically active, play and take part in sport<sup>87</sup>. This is significantly higher than last year (48%)<sup>88</sup>. Half (50%) of parents also agree the challenges associated with cost of living increases make it harder for them to be active as a family.

A quarter (26%) of young people surveyed as part of the Youth Sport Trust Class of 2035 research<sup>89</sup> said that they would be more active if their family had more money to afford activities out of school. 14% are worried about how much money they and their families have.

Data from the latest Sport England's Active Lives survey shows young people from the least affluent families are least likely to be active. 45% of young people from the least affluent backgrounds meet the CMO guidelines compared to 57% of those from the most affluent backgrounds<sup>90</sup>. Children from the least affluent backgrounds also have access to fewer local facilities for physical activity and experience more barriers such as transport<sup>91</sup>. The Sport England inequalities metric identifies a lack of local park or outdoor play space as a key characteristic that influences secondary-aged young people's physical activity levels<sup>92</sup>.

## **Children with special educational needs and disabilities are less likely to be positive about being physically active**

The number of school pupils with educational health and care plans (EHCPs) has risen by 71% between 2018 and 2024<sup>93</sup>.

The Youth Sport Trust Class of 2035 survey<sup>94</sup> found that young children with a disability were significantly less likely to have attended at least one before or after-school physical activity club in the last six months than their non-disabled peers. Disabled children were also more likely to report aspects that they do not like about their PE lessons in school. For example, they were more likely than their non-disabled peers to worry that they will let the team down, worry about getting hurt, feel that they are not very good at exercise or sports and feel self-conscious about their body. Disabled young people were more likely to report that they were not able to play sports as often as other people their own age, than those without a disability. When asked about the things that being active (like playing sports and doing PE) can help them to achieve, children with a disability were overall less likely to identify the benefits of being active than their non-disabled peers, suggesting less positive attitudes towards physical activity amongst this group.

Research conducted by Paralympics GB as part of their Equal Play School Sport Policy paper reinforced the evidence that participation rates in PE and school sport for disabled children in the UK are lower than their non-disabled peers. They called for additional inclusive teacher training to support teachers to have the skills and confidence to deliver inclusive PE<sup>95</sup>.

## **Young people from Black ethnic backgrounds have more positive attitudes towards being active but are least likely to be active**

Sport England's Active Lives survey found that Asian, Black and young people of other ethnic backgrounds were less likely to be active than young people from other ethnicities<sup>96</sup>.

Youth Sport Trust Class of 2035 research, however, found that young people from a Black ethnic background were more likely to report positive attitudes towards their PE lessons and being active than those from a white ethnic background<sup>97</sup>. Young people from a Black ethnic background were also more likely to agree that doing exercise and playing sport is an important part of their life, that they can be themselves when they are being active and that the skills they learn in PE help them in and outside of school. This finding mirrors that of Sport England's Active Lives, where Black children were most likely to have positive attitudes towards being active.

However, Youth Sport Trust Class of 2035 research also showed that young people from a Black ethnic background were also more likely to agree that they don't have enough time to do sport / exercise and that they are not able to play sports as often as other people their age. They are also more likely to agree that they would like to be more active than they are<sup>98</sup>. Worryingly, Sport England's Active Lives data shows a significant reduction in the positive attitudes of Black children since 2017/18. This suggests that there is an unmet need for this group of young people, where there is an appetite for more activity that should be addressed with high quality opportunities provided to them to preserve their positive attitudes.

## Young people in Alternative Provision settings face additional barriers to access PE, sport and physical activity

The number of pupils in alternative provision (AP) settings has increased by 20% to 15,900 in 2023/24. The proportion of girls in APs has also continued to increase to a third (32.6%). A large proportion of young people in APs are eligible for Free School Meals (60.7%), compared to a quarter (24.6%) in the overall school population<sup>99</sup>.

Research published in the last year has explored the value and provision of PE within AP settings in England. This research unearthed the spatial injustices in AP PE settings<sup>100</sup>. Most settings identified a lack of, or limited indoor or outdoor space for PE, with barriers such as costs of hiring facilities, inappropriate spaces and weather further exacerbating the issue. Currently, unlike mainstream schools in England, there is no expectation, regulation or requirement for AP settings to be situated with an adequate space for PE<sup>101</sup>. Despite this, research has demonstrated the potential value of PE within AP settings, in particular to develop life skills, improve mental health, support healthy lifestyles and to support lifelong engagement with sport and physical activity<sup>102</sup>.





***Mental health  
and wellbeing***



# 1 in 10

children (11%) have low wellbeing<sup>103</sup>

More than half of parents say their child has suffered with a mental health issue during the last 12 months<sup>104</sup>



# £1 billion

Children and young people's mental health services now account for over £1 billion of NHS spending annually in England<sup>105,106</sup>

NEARLY

# 40,000

children and young people have waited over two years for support with their mental health after being referred<sup>107</sup>

Globally, girls start reporting lower life satisfaction earlier than boys at around aged 12 years-old<sup>108</sup>



## We continue to face a mental health crisis for young people in the UK

Mind's latest Big Mental Health report (2024) identifies that one in five children and young people in England have a mental health problem<sup>109</sup>, up from one in nine in 2017<sup>110</sup>.

13% of young people surveyed as part of the Youth Sport Trust Class of 2035 research reported that they worry about their mental health. Young people were significantly more likely to report this if they were disabled or had a low sense of belonging to school. Other key worries reported by young people included how well they are doing at school (36%), having friends (42%) and how healthy they are (28%)<sup>111</sup>.

Loneliness amongst young people in the UK is also a concern. The King's Trust TK Maxx Youth Index (2025)<sup>112</sup> found that amongst those young people in the UK aged 16-25 years-old surveyed, over a third (35%) said they always or often feel lonely and 30% always or often feel isolated.

## Mental health and wellbeing

The prevalence of mental health difficulties for young people has continued to grow over time. The latest official data was published in 2023 by the NHS in England and follows the same children from 2017. Analysis of the data conducted by the Centre for Mental Health in the UK found 198 out of 1,000 children aged 8-16 years-old in England in 2023 had a probable mental health disorder, a rise from 185 per 1,000 in 2022<sup>113</sup>. Figures suggest this prevalence only increases as children age, with 316 per 1000 17-19 year-olds having a probable mental health disorder in 2023.

Further evidence on the mounting numbers of young people with mental health concerns comes from a recent study published in The Lancet analysing admissions to medical wards in England from 2012 to 2022<sup>114</sup>. They found large increases in the numbers of children and young people aged 5-18 years-old admitted for mental health concerns. Additional analysis of data by the Children's Commissioner found that, of those children estimated to have a probable mental health disorder in 2022-23, less than half had received at least one contact with mental health services throughout the year<sup>115</sup> and only a third of children and young people were able to access treatment needed in 2023<sup>116</sup>. Overall, nearly 40,000 children and young people had been waiting more than two years for support. This shows not only that levels are increasing, but there is currently not enough provision to support the numbers of young people who need intervention.

### Spotlight on – new research shows greater loneliness at age 12 influences later life chances<sup>117</sup>



New research conducted by Bryan et al. (2024) showed greater loneliness at age 12 was associated with reduced employability and lower social status at age 18.

The study used a longitudinal data set to test potential associations between loneliness and multiple indicators of social position in young adulthood, specifically, whether participants who were lonelier at age 12 were more likely to be classified as 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET) as young adults. The data was drawn from a data set of 2,232 individuals born in England and Wales during the years 1994 and 1995. Measures of loneliness and subjective social status were measured at ages 12, 18 and 26 years, while NEET status was measured at 18 years-old.

Results also indicated that loneliness is associated with reduced subjective social status across adolescence and young adulthood.

Overall, the findings of this research suggest that loneliness may have direct costs to the economy resulting from reduced employability and social position, underlining the importance of addressing loneliness early in life.

## There is a concerning lack of positivity around young peoples' future

Recent research has found that increasingly young people are worried about their future. Nearly two fifths (18%) of young people surveyed as part of the Youth Sport Trust Class of 2035 research reported that they are worried about getting a job<sup>118</sup>. This is an increase from 2020 where only 12% reported this. Findings from The King's Trust TK Maxx report also found that 30% of young people aged 16-25 years-old in the UK surveyed believe that they will fail in life<sup>119</sup>. More than half (58%) of females and half (49%) of males said they felt anxious on a daily basis about their future and 23% of females and 14% of males said their mental health has stopped them going to work, school or college in the last year.

A high proportion of parents (87%) of children under five years-old say they are worried about their child's future life chances<sup>120</sup>.

## Spotlight on – new research explores the relationship between mental health and absence at school<sup>121</sup>



Analysis of longitudinal data sets in England for the Department for Education has concluded that poorer mental health outcomes contribute to absenteeism.

The analysis found in particular

- Mental ill health is found to be one of the causal factors of absence in Year 11
- Poorer mental health predicts authorised absences
- Students who reported enjoying school less were more likely to be absent.

## The role of sport and physical activity on supporting mental health

The benefits of physical activity and exercise on mental health and wellbeing have been well documented (e.g. RCPSYCH<sup>122</sup>, Mind<sup>123</sup>) and are increasingly promoted. Illustrating this, the theme of the 2024 Mental Health awareness week in England, run by the Mental Health Foundation<sup>124</sup>, was 'movement – moving more for your mental health', reiterating and promoting the positive link between regular physical activity and wellbeing.

Positively, new research released within the last year has continued to add to the narrative of the role sport and physical activity can play in supporting mental health for young people.

# Mental health and wellbeing

An independent review commissioned by Sport England found strong and consistent evidence that sport and physical activity interventions had positive effects on mental health for young people<sup>126</sup>. Furthermore, Sport England's Active Lives Children and Young People survey data continues to show a positive association between physical activity levels and mental wellbeing, with those who are more active more likely to report higher wellbeing<sup>127</sup>.

Research by Bang et al. (2024) has also found participating in sport helped reduce teenagers' depressive symptoms through increasing their sense of school belonging<sup>128</sup>. Research evidence indicates team sports in particular are associated with better mental health<sup>129</sup>.

Over half (59%) of young people surveyed by the Youth Sport Trust Class of 2035 research identified that playing sports and doing PE can have a benefit on their wellbeing and happiness<sup>130</sup>. Those from more affluent backgrounds and those who are more active were more likely to be aware of this. Specifically, 43% of young people identified that playing sports and doing PE can make them happier and 18% of young people identified it can help them to be more resilient. A quarter (26%) of young people said that when they feel unhappy, they participate in exercise to make them feel better.

## Spotlight on – new research shows connectivity between physical, subjective and mental wellbeing<sup>125</sup>

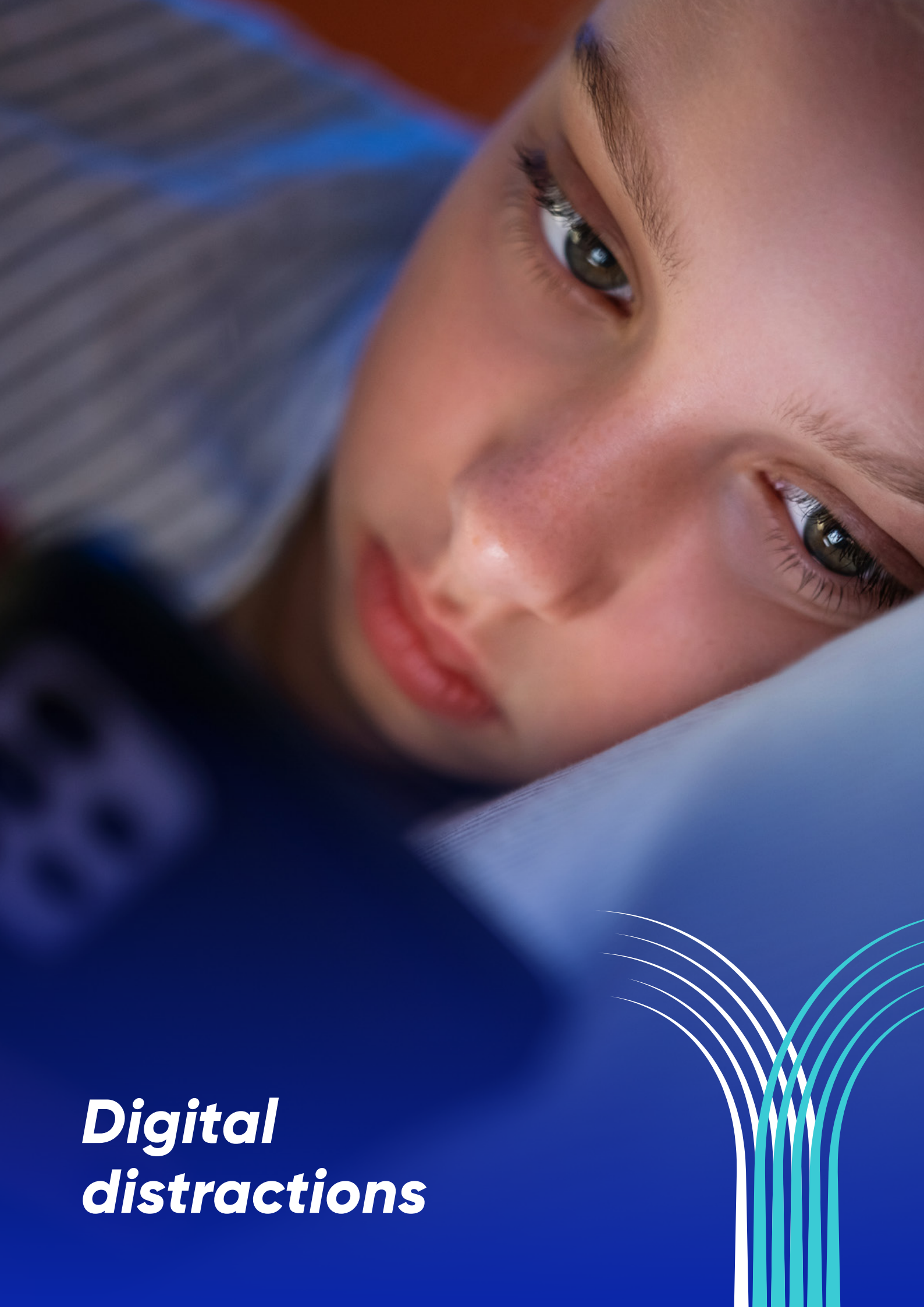


Hennessey et al. (2025) explored the relationships between physical, subjective and psychological wellbeing in secondary school students. This research included 366 adolescents aged 11–16 years-old from five mainstream secondary schools across England. Three wellbeing profiles were identified across the cohort: low wellbeing, moderate wellbeing and high wellbeing.

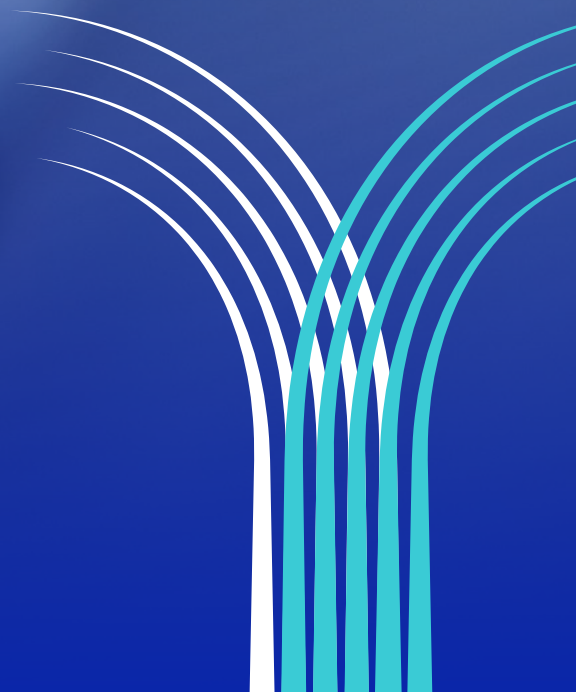
Compared to the high wellbeing profile, the moderate and low profiles were characterised by being older, being a girl, having lower perceived socio-economic status, doing fewer hours of physical activity a week and having lower emotional literacy, school belonging and perceptions of learning. The research also found that the higher wellbeing group had higher levels of physical activity, showing that physical health and physical activity are essential components of overall wellbeing.

The research concluded that physical, subjective and psychological wellbeing are closely interrelated. Therefore, schools should consider these factors, as well as physical activity, in any holistic approach to pupil wellbeing.





# ***Digital distractions***



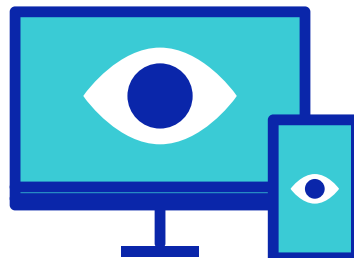
Over

**1/3**

of young people think their screen time is too high<sup>132</sup>

**84%**

of parents are concerned young people are spending too much time online and not enough time with each other in person<sup>131</sup>



Over

**Half**

(54%) of teachers believe children are not ready for school in reception because children are spending more than the recommended two hours a day on electronic devices<sup>133</sup>

### Balance in a digital age is essential to maintaining a healthy and happy childhood

The World Health Organisation recommends that the amount of time children are sedentary should be limited, particularly the amount of recreational screen time<sup>134</sup>. This is increasingly challenging as the use of technology and online connectivity becomes the expected norm. The latest Ofcom report<sup>135</sup> found that by age 11 years-old, 90% of children own their own mobile phone and half of children aged 3-12 years use at least one social media site despite the minimum age being 13<sup>136</sup>. Children are increasingly spending more time on devices, with a third (34%) of children surveyed reporting spending three hours or more a day on a screen<sup>137</sup>. Previous research evidence suggests that there may be negative associations between excessive screen time and health outcomes<sup>138</sup>.

Young people surveyed as part of the Youth Sport Trust Class of 2035 research who had higher screen time were more likely to worry about the way their body looks and their mental health<sup>139</sup>. Additionally, those with higher screen time use were less likely to agree that they think PE lessons are important and less likely to report feeling that they belonged to school.

### Spotlight on – evidence suggests a negative relationship between digital technology use and psychosocial wellbeing amongst young children<sup>140</sup>



A systematic review and meta-analysis including 51 studies was conducted by researchers in Australia. They found negative correlations between children's digital technology use and overall psychosocial wellbeing, social and behavioural functioning. The analysis focused on studies reporting on children aged 4-6 years-old. These findings suggest that limiting the amount of time on digital technology for this age group may have benefits for their overall wellbeing.

### Spotlight on – new research exploring the link between school phone policies and mental wellbeing<sup>141</sup>



New research has explored the links between school phone policies, where phone use is restricted during the school day, and children's mental wellbeing.

The study provides further evidence of the negative links between phone use and wellbeing. They found negative associations between increased time spent on phones and lower mental wellbeing as well as negative associations between increased social media and phone use and outcomes such as anxiety, low physical activity, poor sleep, low attainment and disruptive behaviour.

However, researchers found no evidence to suggest that having a phone policy that restricted use of mobile phones in school was linked to better mental wellbeing in adolescents. Young people in schools with restrictive policies did spend less time on their phones and social media during school time, but their overall total screen time was no different from those young people in schools without a restrictive policy.

This study shows the answer is not as simple as just banning smart phones at school.

### Parents and young people are concerned about the influence of screens

Over a third of 8–17 year-olds feel their screen time is too high<sup>142</sup>. Positively, over half (53%) of young people agree that they would like to spend less time online and more time doing other things<sup>143</sup>. This is particularly the case for those children aged 9–10 years-old, those from more affluent backgrounds, those who are disabled and those who feel more of a sense of belonging to school. However, worryingly, 39% agree that they prefer playing online than being active. Older age groups, those who are less active, less resilient and have lower levels of belonging to school were more likely to agree they prefer playing online than being active. These findings suggest that it might not be simple to increase physical activity levels and reduce screen time for all young people and that different strategies to reduce screen time might be needed for different demographic groups.

Parents are similarly concerned about the amount of screen time in children and the consequences of this. The majority of parents surveyed in the Youth Sport Trust annual parent survey are concerned children are spending too much time online and not enough time with each other in person (84%) and that as a result digital distractions mean their children are spending less time being active (70%)<sup>144</sup>.

Screens are also increasingly being associated with school readiness concerns, with screens being identified as a key challenge by teachers and parents. 54% of teachers and 43% of parents highlighted children spending too much time on electronic devices was a factor in children not being school ready<sup>145</sup>. The majority (85%) of parents agree the teaching of interpersonal skills is even more important for young people growing up in today's digital age than it was for previous generations<sup>146</sup>.





***Parents'  
perceptions  
and attitudes***



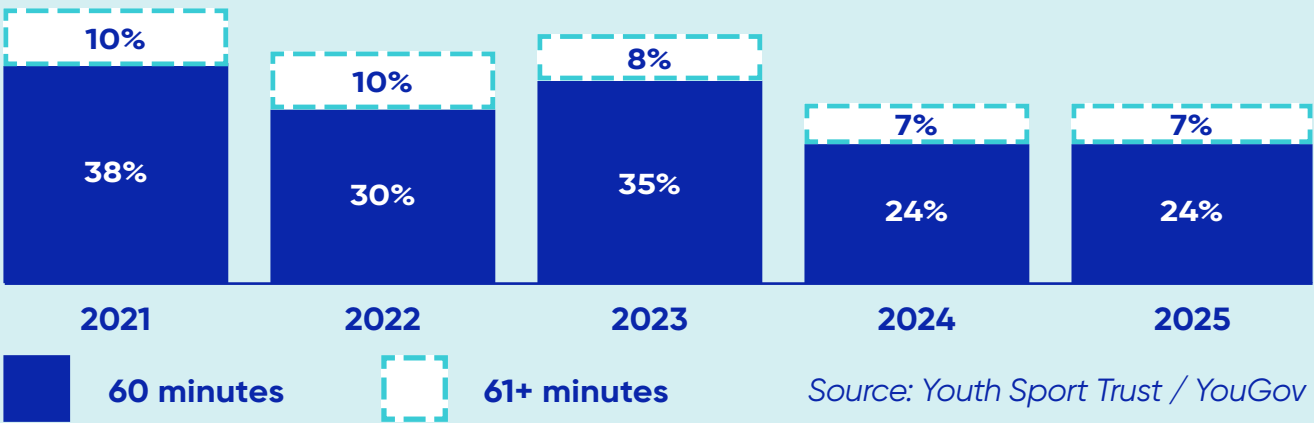
# Parents' perceptions and attitudes towards physical activity



## Parental awareness of the recommended physical activity levels for children is low

The Youth Sport Trust's annual parent survey assesses parental awareness of the Chief Medical Officers' (CMOs) physical activity guidelines for children and young people (an average of 60 minutes a day). This year's survey found only 32% of parents believed that children should engage in 60 minutes of daily physical activity as a minimum<sup>150</sup>. This is similar to last year's data, where 31% of parents were aware of the CMO guidelines<sup>151</sup>. Since this was first measured in 2021, the percentage of parents who are aware of the recommendations in the CMO guidelines has continued to fall. Awareness differed by gender, with female parents more likely to say children should engage in at least 60 minutes of daily physical activity than male parents (35% vs 28%). This gender gap has grown from the previous year.

## The percentage of parents who believe children should be active for 60 minutes or more a day continues to fall



# Parents' perceptions and attitudes towards physical activity

## Parents recognise the value of physical activity for children and young people

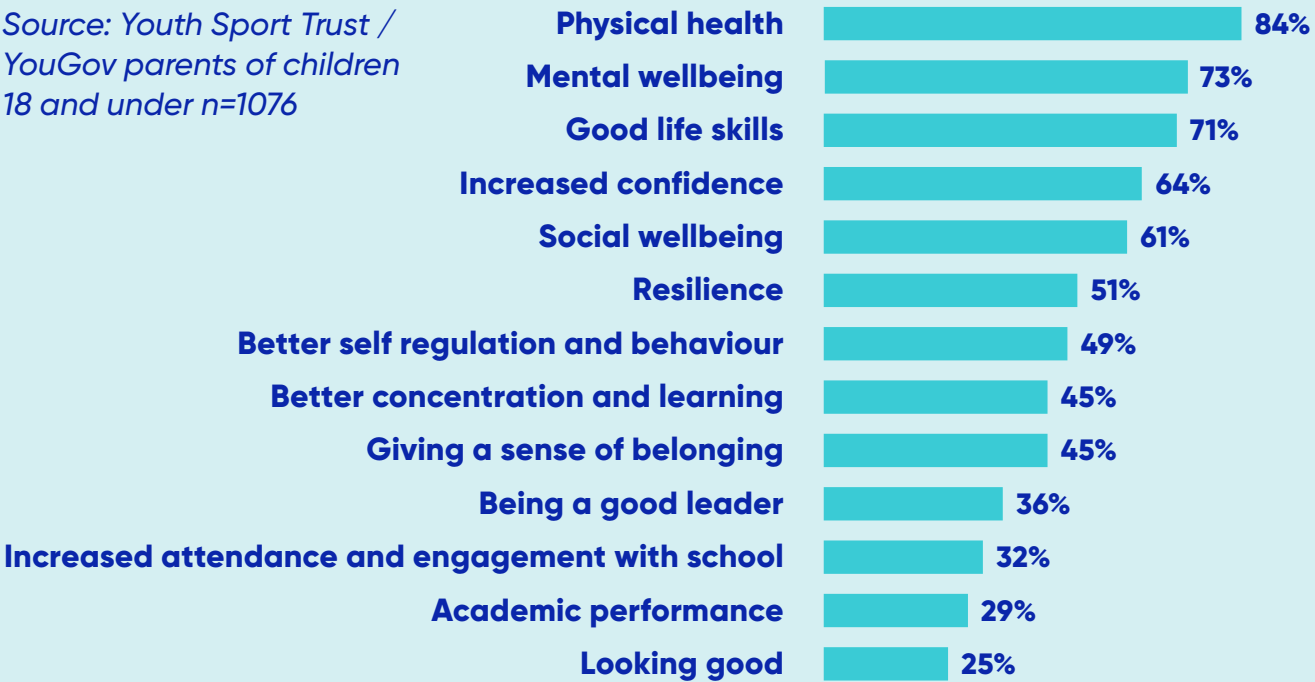
Parents do not believe children are currently active enough, with 82% of parents saying they are concerned young people today are not getting enough physical activity and 85% of parents concerned young people are spending too much time sitting and not enough time being active<sup>152</sup>. Moreover, over half of parents (54%) are concerned their own child does not do as much physical activity as they should – a significant increase from 49% of parents last year<sup>153</sup>.

Increasingly, parents are concerned about their child's physical health, with 43% of parents reporting this concern in 2025 an increase from 35% in 2024. Similarly, a greater proportion of parents are concerned about their child's mental health this year, with 48% of parents concerned in 2025 – a significant increase from 43% last year.

Despite a lack of awareness of the recommended guidelines amongst parents, they are positive about the importance of sport and play, with this year's data also showing the majority (91%) agree sport and play are important parts of every young person's education and development. Parents are positive about how sport and play help young people. In particular, they feel it supports young people's physical health (84%), mental wellbeing (73%) and development of life skills (71%).

## How does sport and play help young people?<sup>154</sup>

Source: Youth Sport Trust / YouGov parents of children 18 and under n=1076



## ***Parents' perceptions and attitudes towards physical activity***

The Youth Sport Trust annual parents survey<sup>155</sup> found that 7 in 10 parents (71%) agree physical activity is important to them as a family. This is a significant increase on last year, where 66% of parents agreed<sup>156</sup>. This year's data also showed a greater proportion of parents from a more affluent background agreed to this statement than those from a less affluent background (74% vs 66% respectively). 65% of parents encourage their child to be active and play sport and, again, this is higher for parents from a more affluent background compared to those from a less affluent background (68% vs 60% respectively). This is a significant decrease from last year where 70% of parents said they encouraged their child to be active and play sport.

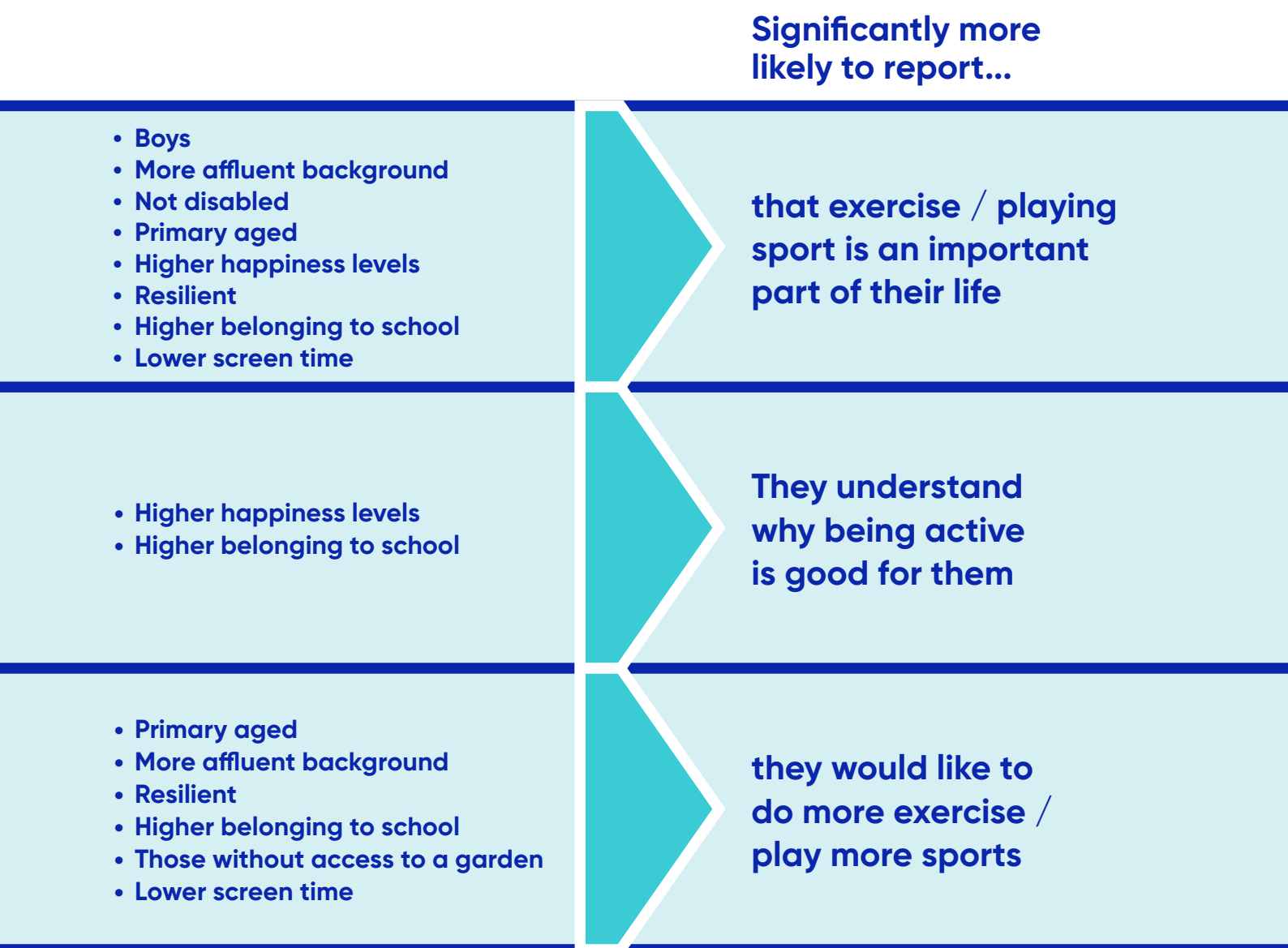
A young child is climbing a light-colored rock wall. The child is wearing a white t-shirt, blue jeans, a grey helmet with red accents, and a black climbing harness. They are reaching up with their right arm to grasp a yellow rock hold. The wall is covered with various colorful holds in red, green, orange, and blue. A green rope is visible running vertically along the wall. The bottom of the image features a blue background with white and teal curved lines.

# ***Children's perceptions and attitudes towards physical activity***

# Children's perceptions and attitudes towards physical activity

## Young people's views of physical activity and the importance of being active are improving

Nearly three quarters (73%) of young people agree that doing exercise and playing sport is an important part of their life<sup>157</sup>. This is an increase from 68% of young people in 2020<sup>158</sup>. The majority (91%) of young people agree that they understand why being active is good for them. Increasingly, young people would like to be more active. In 2020, just over half of young people (54%) said they would like to do more exercise or play more sports than they do at the moment. This has increased in 2025 to 64% of young people. The Youth Sport Trust Class of 2035 research found that young people with certain characteristics and experiences were more likely to value physical activity and sport.



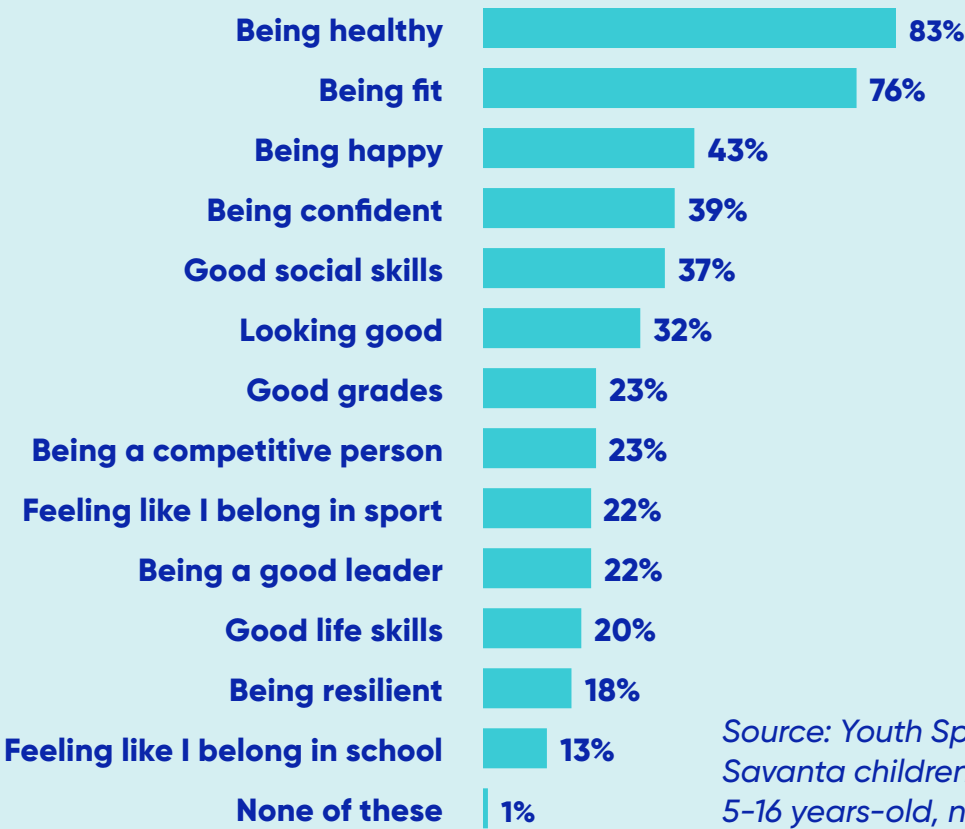
Source: Youth Sport Trust / YouGov parents of children 18 years-old and under n=1076



# Children’s perceptions and attitudes towards physical activity

The Class of 2035 research explored what young people thought the benefits of being active were. The data shows that young people have a good awareness of many of the benefits of being active, including the benefit on their health and fitness, wellbeing and social skills.

Which of the following things do you think that being active, like playing sports and doing PE can help you to achieve?<sup>159</sup>



Source: Youth Sport Trust / Savanta children aged 5-16 years-old, n=1002

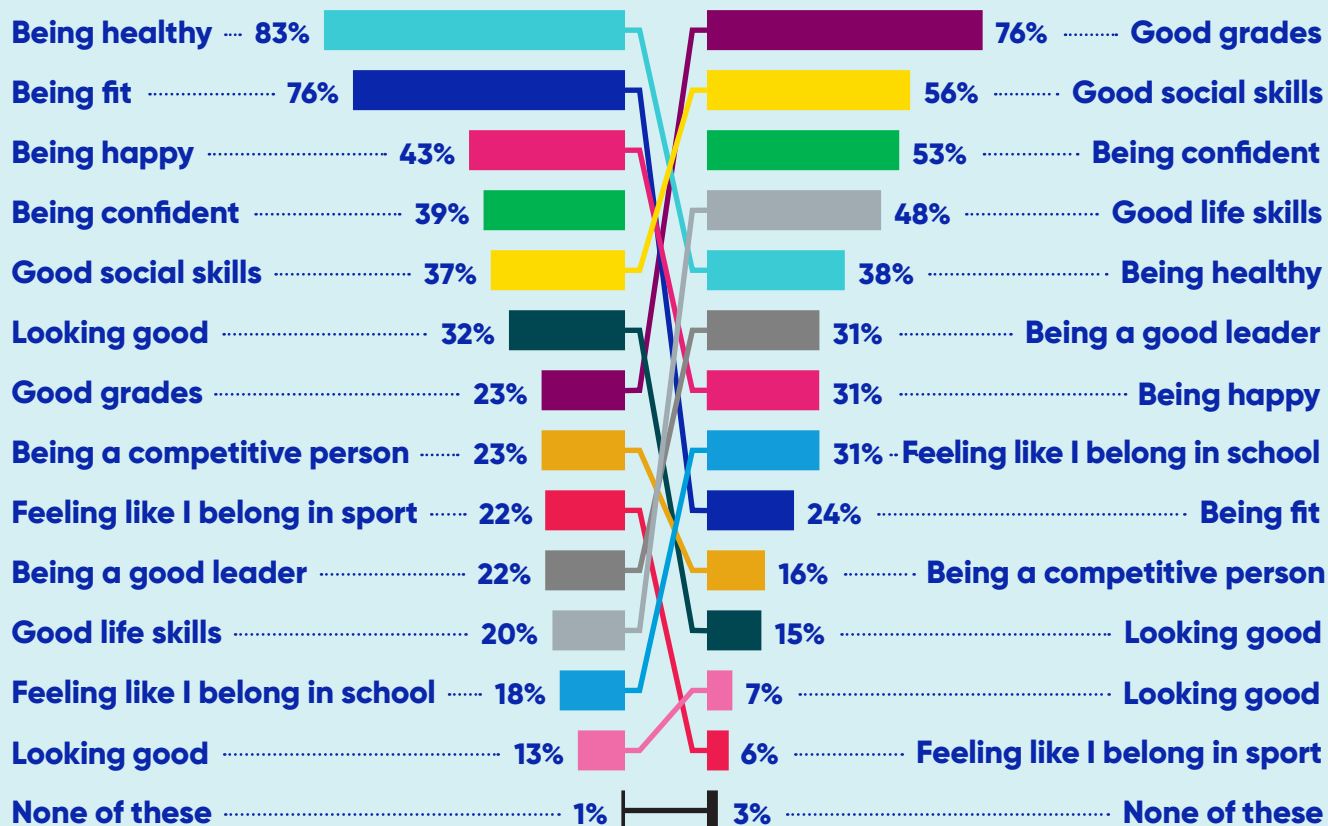
# Children's perceptions and attitudes towards physical activity

The benefits of being active and how they can support them in later life were underacknowledged by many young people<sup>160</sup>. The chart below displays the aspects young people feel are important to support them to get a good job alongside the things that they think being active can help them to achieve. This reinforces the need to continue to educate young people around the value and contribution of being active and playing sport for their future life chances.

## What playing sports and doing PE can help you achieve vs. what's important to getting a good job

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

Which of the following things do you think you need in order to get a good job?



Source: Youth Sport Trust / Savanta, children aged 5-16 years-old, n=1002



# ***The role of schools***

## The role of schools – context

# 30 minutes

**Schools in England** are recommended to provide at least 30 minutes of physical activity for every child every day<sup>162</sup>

# 34%

**of teachers** are aware that children should be active for an average of 60 minutes or more a day<sup>161</sup>

# 88%

**of parents** feel schools should be ensuring all pupils are active for at least 30 minutes a day<sup>163</sup>



## Schools play a unique role in providing universal access for children and young people to PE, sport and physical activity

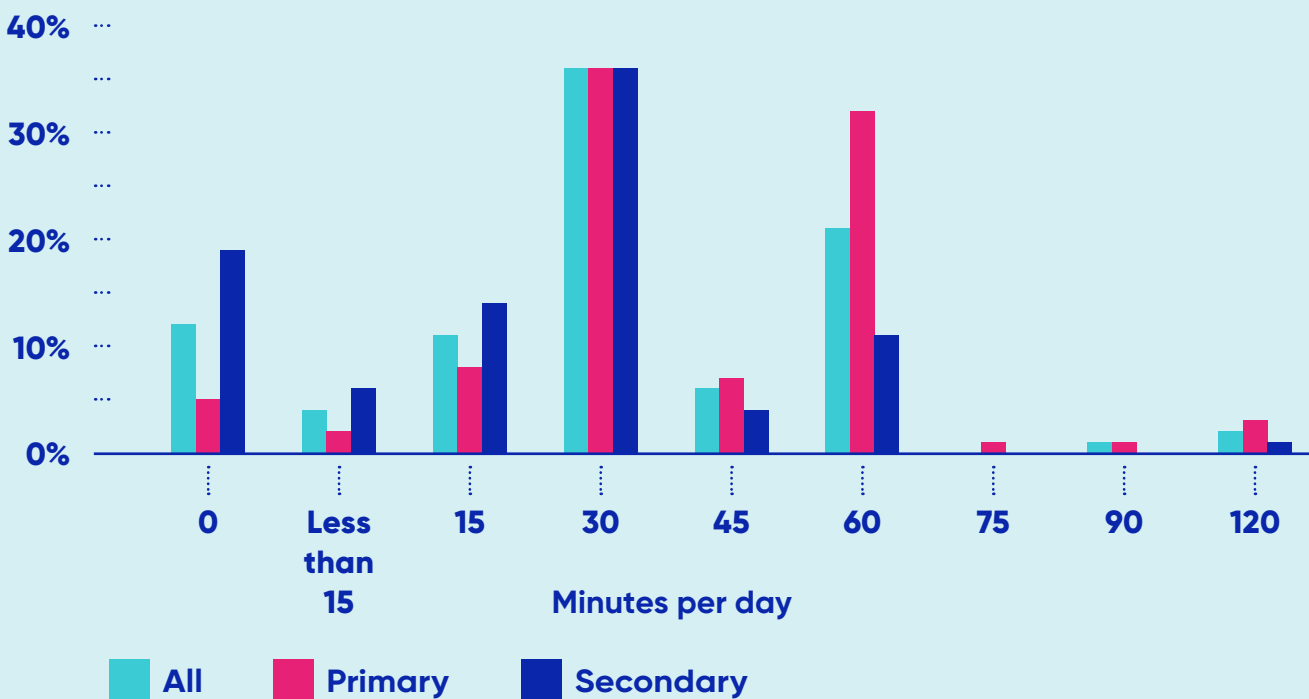
However, teacher awareness of the CMO guidelines for children and young people remains low. The Youth Sport Trust's annual teacher survey found only 34% of all teachers are aware children should be active for 60 minutes or more a day with awareness greater amongst primary teachers than secondary school teachers (42% vs 26%)<sup>164</sup>. A greater proportion of PE teachers than all teachers combined were aware of the recommended levels of physical activity for children – although, still, only 41% of PE teachers are aware of these guidelines.

The Childhood Obesity Plan for England recommends schools provide 30 minutes of physical activity for every child throughout the school day<sup>165</sup>. However, similar to awareness of the CMO guidelines, not all teachers surveyed were aware of this recommendation. Only two thirds (66%) of teachers thought schools should be providing at least 30 minutes of activity a day<sup>166</sup>. Awareness was higher amongst primary teachers than secondary school teachers.



# The role of schools – context

On average, how many minutes of moderate to vigorous activity do you think schools are recommended to provide for children each day?



Source: Youth Sport Trust / Teacher Tapp, all teachers n=9,664

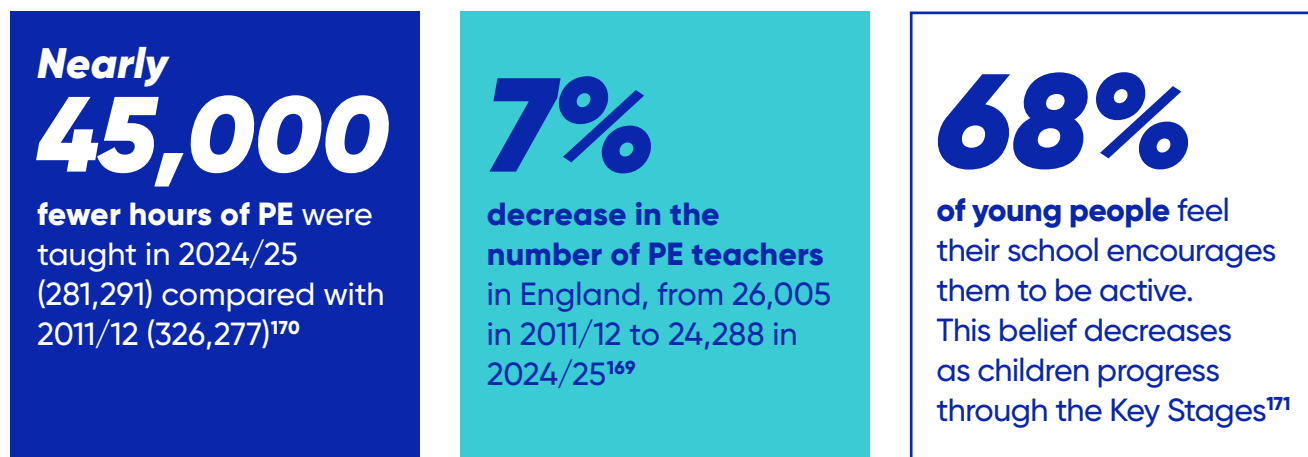
Parents feel schools have an important role to play in supporting young people to be active. The majority (88%) of parents surveyed as part of the Youth Sport Trust’s annual parents survey agree schools should be ensuring all pupils are active for at least 30 minutes a day<sup>167</sup>. Over half (58%) of parents felt their child’s school plays a vital role in helping them to achieve 30 active minutes a day. Parents also believe secondary schools have more of a requirement to provide physical activity opportunities for children than primary schools. Just under two thirds (64%) of parents think primary schools should offer 30 minutes or more of physical activity a day for children whereas 72% of parents believe secondary schools should offer at least 30 minutes of physical activity a day.

Sport England’s Active Lives data<sup>168</sup> shows an encouraging increase in the amount of physical activity achieved within school hours, with 45% of young people reporting being active in school for 30 minutes or more in 2023/24 compared to 40% in 2017/18. However, children are still more likely to be active outside school, with 56% of young people reporting that they do an average of 30 minutes or more a day outside of school hours.



# The challenges facing schools

## The challenges facing schools



## Prioritisation of PE within the school curriculum remains a challenge

Government guidance recommends schools should provide two hours of PE a week for pupils and the majority of parents (85%) agree that schools should provide this<sup>172</sup>. The recommendation of two hours of PE a week during curriculum time was reiterated as part of the latest Government non-statutory guidance release in 2024<sup>173</sup>. A polling of MPs by Youth Sport Trust also showed that 81% agreed that schools should provide two hours a week of PE, and 85% agreed that schools should be ensuring that every pupil is active for at least 30 minutes a day<sup>174</sup>.

However, recent research in areas of higher deprivation, conducted by the University of Manchester found around a quarter of pupils reported not having access to the recommended minimum of two hours of PE a week. This research also found one fifth of pupils reported<sup>175</sup> getting less than half an hour of physical activity outside of school lessons per week.

The number of PE hours taught in secondary schools has stagnated in the last few years and is on an overall downward trend. Nearly 45,000 fewer hours of PE were taught in 2024/25 (281,291) compared to 2011/12 (326,277). The largest decrease in PE hours has been for KS4 and KS5<sup>176</sup>. Since last academic year, almost 4,000 PE hours have been dropped.

A recent survey by the National Education Union of primary teachers in England on curriculum content identified that 58% of the total teaching hours are spent teaching English and Maths. Furthermore, primary schools in the most disadvantaged areas had less time dedicated to PE than those in the least disadvantaged areas<sup>177</sup>.

# The challenges facing schools

Current evidence suggests the quality of a school's PE, school sport and physical activity offer is driven by the value placed on it by the school<sup>178</sup>. Less than half (45%) of schools interviewed as part of the Sport England Secondary Teacher Training project reported they have an action plan for developing PE, school sport and physical activity at a whole school level<sup>179</sup>. There have been calls in recent years for PE to be a core subject on the National Curriculum<sup>180</sup> which would elevate the status of the subject in schools. Recent polling of MPs found that 89% agreed that there should be protected time for PE on the curriculum<sup>181</sup>, while the majority (71%) of parents agree that PE should be a core subject<sup>182</sup>. Notably, a greater proportion of parents from a more affluent background agreed to this than parents from less affluent backgrounds (74% vs 66% respectively).

Moreover, research by Sheffield Hallam University found that PE teachers who had support from senior leadership teams found it easier to engage inactive students in PE, school sport and physical activity than those who reported poor or very poor senior leadership support<sup>183</sup>, showing the importance of whole school engagement in physical activity.

Despite 7 in 10 parents agreeing that their child's school curriculum has the right level of focus on developing their child's health<sup>184</sup>, nearly half (47%) of parents believe children should be provided more time in the school day for sport and play, which is a slight increase from the previous year's data (43%)<sup>185</sup>.

Worryingly, 17% of young people have had PE lessons cancelled so far this academic year<sup>186</sup>. The main reasons for lessons being cancelled were because the teacher wasn't available (42%), the space wasn't available (31%) or the weather (29%). When PE lessons are cancelled, the most common alternative activity for young people is to engage in a study or homework lesson (31%) or attend another academic class (30%). This influences the view young people think their schools have of PE as a subject; despite 93% of young people themselves thinking PE lessons are important, a lower proportion (84%) feel that their school thinks PE lessons are important. In the recent non-statutory guidance released for schools by the Department for Education they acknowledge how the school's approach to delivering PE, school sport and physical activity can have a considerable influence on young people's attitudes towards physical activity and their engagement with it<sup>187</sup>.

Over a third (36%) of young people identified their school PE teacher as someone who inspires them to be active<sup>188</sup>. School staff play an important role in engaging young people in PE, school sport and physical activity – this includes their enthusiasm, knowledge, position as a role model and availability<sup>189</sup>. However, there has been a 7% decrease in the number of PE teachers in England, from 26,005 in 2011/12 to 24,288 in 2024/25<sup>190</sup>.

# The challenges facing schools

## Challenges associated with absenteeism

Four in ten (39%) teachers surveyed as part of the Youth Sport Trust annual teacher survey identified absenteeism was one of the most important issues in their school<sup>191</sup>. Persistent absenteeism was a greater concern among secondary teachers compared to primary teachers and is also more of a concern among teachers teaching in schools with a greater proportion of children from low socioeconomic households.

A report by the Institute for Public Policy Research and The Difference<sup>192</sup>, found that 32 million days of learning were lost to suspensions and unauthorised absences in the 2022/23 academic year. More than one in five pupils (21%) were persistently absent in the 2022/23 academic year, though this has reduced slightly to 20% in the 2023/24 academic year<sup>193</sup>. These levels are still much higher than that observed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are links between absenteeism and school attainment. Statistical analysis released by the Department for Education<sup>194</sup> found a positive correlation between increased attendance and improved attainment. For example, KS2 pupils with high attendance rates (95%-100%) were 1.3 times more likely to achieve the expected standards in reading, writing and maths compared to those whose attendance rates were only slightly lower at 90-95%. The difference was even more stark for those with even lower attendance rates. The latest Education Policy Institute report found that pupil absence is a key driver of the disadvantage gap, if disadvantaged pupils had the same level of absence as their peers in 2023, the attainment gap would have been smaller at both age 11 and 16 years-old. Their analysis suggests that the growth in the disadvantage gap since 2019 at aged 16 can be entirely explained by higher levels of absenteeism for disadvantaged pupils<sup>195</sup>.

### Spotlight on – emotional engagement in school as a driver of absenteeism<sup>196</sup>



Analysis of global survey data found that between the end of primary school and mid secondary school, young people's level of emotional engagement at school falls in almost every country.

For pupils in England, the drop was found to be even more severe than other countries. The data also shows a decline in emotional engagement with school since the COVID-19 pandemic. The study also found that pupil emotional engagement with school is important as it is likely to be a driver of absence rates.

# The challenges facing schools

Not only does being absent from school impact young people's attainment, it also limits their experience of PE, school sport and physical activity. There is growing evidence that PE, sport and physical activity can play an influencing role in engaging young people with school. 77% of teachers felt pupils involved with a Youth Sport Trust physical activity programme had a positive impact on their engagement with school<sup>197</sup>. A rapid evidence review conducted by the Education Endowment Foundation suggests whilst more research is needed to identify the impact of extra-curricular activities directly on school engagement, there is some positive indications of the potential impact of extra-curricular interventions on attendance<sup>198</sup>. Similarly, a report by the House of Lords identified the potential role sports based interventions could play to improve attendance, and recommended future investment and research was needed<sup>199</sup>.

## The opportunities schools provide for children to play is changing

Encouraging active play, particularly in early years settings, supports physical activity amongst children<sup>200</sup>. The British Preschool Children's Play Survey found that preschool children spent an average of four hours per day playing, with nearly half of that playing outdoors<sup>201</sup>. Children from minority ethnic groups were less likely to play and play outdoors than children from a white ethnic background. Boys were also found to spend more time playing outdoors compared to girls. This reflects some of the differences observed in physical activity data later in a child's life.

Recent evidence suggests that within primary schools the opportunities to play are decreasing. Teacher Tapp survey data found that compared to 2019, less primary schools are providing hopscotch or skipping ropes and fewer are letting children bring in balls<sup>202</sup>. Similarly, surveys repeated over time have shown that the amount of time reserved for children to play at school has decreased<sup>203</sup>, with children in KS1 experiencing 23 minutes less of playtime a day on average than the same aged children in 1995. Data shows a similar fall of 18 minutes on average for KS2 and 17 minutes on average for KS3. Recent qualitative research exploring school and community based active clubs found a shift to more structured adult led activities e.g. specific clubs than those that are more unstructured e.g. active play, suggesting the ways children participate in physical activity is changing<sup>204</sup>. This puts additional demands on school provision, though the Play Commission advocates for a national strategy and plan for play to shape future Government policy and enable all children to access play<sup>205</sup>.

## Physical activity can support school and work readiness

School readiness is defined as giving children '*the right foundation for good future progress through school and life*'<sup>206</sup>. Targets for school readiness form part of the Prime Minister's Plan for Change<sup>207</sup>, with an ambition of 75% of children to be ready for school when they start in 2028.

# The challenges facing schools

Currently, school readiness is a big concern for reception teachers. Teachers report that one in three children were not school ready in September 2023<sup>208</sup>. Of those starting reception in 2024, teachers reported an estimated 45% were unable to sit still, just over a third (34%) didn't know how to listen and respond to basic instructions and nearly four in ten (36%) found it hard to play or share with other children. Teachers surveyed estimated that, as a result of this lack of school readiness, 2.4 hours of teaching time is lost every day. However there also appears to be a disconnect with parents' awareness around school readiness, as 90% of parents believe their child was ready for school.

A third of teachers surveyed as part of the Youth Sport Trust teacher survey in 2024 reported physical development challenges for children entering reception year and 10% reported seeing children with unhealthy weight<sup>209</sup>. Physical development is an important factor of school readiness. In the ten years between 2007 and 2017, the percentage of children starting school with or at risk of having a movement difficulty almost doubled<sup>210</sup>. Poor physical development can impact school readiness amongst young children, reiterating the importance of physical activity<sup>211</sup>, movement and play in the early years to benefit physical development.

Early years interventions can help with school readiness. An evaluation of the Youth Sport Trust Healthy Movers early years programme, which is designed to develop children's physical literacy in early years settings, found that the intervention had a positive impact on children's school readiness. 74% of practitioners reported the intervention had a very positive or positive impact on their school readiness including improvements in listening skills, ability to follow instructions and physical development needed for school e.g. sitting at a table and holding a pencil<sup>212</sup>.

For older children, there is evidence that engagement with physical activity can develop key skills required for work readiness and employability. A report by the Social Mobility Commission<sup>213</sup> identified the role that extra-curricular activities such as playing sport can have on key life skills, particularly social skills. Analysis of the Understanding Society UK dataset as part of the same report found that increased sports participation in young people has a positive, statistically significant impact on their likelihood to continue on to further education.



# The role of schools – opportunities

## The opportunities for schools

There are a number of positive indicators and trends which suggest there could be opportunities for schools to harness the power of PE, school sport and physical activity.

**71%**

**of young people** say they would like to be more active at school<sup>215</sup>

**98%**

**of teachers** believe that sport and play have benefits for children's physical wellbeing and 96% see benefits for mental wellbeing<sup>214</sup>

**66%**

**of parents** mentioned pupil wellbeing as a factor when choosing a secondary school – the most mentioned factor in school choice<sup>216</sup>

## Teachers are aware of the benefits of sport and play

Insights gained through the Youth Sport Trust's annual teacher survey in collaboration with Teacher Tapp shows overall awareness from teachers of the benefits of sport and play remains high, with 98% and 96% identifying the benefits on physical and mental wellbeing respectively<sup>217</sup>. One in five teachers (20%) stated sport and play improved academic performance. Both primary teachers and secondary teachers believe sport and play helps young people develop good life skills (74% and 65% respectively) and improve concentration and learning (64% and 51% respectively).

## We need to ensure all young people are having a positive experience of PE at school

Research identifies the important role that enjoyment plays in encouraging young people's engagement and participation in PE<sup>218</sup>. Recent research by Sheffield Hallam University exploring the Sport England Teacher Training data found that those who enjoy PE more are also more active<sup>219</sup>. They also found that the decrease in physical activity as young people get older mirrors a decrease in the ratings of enjoyment of PE. From the research they developed an enjoyment model of PE, which suggests that enjoyment is driven by individuals feeling competent, confident, included in the activity and having an understanding of how and why they are being asked to engage.

## The role of schools – opportunities

Only half (51%) of parents currently believe their child enjoys PE at school<sup>220</sup>. However, positively, much higher levels of young people (86%) report that they like taking part in PE at school<sup>221</sup>. The majority (93%) of young people also think PE lessons are important. Primary aged young people, those from more affluent backgrounds, those who reported higher happiness and resilience and those with a greater sense of belonging to school were also more likely to agree that PE lessons are important. A third (34%) of young people would like more time to be active during curriculum PE lessons.

Young people were asked what they liked and didn't like about taking part in PE lessons. Key reasons are outlined below.

### What do you like about PE lessons?



- I think it's fun (68%)
- I like being part of a team (49%)
- I like being outside (48%)

### What don't you like about PE lessons?



- I am worried I will let the team down (19%)
- I worry about getting hurt (18%)
- I am not very good at exercise/playing sports (16%)

Source: Youth Sport Trust / Savanta, children aged 5-16 years-old, n=1002

Positively, 73% of young people believe that the skills they learn in PE help them in and outside of school. Primary aged young people, boys and those from more affluent backgrounds were more likely to identify this.

## Extra-curricular and enrichment clubs provide more opportunities to be active

In general, parents are positive about their child's school's extra-curricular offer. Data from Parent Kind's<sup>222</sup> annual parent survey found that 60% of parents agreed their child's school offers a general good range of extra-curricular activities, including, but not limited to, those focused on sport and physical activity. Half (52%) of parents surveyed through the Youth Sport Trust annual parent survey<sup>223</sup> agreed their child gets the right amount of time at school for sport and play focused extra-curricular clubs. However, nearly four in ten (37%) of parents believe they should get more time. From a child's perspective, 42% of young people say that they would like more time in breaktime / lunchtime to be active, and 30% feel they would like more time after school to be active<sup>224</sup>. Only a third (36%) of young people take part in sport or physical activity at school outside of their PE lessons on three or more days a week. Boys, and those in primary school are more likely to fall into this category than girls and secondary aged pupils.

## The role of schools – opportunities

School extra-curricular provision and in particular, physical activity extra-curricular provision was highlighted as a factor that could influence the attainment of primary aged pupils<sup>225</sup>. However, there is the suggestion that some young people are not accessing these extra-curricular opportunities as much as others. Using longitudinal data, the Education Policy Institute found young people with certain characteristics were less likely to participate in sports clubs. For example, those eligible for free school meals were 11% less likely to participate than their peers and those with special educational needs or disabilities were 23% less likely to participate<sup>226</sup>. Similarly, Parent Kind's parent survey suggests that a third of children from the least affluent homes do not participate in after-school clubs<sup>227</sup>.

New government policy has led to a pilot of a national roll out of school breakfast clubs. The Children's Wellbeing and Schools bill proposes free breakfast club provision in primary schools in England for all qualifying pupils<sup>228</sup>. 57% of MPs and 60% of parents believe a school breakfast club should include play or sports activities to give their child the best start to their day<sup>229,230</sup>. Parents from a more affluent background were more likely to agree to this statement than parents from less affluent backgrounds (66% vs 47% respectively). Only the option to socialise with other pupils was rated more important than including play or sports activities by parents (72%). A fifth (21%) of young people agreed that their school offering an active breakfast club would encourage them to be more active<sup>231</sup>.

### Spotlight on – new case study research explores impact of enrichment clubs<sup>232</sup>



Research, commissioned by NCS Trust and The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) was conducted to understand the links between enrichment and attendance. A literature review and primary research was conducted, including case studies and insights from youth and professional advisory panels.

The case study work found a clear indirect link between enrichment and attendance. However, it was identified that this evidence is not reflected in the available literature. They suggest there is an opportunity for further research to explore this.

# **The role of schools – opportunities**

## **PE and school sport can support young people to feel connected and foster a sense of belonging in school**

The most recent OECD PISA (2022) data shows that, across the UK, fewer young people report that they feel they belong at school than the OECD average. 64% of young people in the UK feel they belong at school compared to 75% OECD average<sup>233</sup>. Young people in the UK's sense of belonging at school has also not changed significantly since 2018.

The evidence base supporting a link between a young person's sense of belonging at school and their wellbeing and academic success is growing<sup>234,235</sup>. Evidence also indicates a relationship between school belonging and attendance, with pupils who are persistently absent less likely to report they feel part of their school<sup>236</sup>.

63% of young people surveyed as part of the Youth Sport Trust Class of 2035 work reported that they felt they belong at school<sup>237</sup>. Notably, young people with higher physical activity levels and higher wellbeing were more likely to agree that they belong at school. However, only 13% of young people identified that a benefit of being active is to support them to feel like they belong in school.

Recent evidence highlights how opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities can support young people to feel a greater sense of school belonging<sup>238</sup>. This shows the potential role that school sport and physical activity can play in this area.

## **Schools can play a role in supporting and measuring children's mental health**

Schools are continuing to be on the frontline of the mental health crisis for young people. They play an important role in promoting and protecting children and young people's mental health<sup>239</sup>. Approximately 500 Mental Health Support Teams are now established in schools in England<sup>240</sup>, with 4.2 million children accessing their support during the 2023/24 financial year<sup>241</sup>. However still, 84% of teachers have spent time helping pupils with mental health issues over the past academic year<sup>242</sup>. Positively, 75% of young people agree that their school cares about their wellbeing and 72% feel that their school supports their wellbeing<sup>243</sup>.

Recent research commissioned by Youth Sport Trust and #BeeWell showed that nearly one in three parents (28%) believe their child's school needs to do more to support pupil wellbeing<sup>244</sup>. Over three quarters (76%) of parents would like to see more information on what schools are doing to support the wellbeing of pupils. Similar levels of parents (73%) agree pupil wellbeing is likely to be better in schools which prioritise sport, PE and physical activity, which is a significant increase from last year where 68% of parents agreed<sup>245</sup>.

## **The role of schools – opportunities**

How a school supports their young people's wellbeing is certainly an influential factor for parents choosing a school for their child. When looking for a primary school for their child to attend, pupil wellbeing at the school is the second most mentioned factor by parents when considering schools (65%) behind school location (66%). For secondary schools, pupil wellbeing at the school was the most mentioned factor (66%)<sup>246</sup>. This has remained the case since 2022. This reiterates the important role that parents feel schools play in supporting children and young people's wellbeing.

The transition between primary and secondary school has been identified widely as a key point in time of a child's life. Research by the Children's Society highlighted that during this transition there is a decline in children's wellbeing and happiness with school<sup>247</sup>. Research released in May 2025 by ImpactEd and TEP looking at data from over 80,000 students also indicates Year 7 (the year young people start secondary school) is a pivotal year for maintaining engagement in education, as it is where reductions are seen in pupils' perceptions about the importance of learning, feeling safe at school, a sense of agency and happiness about going to school<sup>248</sup>.

There are calls for the wellbeing of children to be tracked in schools<sup>249</sup> led by a coalition of organisations including #BeeWell, The Children's Society, Anna Freud, NSPCC and the Centre for Education and Youth<sup>250</sup> and supported by the Youth Sport Trust. 66% of parents surveyed by the Youth Sport Trust and #BeeWell agree that there should be an agreed way for the wellbeing of children to be measured. Three quarters (75%) of parents agree we need to measure young people's wellbeing if we are going to improve it<sup>251</sup>. 69% of MPs also agree with this statement<sup>252</sup>. Parents tend to see this wellbeing measurement as a responsibility for schools, with over seven in ten parents (73%) believing that schools should measure and track the wellbeing of pupils in the same way they do with academic progress<sup>253</sup>.

### **Schools can play a role in challenging gender stereotypes**

Schools have the opportunity to provide universal provision and access to PE, school sport and physical activity irrespective of gender. The school environment plays an important role, and prioritisation of boys' participation in sport has been found to directly and negatively impact girls' attitudes to sport and physical activity<sup>254</sup>. Only 42% of girls believe girls and boys are treated equally in PE and sport at their school and agreement to this statement declines with age<sup>255</sup>. Equally, only 39% of secondary aged girls feel they have the same opportunities as boys in school to do sports and activities they want<sup>256</sup>.

Positively, The Football Association Equal Access survey data from 2024 showed 77% of schools are now providing equal access to girls to football in the curriculum (85% primary schools, 50% secondary schools) and 64% provide equal opportunities to girls for extra-curricular football (63% primary school, 68% secondary schools).



## **The role of schools – opportunities**

Encouragingly, this has increased over time, providing more access to girls to play football and demonstrating that equal opportunities across genders can be achieved with appropriate drive and investment.

Research conducted by Women in Sport looking at attitudes and behaviours in primary school found boys dominate the playground for sport, with limited opportunities for girls to join in. They also found boys often dominate mixed-sex PE lessons which has a negative impact on girls' experiences and participation. The reinforcement of masculine ideals of sport was not only found to exclude girls, but also was also seen as potentially damaging for those boys who do not conform to the stereotypes. When playtime was facilitated by adults in primary schools, there was more gender equal use of the space<sup>257</sup>. However, the Women in Sport research also found a lack of confidence and knowledge in staff which limited their ability to provide fair and equal opportunities for all young people, suggesting educators would benefit from training and development in order to change this.

### **Active uniforms and changes to PE kit can reduce barriers to physical activity for many young people**

The average cost of PE kit in 2023 was £139.70 compared to £115.11 in 2015 (adjusted for inflation)<sup>258</sup>. The cost is even higher for secondary school pupils. The proposed Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill includes a proposed limit on branded items of school uniform<sup>259</sup> which would likely reduce this cost.

Barriers to being physically active that are associated with PE kit appear to affect girls more than boys, with nearly double the proportion of girls (28%) reporting a dislike of their PE kit stops them from being more active than boys (15%). Similarly, twice the proportion of girls (30%) than boys (16%) report a barrier to being active is getting changed in front of others. Of those who think their PE kit could be improved, twice the proportion of girls would like more PE kit options to choose from than boys (58% vs 29%), with only 33% of girls saying their current PE kit makes them feel confident compared to 54% of boys. For secondary aged girls, this is even lower with only 24% agreeing that their PE kit makes them feel confident<sup>260</sup>.

Evidence exploring physical activity participation data internationally found that in countries where young people are required to wear school uniform, fewer young people meet the WHO recommended physical activity levels, with the research suggesting that school uniform may restrict engagement in physical activity<sup>261</sup>.

## The role of schools – opportunities

Over three quarters (77%) of parents of primary aged children agree they would like their child to wear a uniform that allows them to be active throughout the school day<sup>262</sup>. Similar levels (74%) of parents of primary aged children would support their child's school to have an Always Active Uniform policy.

Overall, two thirds (65%) of parents feel this type of uniform would help their primary aged child to be more active during the school day and would be beneficial for their primary aged child's education and development. 68% of parents also agreed that if their primary aged child's school adopted an Always Active Uniform policy it would save them money when purchasing uniform. Primary teachers are also broadly supportive of an Always Active Uniform, with 67% saying they would support their school adopting this type of policy<sup>263</sup>.

Whilst 60% of young people feel that their current school uniform and shoes allow them to be active throughout the day, three in ten (29%) agree that if their uniform allowed them to be more active, they would then be encouraged to do more sport and get more active<sup>264</sup>. Significantly more boys were likely to report that their current uniform allows them to be active throughout the day than girls (66% agree vs 55% agree).

## Conclusions – what next?

Within this report there is clarity of message from children and young people, parents, carers, and teachers alike that being physically active in childhood is essential for a multitude of reasons.

However, the crises in children's physical, mental and social wellbeing show no sign of abating. Unless we act to address stagnating activity levels in childhood there is a real danger the picture gets ever bleaker.

As the evidence shows, being active provides a clear route to a brighter future for children. By increasing physical activity including PE, sport and play we can support children to be happier, healthier and ready to learn now, with the skills and healthy habits to set them up for success throughout life.

Delivering on this potential requires leadership from The Government to drive change in schools and across society.

Almost a year on from the 2024 General Election, it is clear increasing opportunities to be active in childhood is integral to progress against the Government's core missions and ambitions.

From improving school readiness to breaking down barriers to opportunity and creating the healthiest generation of children ever, in physical activity we have a ready-made, low-cost intervention which can transform lives and improve life chances.

As government departments develop their policies and programmes in line with the outcomes of the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review, our sector must continue to speak with one voice about the need to put increasing activity levels at the forefront of policy development and implementation.

With recent confirmation of funding for the School Games Organisers Network for the 2025/26 financial year, the Government has responded to calls from the sector to protect opportunities we have now. This can provide a springboard to build a future where every child can access the life-changing benefits of play and sport.

On World Children's Day last year, the Youth Sport Trust's National School Sport Champion, Sir Mo Farah was joined by other leading British athletes in urging the Government to develop a new national plan guaranteeing every child daily opportunities to be active.

We echo this call to action and believe the key to progress is re-imagining the world-leading school sport partnerships which in the past has made such a significant impact by increasing children's physical activity levels in schools.

## Conclusions – what next?

Rebuilding these for the modern education landscape should underpin a broader ambition to create a nation of active and well schools, where physical activity throughout the school day supports the health and happiness of pupils.

Supported and encouraged by government, schools can deliver a comprehensive physical activity offer which reaches and includes every child, incorporating high-quality and engaging PE, active learning, protected breaktimes and lunchtimes, and a broad co-curricular offer providing sport and play in breakfast clubs and after the school day.

Moving beyond schools, there is a need to emphasise how much physical activity children should be doing. Parental awareness of the UK's Chief Medical Officers' recommended activity levels for children remains low, and this can be addressed by a national campaign raising awareness of the importance of 60 active minutes a day.

Building on the impact of previous behaviour campaigns and reinforcing the benefits of being active as well as signposting towards opportunities in schools and communities, a national campaign could drive societal change to build a future where every childhood is an active one.

Opportunities for progress are on the horizon. The ongoing Curriculum and Assessment Review, passage of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill through Parliament and development of a new National Youth Strategy all have the potential to provide greater opportunities to be active during and around the school day, informed by insights from young people about the change they want to see. These opportunities to create change cannot be wasted.

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