



**YOUTH  
SPORT  
TRUST**

**RESEARCH**

# ***PE and School Sport***

The Annual Report 2026

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

## Introduction from our CEO



Welcome to the fifth edition of the annual PE and School Sport Report. As a charity on a mission to build brighter futures for children and young people, the Youth Sport Trust launched this report to bring together all the latest insights and research relevant to the delivery of PE and sport in schools. We hope this report and our Knowledge Bank will help any readers looking to understand the importance of physical activity across the school day.

Across the country, physical activity levels remain worryingly low, with too many young people missing out on the daily movement needed for healthy physical, social and cognitive development. At the same time, worsening mental health and rising childhood obesity are affecting children's happiness and wellbeing, and for some, their self-regulation, engagement in class and school attendance. For a growing number, disengagement does not end at the school gate, with more young people not in education, employment or training, often alongside wider health and social issues. Together, these challenges reflect a childhood that, for too many, is less active, less connected to others and nature, and with fewer opportunities for the freedom and creativity of informal play.

These challenges sit against the backdrop of some of the biggest debates about childhood today. Across the media and in public policy, questions around screen time and the impact of digital life on children's wellbeing have soared up the agenda. There is growing recognition that excessive or unhealthy digital engagement is displacing time for movement, face-to-face connection, rest and play; all of which are essential to healthy development.

Within this context, the Youth Sport Trust's strategy, Inspiring Changemakers, Building Belonging, is more relevant than ever. Its three pillars - Urgent Action (supporting healthier, happier, more resilient young people and levelling the playing field for the most disadvantaged), Generational Shift (balancing digital-age pressures through play and sport) and Societal Change (shifting attitudes to the value of physical literacy, play and sport in young people's education and development) - provide a clear framework for responding to the pressures shaping young lives.

Guided by this strategy, we are working with schools and trusts to embed movement more intentionally across the school day and helping educators create environments where young people can access physical activity, especially those facing the greatest barriers to participation.

We are encouraging schools to think beyond traditional approaches through campaigns like 'Active Uniforms', which highlights the economic, wellbeing and educational benefits of movement-friendly uniforms, and National School Sports Week, which helps shift perceptions and influence decision-makers to build a stronger, more joined-up commitment to helping every child thrive through play and sport.

## Introduction from our CEO

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We are supporting schools to use physical activity to put health, wellbeing and inclusion at the heart of everyday practice: strengthening mental health and resilience through Active in Mind; addressing inequalities in girls' participation through Girls Active; improving meaningful access for young people with SEND through Inclusion 2028, a Department for Education-funded programme delivered by the Youth Sport Trust. Additionally, our work extends to early years settings with Healthy Movers supporting educators, parents and carers support physical and language development together.

Through play and sport, we can help children develop essential skills and find opportunities for real-world belonging. Our Young Ambassadors movement and Set for Success, supported by the Wimbledon Foundation and Barclays, give young people a voice and leadership opportunities through which they can drive their own development, while influencing change in their schools and communities.

Through key partnerships, we are extending our reach to support more young people and helping to build stronger pathways between schools and communities, and through our advocacy and influencing activity we are challenging the wider conditions shaping childhood today and making the case for system-wide change.

We hope the new PE and School Sport Partnership Network on the horizon in England can be a catalyst for change, building on the world-leading approach which made such an impact in the past. This approach has the potential to deliver systemic change and improve access to PE and school sport for all children, with a particular focus on those at greatest risk of missing out. Done properly, this could be a genuine turning point for our young people.

Elsewhere across the UK, we are encouraged by the green shoots appearing and the greater push for change, with initiatives aimed at increasing physical activity among young people and measures to reduce phone use in schools helping to support healthier, more active lifestyles.

The findings in this report reinforce both the urgency of the challenge and the opportunity before us. If we want healthier, happier and more hopeful futures for young people, we must do more than respond to the symptoms. We must prioritise and create the conditions in which children are set up for success and the best start in life.



**Ali Oliver MBE**

Chief Executive Officer, Youth Sport Trust

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## 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.



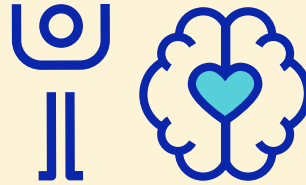
***State of the nation –  
executive summary***



# State of the nation – executive summary

## 2.1 million

young people in England are not active enough and do less than an average of 30 minutes of activity per day, this is reflected across the UK



Young people's physical and mental health are suffering

## 1 in 8

young people aged 16-24 in the UK are not in education, employment or training and these young people are likely to report the lowest wellbeing scores

## 6.9%



of school sessions are missed due to absence. Absence rates are higher for pupils who are eligible for free school meals and who have special educational needs



Young people with particular characteristics of inequality, such as being from a low affluence family, are less likely to be active enough

Parents are concerned that young people

today are not getting enough physical activity. However, their awareness of how active young people should be is still low



## Only 36%

of teachers are aware that young people should be active for an average of 60 minutes per day. This is despite being aware of the benefits of sport for young people



## Just 46%

of young people are active for 30 minutes within the school day

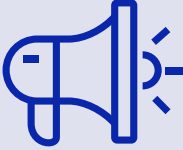
## State of the nation – executive summary



**PE is by far the most cancelled subject**, mostly due to the teacher or space not being available

**Only 57%**

**of teachers** report that their school provides a minimum of 2 hours of PE a week. This was higher amongst schools in more affluent areas than those in more deprived areas

**Just 1/3** 

**of young people** strongly agree that they feel listened to by adults who organise their exercise and sports activities

**1 in 3**

**young people** spend at least 3 hours per day in front of a screen excluding schoolwork



**77%**

**of parents agree** that young people are spending too much time online and not enough time with each other in person

**Increasingly, use of screens has been linked to lack of school readiness** amongst younger children, including reduced vocabulary development and increased emotional and behavioural problems

**1 in 6**

**parents agree** that their child has stopped doing exercise or sport because they are too busy on a screen

**69%**

**of teachers agree** that when students have access to their mobile phones at break and lunchtime they are less physically active

# State of the nation – key trends and indicators

Young people's physical activity levels – England



**47.8%** **49.1%**  
2024/25 2025/26

Young people's physical activity levels are slightly higher in England this year compared with last year and the previous few years. However, they still remain alarmingly low.

Young people's happiness with life as a whole – UK



**7.56\*** **7.43\***  
2024/25 2025/26

Young people's happiness with life as a whole continues to worsen, having decreased year on year since 2017.

\*Numbers out of 10

Young people's obesity levels – England (reception)



**9.6%** **10.5%**  
2024/25 2025/26

The percentage of children in Reception who are obese has slightly increased since 2024/25 and remains higher than the figure in many of the previous years.

Young people's obesity levels – England (Year 6)



**22.1%** **22.2%**  
2024/25 2025/26

The percentage of young people in Year 6 who are obese remains similar to the figure in 2024/25, though is still worryingly high..

# State of the nation – key trends and indicators

Teachers' awareness of physical activity recommendations for young people



34%

2024/25

36%

2025/26

The percentage of teachers aware that young people aged 5-18 should do at least 60 minutes of physical activity a day has slightly increased from last year. However, again there has been no notable increase in the last few years and remains stubbornly low.

Teachers' awareness of physical activity recommendations for young people *in school*



66%

2024/25

65%

2025/26

The percentage of teachers aware that young people should do at least 30 minutes of physical activity a day in school remains similar to last year. However, there has been a slight increase in this awareness compared with years previous to last year. .

Proportion of teaching time allocated to PE



7.6%

2024/25

7.3%

2025/26

The proportion of teaching time allocated to PE in English secondary schools has fallen every year since 2011/12 and has reached a new low this year of 7.3%, whilst many other subjects saw an increase.

Parents' awareness of physical activity recommendations for young people



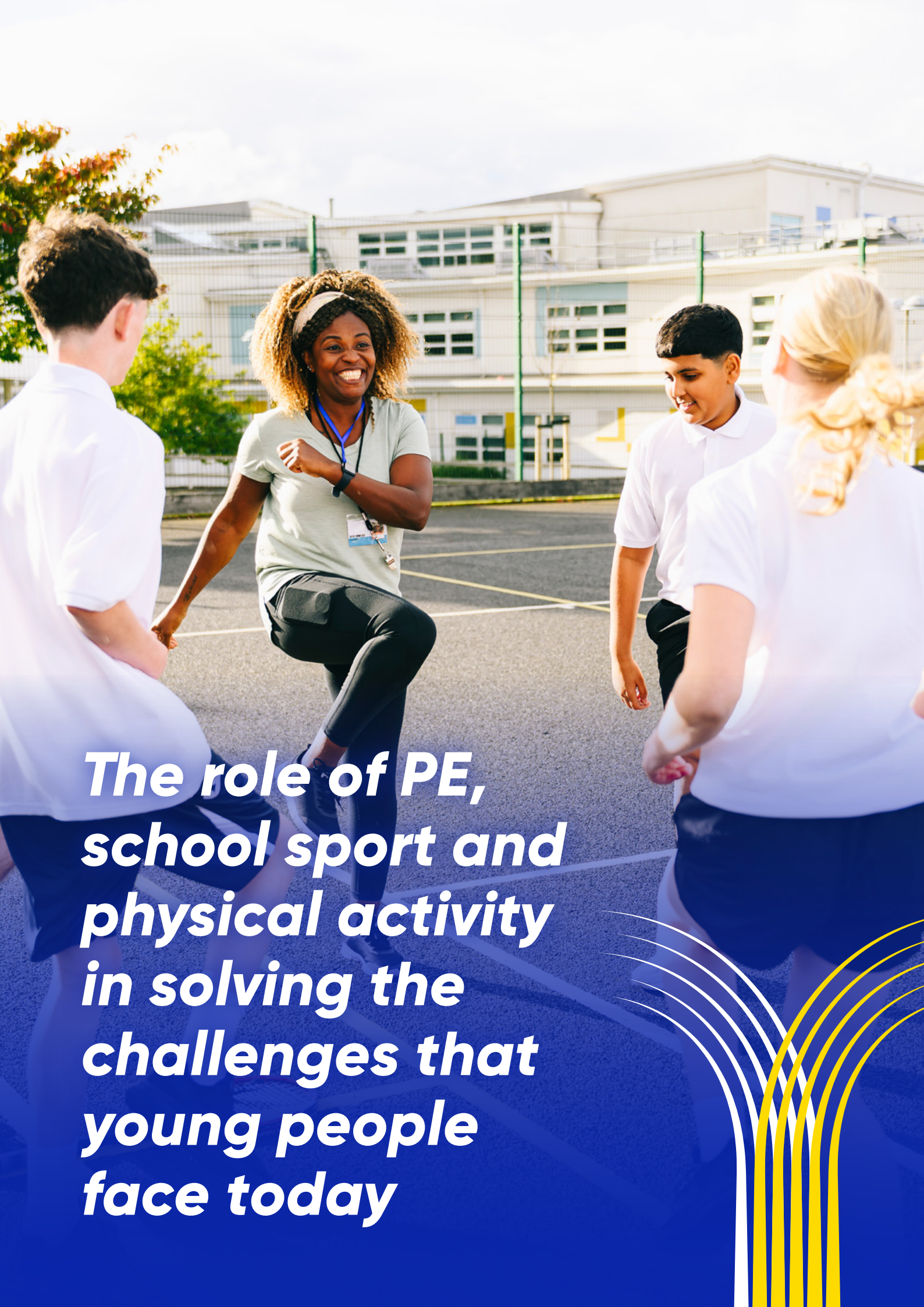
32%

2024/25

35%

2025/26

The percentage of parents aware that young people aged 5-18 should do at least 60 minutes of physical activity a day has increased from last year, but there has been no notable increase in the last few years and remains stubbornly low.



***The role of PE,  
school sport and  
physical activity  
in solving the  
challenges that  
young people  
face today***



# The role of PE, school sport and physical activity in solving the challenges that young people face today

Children today face declining physical and mental health, as well as many challenges with their social wellbeing and engagement at school. PE, school sport and physical activity can play a role in addressing each of these challenges.



## Physical health

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

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

Improved bone and functional health<sup>4</sup>

Improved sleep<sup>5</sup>



## Mental wellbeing

Better mental health<sup>6</sup>

Improved resilience<sup>7</sup>

Reduction in depressive symptoms<sup>8</sup>



## Social wellbeing

Less lonely<sup>9</sup>

Improved wellbeing, self-belief and mental toughness<sup>10</sup>

Improved teamwork and communication skills<sup>11</sup>

Better social skills and social interactions<sup>12</sup>

Improved emotional control and cooperation<sup>13</sup>



## School outcomes

Improved memory and learning<sup>14</sup>

Increased feeling of belonging to school<sup>15</sup>

Positive effect on cognition, working memory and academic attainment<sup>16, 17</sup>

Improved engagement in learning<sup>18</sup>

Improved physical development and school readiness in Early Years<sup>19</sup>

Extra-curricular provision could support school attendance<sup>20</sup>



***Physical health***



# Physical health Challenges



## What do we already know?

The UK's Chief Medical Officers' recommend that children and young people aged 5-18 years old are physically active for an average of 60 minutes per day<sup>21</sup>. For children under 5 years, the recommendation is 180 minutes per day and for disabled young people 20 minutes per day<sup>22</sup>.

However, globally and in the UK, young people are not active enough and rates of childhood overweight and obesity remain too high, with adverse implications on long term physical health.

## What is the latest evidence?

In England, despite recent increases, less than half (49%) of children aged 5 - 16 meet the recommended amount, and three in ten (28%) are doing less than 30 minutes of activity per day<sup>23</sup>.

**2.1 million young people in England do less than an average of 30 minutes of activity per day<sup>24</sup>**

In Scotland, rates are higher, with the latest Scottish Health Survey<sup>25</sup> reporting that 68% of children met the physical activity guidelines. However, it should be noted that different methods to England and Wales are used in collecting this data so comparisons should be treated cautiously.

In Wales, just 31% of young people reported exercising on 7 days a week<sup>26</sup>. Again, it should be noted that different methods to England and Wales are used in collecting this data so comparisons should be treated cautiously.

Research on children aged 2-4 years old in UK early childhood education settings found less than a quarter of children (23%) met the guideline of 180 minutes total physical activity per day<sup>27</sup>.

**Only 14% of 3-4 year-olds are getting the combination of adequate sleep, physical activity and time away from screens<sup>28</sup>**

# Physical health Challenges



Beyond physical activity levels, young people's physical health is suffering, with adverse implications for long term health. Parents, teachers and young people are all concerned about young people's physical health. A recent report by the House of Commons Health and Social Care committee<sup>29</sup> highlighted that children in the UK have some of the worse health outcomes in Europe. For example:

The number of young people diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes in England has increased year on year<sup>30</sup>.

**Over a quarter of young people are worried about their own health (28%)<sup>31</sup>**

1 in 4 children in reception classes in England are either overweight or obese, increasing to 2 in 5 children in year six. This is the highest prevalence ever seen for reception aged pupils in England. Children from Black ethnic groups and from more deprived areas are more likely to be obese at both age groups<sup>32</sup>.

**2 in 5 (41.7%) of year six children in England are either overweight or obese<sup>33</sup>**

In Scotland, the latest Scottish Health Survey data found that 18% of children were at risk of obesity and a third (33%) were at risk of being overweight or obese<sup>34</sup>. This was similar to previous years.

The most recent data from Wales was published in 2024<sup>35</sup>. This found that the proportion of children in reception classed as obese or overweight were 13.4% and 11.4% respectively.

In Northern Ireland, 25.3% of children aged 4-5 were considered overweight or obese, the highest level in the United Kingdom for this age group<sup>36</sup>.

Youth Sport Trust's latest Class of 2035 report<sup>37</sup> forecasts that without change, children's physical health will continue to suffer. By 2035, obesity rates among 10-11-year-olds in England are predicted to rise to 24% and the number of Type 2 diabetes diagnoses will double to 500 new diagnoses a year.

Similarly, data from the World Obesity Forum predicts that by 2040 in the UK, 80% of adolescents aged 11-17 will not meet physical activity recommendations and 30% of children aged 5-19 will be overweight or obese<sup>38</sup>.

# Physical health

## Benefits of physical activity



### What do we already know?

The physical health benefits of being active are well documented<sup>39</sup> and have been discussed in previous Youth Sport Trust PE and School Sport Reports. Benefits include:

- Better physical health and healthy weight
- Improved cardiovascular fitness, muscular fitness, cardiometabolic health, bone and functional health
- Reduced risk of cardiovascular disease
- Improved sleep

### What is the latest evidence?

New evidence further demonstrates the impacts of physical activity on physical health.

#### Spotlight on new research

Regular physical activity during adolescence may influence biological pathways related to future breast cancer links<sup>40</sup>



A study examining the association between recreational physical activity (including all intensities) during adolescence and breast cancer markers such as breast tissue composition found girls who engaged in 2 or more hours a week had a lower percent of water content in the breast. This could influence risk of developing breast cancer. However, the authors do acknowledge that more longitudinal research is needed to determine how these markers may translate into breast cancer risk and incidence in later life.

#### Spotlight on new research

A large review study exploring the health impacts of physically active outdoor play in children and adolescents<sup>41</sup>

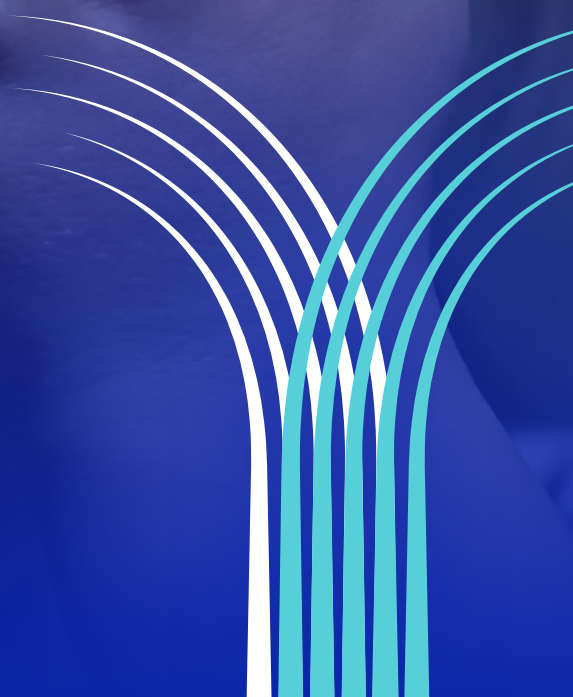


A recent review of 6 systematic reviews of evidence confirmed that physically active outdoor play was favourably associated with physical, mental and social health outcomes.

In particular, the freedom of movement, natural environment and elements of challenge and risk were factors that are likely to explain the link between physically active outdoor play and improved physical health in childhood.



***Mental wellbeing***



# Mental wellbeing Challenges



## What do we already know?

Children's happiness and life satisfaction continue to decline, both globally and in the UK. Alongside this, rates of diagnosable mental health conditions in young people are rising in the UK.

## What is the latest evidence?

The latest UNICEF report card<sup>42</sup> highlights signs of deteriorating life satisfaction in most countries. The UK is ranked 21st overall for child wellbeing and 27th for mental health (out of 36 countries). The latest OECD PISA data<sup>43</sup> also shows that pupil life satisfaction in the UK is one of the lowest among countries participating in the survey.

In the UK, evidence of this decline in wellbeing is documented through The Children's Society's annual Good Childhood Report, which has seen a decrease in children's happiness scores since 2009, and through NHS digital data, which shows that the proportion of young people in England with a diagnosable mental health condition has increased from 12.5% in 2017 to 20.3% in 2023<sup>44</sup>.

■ **9% of young people in the UK report low wellbeing<sup>45</sup>**

■ **25% of young people are worried about their mental health<sup>46</sup>**

■ **More than one in five young people in England have a diagnosable mental health condition. The NHS is only able to support around 40% of those in need<sup>47</sup>**

■ **In Wales, around 30% of young people report elevated or clinically significant emotional difficulties<sup>48</sup>**

■ **Three in ten (28%) teachers report that the mental health of pupils is an important issue at their school at the moment<sup>49</sup>**

■ **The cost of childhood mental health problems leads to £1 trillion in lost earnings<sup>50</sup>**

## Mental wellbeing Challenges



This evidence is also compounded by the recent research done as part of the Youth Matters consultation conducted to inform the new National Youth Strategy; young people are concerned about their mental health as well as feeling lonely and unsafe<sup>51</sup>.

Youth Sport Trust's latest Class of 2035 report<sup>52</sup> predicts that if current trends continue, 23% of children aged 8-16 years old will have a mental health disorder by 2035 – up from 18% in 2025. With three quarters of mental health problems established by age 24<sup>53</sup>, it is important to identify and take preventative action during the childhood period.

### Spotlight on Youth Sport Trust research What the future holds<sup>54</sup>



The Youth Sport Trust Class of 2035 Report found that, if change is not forthcoming – in government, education, and across society – current trends will lead to:

- 34% of children failing to be physically active for even 30 minutes per day.
- 500 new diagnoses of Type 2 Diabetes in children per year – almost double the current rate for 2025.
- Obesity rates among 10–11-year-old children rising to 24%, from 22% in 2025.
- 23% of children aged 8-16 having a mental health disorder, up from 18% in 2025.

# Mental wellbeing

## Benefits of physical activity



### What do we already know?

The benefits of physical activity on mental health and wellbeing are well known and have been discussed in previous Youth Sport Trust PE and School Sport Reports. Benefits include:

- Higher life satisfaction<sup>55</sup>
- Reduction in depressive symptoms<sup>56</sup>
- Improved resilience<sup>57</sup>

### What is the latest evidence?

Sport England's Active Lives report demonstrates a positive association between levels of physical activity and positive mental wellbeing<sup>58</sup>.

Further research this year has added to the evidence base demonstrating the benefits of physical activity on mental wellbeing.

### Spotlight on new research

Physical activity may protect against depressive symptoms in middle to late adolescence<sup>59</sup>



Data was collected as part of a Norwegian cohort (n=873) following young people from 6 to 18 years old. Physical activity levels were measured using accelerometers and insight on depressive symptoms was collected through surveys. The authors found:

- Increased physical activity predicted decreased depressive symptoms from middle to late adolescence.
- Individuals who decreased their total levels of physical activity in middle to late adolescence were at risk for an increased numbers of symptoms of depression two years later.

Authors concluded that within this age period, physical activity may protect against depressive symptoms.

# Mental wellbeing

## Benefits of physical activity



### Spotlight on new research

Promoting physical activity for leisure time is likely to have the greatest benefits for promoting mental health and preventing mental ill health<sup>60</sup>



An updated systematic review and meta-analysis pooled data of over 3.3 million people including children and adults from 372 studies.

The authors found:

- Leisure time spent doing physical activity was associated with better mental health and lower likelihood of mental-ill health.
- Physical activity during people's free time plays the most substantial role in mental health promotion.
- Participation in sport at school was associated with better mental health and school sport was inversely associated with mental ill-health.

### Spotlight on new research

Sports programmes in schools are a vital part of improving mental health in healthy adolescents<sup>61</sup>



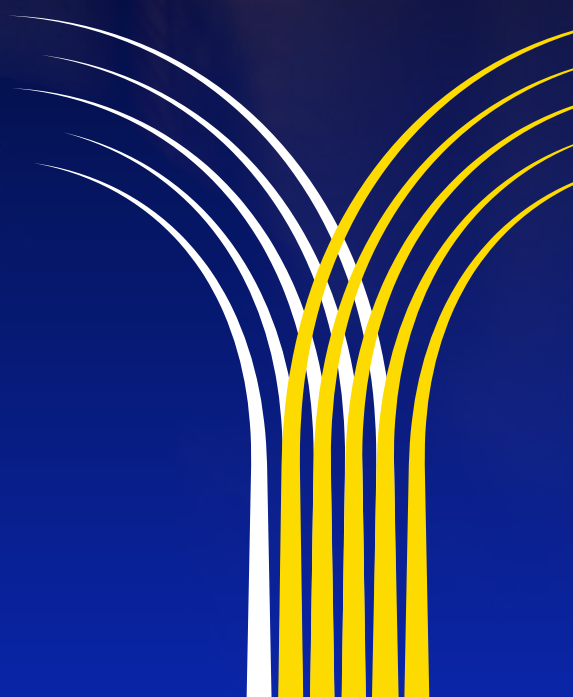
A recent review explored the last five years of research on the effect of physical activity interventions on mental health of adolescents without a clinical mental health diagnosis.

Across 11 studies, the authors found:

- Specific physical activity interventions can improve aspects of mental health for adolescents including subjective wellbeing, self-esteem and emotional intelligence.
- Interventions need to be well-designed and tailored to the age group to be effective.
- Schools play an important role in promoting physical activity interventions for young people.



***Social wellbeing***



# Social wellbeing Challenges



## What do we already know?

Last year's Youth Sport Trust PE and School Sport Report<sup>62</sup> highlighted young people's fear for their future, with concerns about getting a job and about failing in life.

## What is the latest evidence?

Data from 2025 shows that 12.8% of young people aged 16–24 in the UK are not in education, employment or training<sup>63</sup>, worsening their prospects. Young people who are not in education, employment or training are also likely to report the lowest wellbeing scores and least likely to feel that they can access mental, physical or financial health support<sup>64</sup>.

**12.8% of young people in the UK are not in education, employment or training<sup>65</sup>**

International comparisons suggest that young people's skills for future success in work are worse in England than the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average at age 15–16<sup>66</sup>. Just over half of young people (55%) feel that they have the skills to get a job and only half (50%) feel they have the work experience<sup>67</sup>. However, only a quarter of young people in education accessed work experience in the last 12 months, and 33% undertook no extra-curricular volunteering or social action, missing out on key opportunities to build their work readiness.

**Almost a third of pupils in England question whether what they are learning at school will help them in the future<sup>68</sup>**

Getting good grades at school was, for the first time, the most common worry identified by young people surveyed as part of the Children's Society Good Childhood report<sup>69</sup>. This highlights the increasing pressure young people are feeling to get a job post education.

# Social wellbeing

## Benefits of physical activity



### What do we already know?

The effect of being physically active on developing young people's life skills is already known; participation in sport has been reliably shown to improve social skills and social interactions, emotional control, cooperation, communication and teamwork<sup>70</sup>.

### What is the latest evidence?

A recent systematic review<sup>71</sup> reiterated the relationship between sport and the positive development of young people in school. The authors concluded that sport is a favourable context for the developmental outcomes of young people. Furthermore, another recent systematic review demonstrated that regular sports participation is associated with increased self-confidence, reduced stress and increased resilience<sup>72, 73, 74</sup>.

Nonetheless, though most young people (89%) say that they understand why being active is good for them<sup>75</sup>, only 57% of young people recognise that the skills they learn in PE could help them in and outside of school<sup>76</sup>. A similar proportion (61%) feel their physical health is important to contributing to their future<sup>77</sup>. Despite this, young people who are in employment are significantly more likely than those not in employment to rate participation in activities such as sports clubs as important<sup>78</sup>.

**Only one in three young people have taken on a leadership role in sport or physical activity in school<sup>79</sup>**

Further recent research has added to the evidence base demonstrating the benefits of physical activity on social development.

### Spotlight on new research

#### The relationship between sport participation and positive development of young people<sup>80</sup>



A recent systematic review explored 30 studies investigating the relationship between sport participation and positive development of young people. They found that:

- Sport participation is a mechanism for developing young people's life skills and transferable skills.
- It was important for the sport participation to ensure psychological and physical safety, as well as provide positive social interactions and opportunity for youth voice and leadership.

# Social wellbeing

## Benefits of physical activity



### Spotlight on new research

The impact of sport participation on emotions, self-confidence, self-esteem, stress and resilience<sup>81</sup>

A recent systematic review explored 25 studies investigating how sport participation influences children's and adolescents' emotions, self-confidence, self-esteem, stress and resilience. Authors found:

- Sport participation can positively influence emotions, self-confidence, self-esteem, stress and resilience.
- Sport can offer distraction and focus, performance, personal development, purpose and structure in life, as well as a sense of belonging.
- Other factors such as the influence of coaches, teammates, peers and family members were also found.



### Spotlight on Youth Sport Trust research

The social value of the outcomes generated by the Set for Success programme<sup>82</sup>

Set for Success is an intensive youth leadership physical activity intervention funded by the Wimbledon Foundation in partnership with Barclays and delivered by the Youth Sport Trust. Independent analysis demonstrated that for every £1 spent on the programme, £5.63 worth of social impacts were generated by the programme in Year 1 delivery. Social impacts generated included enhanced personal wellbeing and improved future prospects.





# ***School outcomes and school readiness***



# School outcomes and school readiness

## Challenges



### What do we already know?

Last year's Youth Sport Trust PE and School Sport Report<sup>83</sup> detailed how some young people have reported that poor mental health has stopped them from going to work, school or college. It is also becoming clear that many children do not feel they have enough support to attend school when they perceive barriers related to their mental health, emotional needs and problems related to feeling safe and supported in school<sup>84</sup>. Issues including school absenteeism have become increasingly prevalent since the COVID-19 pandemic, whilst young people's engagement with school has been declining.

**There are now over 85,500 girls severely absent from school per year<sup>85</sup>**

**55% of young people reported their education has been disrupted in the last 12 months due to illness or mental health<sup>86</sup>**

### What is the latest evidence?

Government data<sup>87</sup> from schools in England shows that the overall absence rate for academic year 2024/25 was 6.9%, which is a slight decrease on the previous academic year. Positively, this decrease is equivalent to around 5.31 million more days in school compared to the previous academic year. Absence rates were, however, higher for pupils who are eligible for free school meals and who have special educational needs. There is also a strong correlation between poor mental health and absenteeism<sup>88</sup>, with children facing mental health challenges more likely to be absent from school.

The latest OECD PISA report<sup>89</sup> found that fewer young people in the UK feel a sense of belonging at school (64%) compared to the OECD average (75%), which may negatively affect attendance. Encouragingly, there has been a statistically significant increase in the proportion of pupils in England (Years 7–13) who report feeling they belong at school 'every day' or 'most days' between May 2024 and May 2025.

# School outcomes and school readiness

## Challenges



The latest PISA data found **two thirds (64%) of pupils in England agreed that they felt like they belong at school**<sup>90</sup>

Further, despite most pupils wanting to do well at school, there are signs that both pupil engagement in learning and pupil behaviour are worsening.

**The Department for Education's National Behaviour annual survey**<sup>91</sup> found that 70% of pupils in years 7 to 13 said they felt motivated to learn, which significantly decreased from 75% in April 2024

The average score out of 10 to the statement 'I feel happy to go to school in the morning' was 4.6. This level of enjoyment also decreases as pupils get older<sup>92</sup>.

In Wales, just 43% of young people report that they like school 'a lot'<sup>93</sup>.

A third of teachers (34%) surveyed as part of the Youth Sport Trust's annual teacher survey identified lack of pupil engagement as one of the most important issues in their school at the moment<sup>94</sup>.

Pupil behaviour is frequently cited as a challenge for schools to manage and is still disrupting pupil learning; 31% of pupils report that their education has been disrupted due to poor behaviour<sup>95</sup>. Poor behaviour from pupils is also identified by teachers surveyed as part of the Youth Sport Trust annual teacher survey as the top issue for their school at the moment<sup>96</sup>.

**31% of pupils reported that their education has been disrupted as a result of poor behaviour**<sup>97</sup>

# School outcomes and school readiness

## Benefits of physical activity



### What do we already know?

There is a strong positive link between school attendance and school belonging<sup>98</sup>. Improved school belonging is also shown to improve academic resilience and social development which is likely to support school engagement<sup>99</sup>.

With regards to young people's cognition, or the process of acquiring and understanding knowledge, it is well demonstrated that physical activity has a small but positive effect<sup>100,101</sup>.

### What is the latest evidence?

Three quarters of teachers (75%) and 62% of parents identified that sport, and play give young people a sense of belonging<sup>102,103</sup>. For parents, this was a significant increase from 49% last year<sup>104</sup>. This is noteworthy given the known influence of school belonging on school attendance.

The role that PE, school sport and physical activity can play in building belonging and benefitting school-related outcomes for young people is highlighted by the recent Youth Sport Trust Class of 2035<sup>105</sup> report. This also found that young people with a higher sense of belonging to school were more likely to report:

- Physical activity and sport are an important part of their life
- They understand why being active is good for them
- They agree PE lessons are important
- They would like to do more physical activity or play more sports

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) highlights evidence that extra-curricular sporting activities can improve pupil attendance<sup>106</sup>. There is also a strong, positive link between school engagement and attendance among secondary pupils<sup>107</sup>, suggesting that if PE, school sport and physical activity foster a sense of belonging to school, they may help improve both engagement and attendance.

Evidence increasingly shows that physical activity benefits young people's cognition and working memory, supporting their ability to engage and succeed in school. The EEF also states that physical activity interventions can lead to an average of two months' additional academic progress, although this impact varies and does not directly translate to improved grades<sup>108</sup>.

# School outcomes and school readiness

## Benefits of physical activity



Longitudinal evidence from the UK's Millennium Cohort Study shows that adolescents who take part in structured moderate-to-vigorous physical activity demonstrate stronger executive function, particularly when taking part in competitive team ball games<sup>109</sup>. Similarly, games-based PE lessons and higher fitness levels are associated with improved cognitive function and working memory<sup>110</sup>.

Despite this, more needs to be done to highlight and communicate the educational benefits of PE, school sport and physical activity. Youth Sport Trust Class of 2035 research<sup>111</sup> highlights a lack of awareness among young people, with only 23% recognising that sport and play can support academic achievement, compared to 76% who identify good grades as key to securing a job.

Further recent research has added to the evidence base demonstrating the benefits of physical activity on school attendance, engagement and cognition.

### Spotlight on new research

#### A short physical activity session can improve children's ability to identify emotions<sup>112</sup>



In Switzerland, a study randomly assigned 100 students aged 9-13 to either a group taking part in 20 minutes of physical activity or a control group without any physical activity.

Authors found:

- Ability to recognise emotions was improved following physical activity.
- This is important given an ability to identify emotions is related to school-based social behaviours, and therefore school engagement.
- It did not matter if the physical activity session required cooperation with others or not.

# School outcomes and school readiness

## Benefits of physical activity



### Spotlight on Youth Sport Trust research

#### Addressing the Disadvantage Gap through Well Schools<sup>113</sup>



Research conducted by Sheffield Hallam University, on behalf of the Youth Sport Trust, sets out evidence-based approaches that schools are taking to create happy, healthy and engaged students. Alongside other methods, schools are using the Well Schools Framework to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils by placing physical health at the heart of their culture and ethos. The research also demonstrated that:

- When physical activity is treated as foundational, it supports four key areas: emotional regulation and mental health; belonging, inclusion and safety; character, confidence and transferable life skills; and motivation, attendance, behaviour and engagement.
- Moving pupils from the least active to the most active can lead to a 26% improvement in school experience, a 32% improvement in happiness and a 14% improvement in general health.
- 'General health' is the strongest explanation for the statistical link between physical activity and attendance; each one-point improvement in general health is associated with a 1.1 percentage point increase in attendance.

The report demonstrates that when physical activity and movement is embedded within a whole-school culture, it creates a coherent, evidence-informed model for enhancing student wellbeing, strengthening school identity, and improving school engagement.

### Spotlight on new research

#### Physical activity positively and directly predicts academic engagement in middle school aged pupils<sup>114</sup>



A study of 746 middle school participants exploring academic engagement was conducted by researchers in two schools in China.

Authors found:

- Physical activity levels were positively associated with improved academic engagement.
- This association was particularly driven by strengthening interpersonal relationships and increasing perceived academic support.
- This work provides further evidence for targeted interventions aimed at enhancing adolescents' academic engagement through physical activity.

# School outcomes and school readiness

## Benefits of physical activity



### Spotlight on new research

Physical activity interventions in school for disabled children have significant positive effects on cognitive and mental health<sup>115</sup>



A systematic review and meta-analysis were conducted: 33 studies were included, involving 1,454 young disabled people and adolescents.

Authors found:

- Significant positive effects for school based physical activity interventions on cognitive and mental health outcomes for young disabled people.
- Positive effects of school based physical activity were not seen on academic outcomes.
- More high-quality research and more diverse samples are needed to improve how applicable these findings are.

### Spotlight on new research

Adolescents who engaged in structured physical activity at moderate-to-vigorous levels demonstrate better executive function<sup>116</sup>



Using longitudinal evidence from the UK Millennium Cohort study (n=3,526), authors explored how physical activity can be linked to cognitive development.

Authors found:

- More time spent on swimming and individual ball games predicted better GCSE grades.
- Adolescents who spent more time in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity at aged 14 had better executive functioning.

# School outcomes and school readiness

## Challenges – readiness in the early years



### What do we already know?

Early Years children's school readiness, a measure of 'how prepared a child is to succeed in school – cognitively, socially and emotionally'<sup>117</sup>, is a growing concern. Evidence consistently shows that being school ready is linked to more positive educational outcomes and improved life chances.

### What is the latest evidence?

Recent findings from the Kindred<sup>2</sup> School Readiness Survey<sup>118</sup> indicate that school readiness has significantly declined, with over a third (37%) of children starting reception not considered ready for school. School readiness includes a range of developmental milestones needed to support learning. Key challenges identified include difficulties with sitting still (44%), sharing (37%), listening and following instructions (37%), and dressing independently (35%).

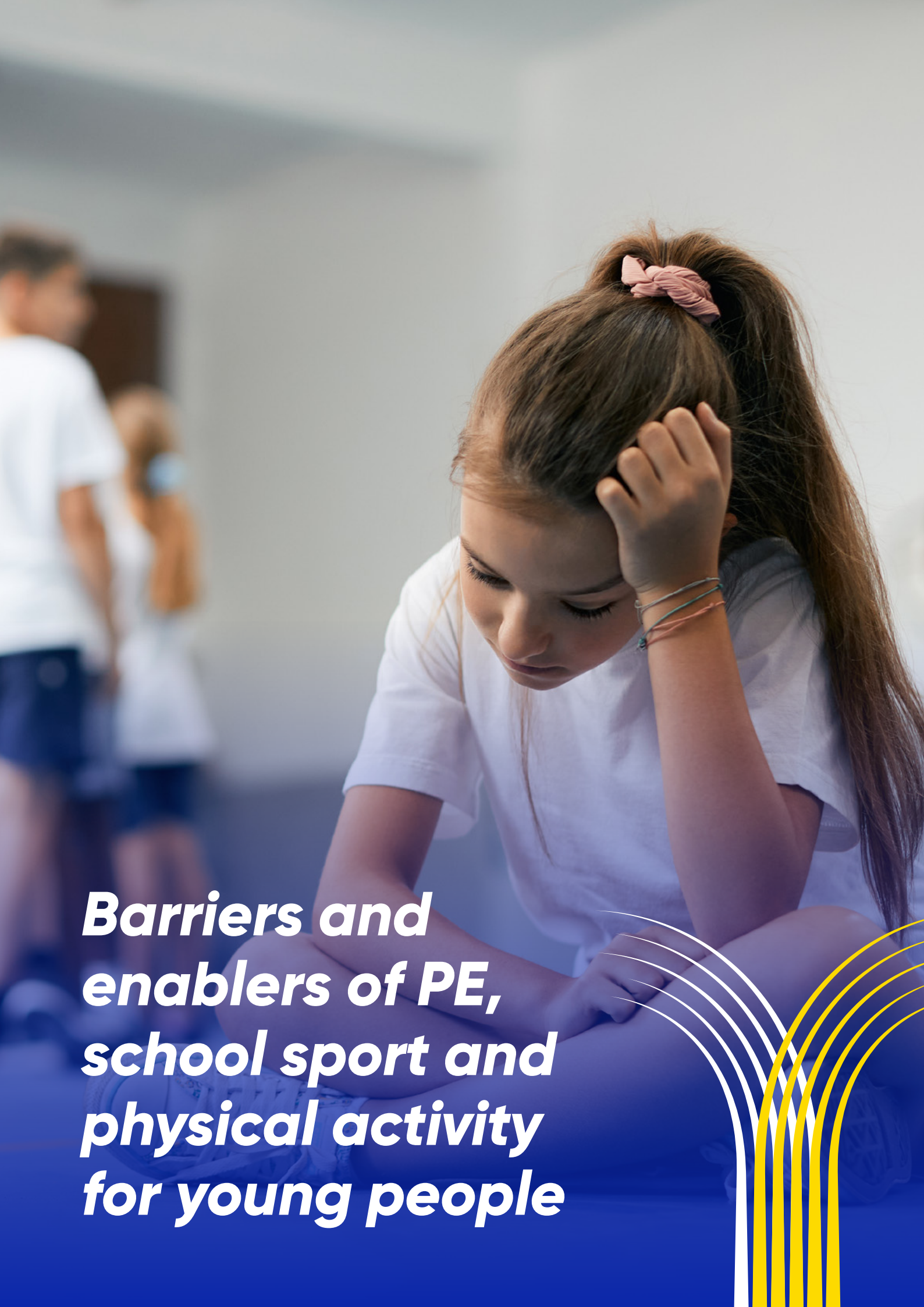
**Over a third (37%) of the reception intake in September 2025 were identified as not school ready<sup>119</sup>**

## *Benefits of physical activity on school readiness*

### What is the latest evidence?

Given that physical development is a key part of being school ready, this reiterates the importance of physical activity, including physical movement and play in the early years<sup>120</sup>. Children who are more physically active in the early years are better at regulating their emotions and achieve better grades in primary schools<sup>121</sup>.

However, findings from the Royal Foundation Centre for Early Childhood show that only 9% of adults view supporting physical health as a key reason to invest in early childhood, compared to 29% who prioritise social skills and friendships<sup>122</sup>. This aligns with wider evidence suggesting that physical activity guidance, despite its benefits for both health and social development, is not effectively reaching Early Years education<sup>123</sup>.



***Barriers and enablers of PE, school sport and physical activity for young people***



# Barriers and enablers of PE, school sport and physical activity for young people

Despite the benefits of being active generally being well understood, there remain barriers that stop young people from being more active. As a result, many young people miss out on these benefits. Factors that help and hinder participation in PE, school sport and physical activity exist at different levels in young people's lives.

This section of the report explores these barriers and enablers using the well-known socioecological framework. This framework acknowledges that individuals both influence and are influenced by a range of factors at five different levels.



**Political** – systemic factors including local and national policies, resource distribution, and education strategy



**Societal** – wider factors affecting children's wellbeing, e.g. the role of social media



**School** – provision of PE, school sport and physical activity, teachers' perceptions, barriers and opportunities for schools



**Interpersonal** – those around young people who influence their engagement, e.g. attitudes and beliefs of friends and family

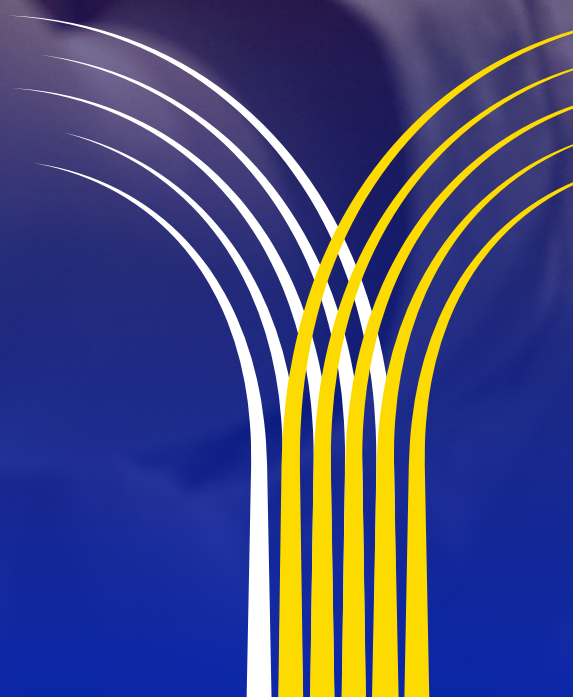


**Individual** – attitudes towards being active, characteristics of inequality

The remainder of this section will explain how each of the five levels affects children's participation in PE, school sport, and physical activity.



***Individual level***



## **Individual level**

### *Young people's attitudes towards physical activity*



#### **What do we already know?**

Last year's Youth Sport Trust PE and School Sport Report<sup>124</sup> demonstrated that the majority of children and young people understand why being physically active is good for them and that it is an important part of their life. Encouragingly, most young people are also aware of the recommendation that they should be active for 60 minutes or more per day. Nonetheless, physical activity levels remain stubbornly low, suggesting that multiple factors still hold young people back from being more active.

#### **What is the latest evidence?**

Research conducted as part of the most recent annual Youth Sport Trust survey of young people<sup>125</sup>, shows young people remain aware of the importance of being active and the benefits it gives them:

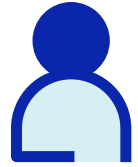
- **89% of young people** say they understand why being active is good for them
- **93% of young people** agree that PE lessons are important
- **83% of young people** identify that being active can help them to be healthy
- **77% of young people** say sport makes them feel better about themselves

Around 6 in 10 young people feel they can be themselves when they are being active (62%) and feel confident when they take part in physical activity (61%)<sup>126</sup>.

Young people's knowledge of how physically active they should be on a daily basis again surpasses that of their parents and teachers. 75% of young people correctly believe children aged 5-18 years should get at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day<sup>127</sup>. However, only 68% of young people are happy with the amount of physical activity that they do<sup>128</sup>. This suggests that barriers exist that prevent them from being as active as they would like to be, rather than knowledge or desire.

New research with 10-11-year-olds found that some children do not want to participate in physical activity at school due to being worried about getting injured, failing or anxiety about being watched<sup>129</sup>. Similar barriers were identified through the annual Youth Sport Trust survey of young people aged 7-16, with the top three barriers to participation being lack of confidence, poor weather and not liking getting hot and sweaty<sup>130</sup>.

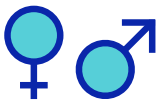
# Individual level Inequalities



## What do we already know?

Evidence continues to show that young people with particular characteristics of inequality are less likely to be as active and have more negative attitudes or perceptions towards physical activity<sup>131</sup>.

## These characteristics include<sup>132</sup>



**Gender**  
Girls



**Ethnicity**  
Young people from a Black, Asian or other ethnicity



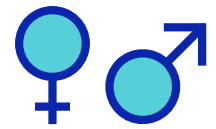
**Affluence**  
Young people from the least affluent families



**Disability**  
Those with a disability or special educational need, additional learning needs or additional support needs

# Individual level

## Gender

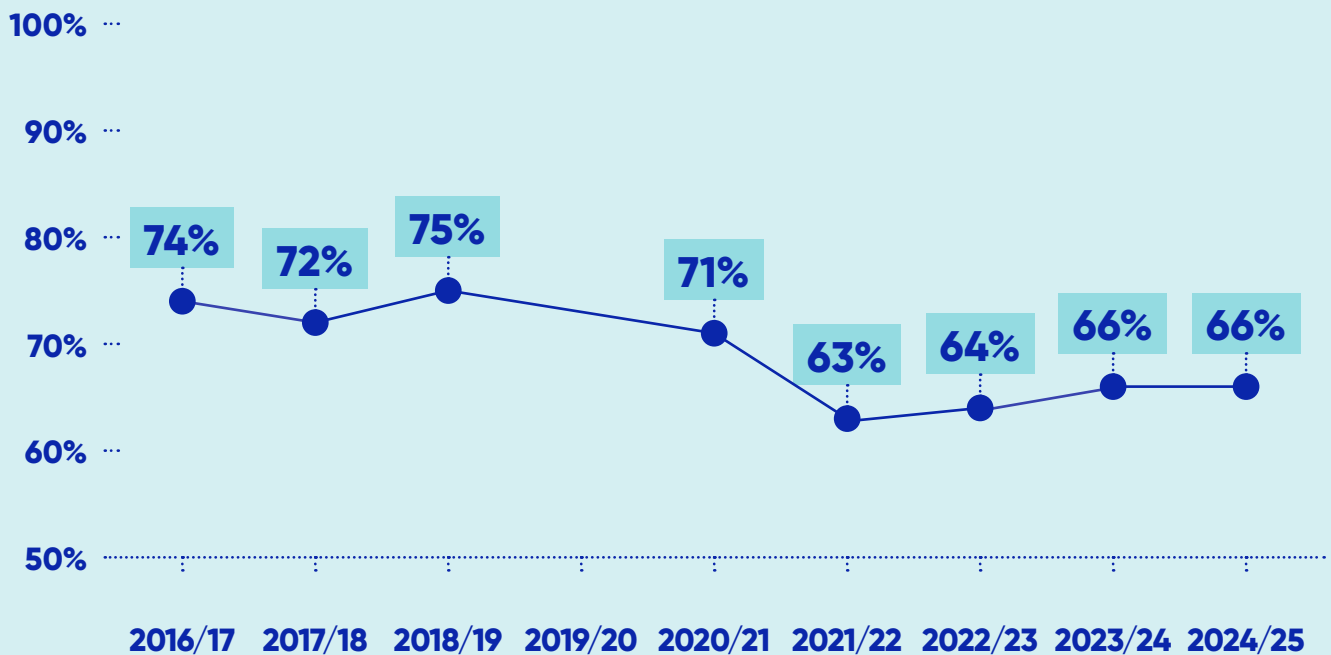


### What do we already know?

Boys are more likely to be physically active than girls. Indeed, recent data shows that 52% of boys and 46% of girls achieve the recommended physical activity levels<sup>133</sup>.

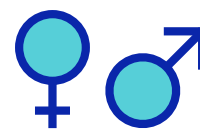
Girls generally demonstrate fewer positive attitudes to being active than boys, with girls being twice as likely as boys to report not liking taking part in physical activity and nearly four times more likely than boys to report not liking taking part in PE<sup>134</sup>. Girls are also more likely than boys to report barriers to being active such as lack of confidence, concerns about getting changed and unequal access to sports at school.

### Girls enjoyment of taking part in PE over time



# Individual level

## Gender



### What is the latest evidence?

Analysis conducted this year by the Youth Sport Trust found that:

- **Girls** are over **three times more likely** than boys to not feel confident when taking part in physical activity<sup>135</sup>
- **Girls** are significantly and **twice as likely** as boys to not do 60 minutes of physical activity every day<sup>136</sup>
- **35% of girls** feel that boys at their school have access to a wider range of sports than girls<sup>137</sup>

Other recent evidence from the Youth Sport Trust also reiterates that specific barriers still remain for girls, such as changing, PE kit and periods:

- **14% of girls** state that not liking the PE kit stops them from being active at school
- **Less than half of girls** (48%) agree that their PE kit makes them feel comfortable, compared to 61% of boys
- Gender is also significantly associated with whether young people report wanting more options to choose from for their PE kit; nearly half (48%) of girls state this compared to less than a third of boys (29%)
- **1 in 10 (11%) of girls** said they never take part in PE when they are on their period and only 46% of girls reported that they always take part
- **A quarter of secondary aged girls** (24%) reported that their period was a barrier to them taking part in sport, physical activity and PE at school<sup>138</sup>

Though there is still much improvement to be made, progress has been made over the last few years to reduce gender inequalities and stereotypes in schools. For example, collaboration between Barclays, The FA and The Youth Sport Trust has seen 90% of schools now offering equal access to girls in curriculum football<sup>139</sup>.

# Individual level Disability



## What do we already know?

Recent research from Activity Alliance<sup>140</sup> reinforces that young disabled people are not as physically active as their peers.

- Young disabled people are more likely to be classified as less active than their non-disabled peers (43% vs 32%)
- Only a quarter (25%) of young disabled people say they take part in sport and activity all the time at school compared to 41% of non-disabled children

## What is the latest evidence?

Further research demonstrates that young disabled people generally show fewer positive attitudes towards being active. **Young disabled people:**

- Agree to a significantly lesser extent that they 'feel like themselves when being active' compared with their non-disabled peers (56% vs 65%)<sup>141</sup>
- Agree to a significantly lesser extent that they feel confident when taking part in physical activity compared with non-disabled young people (52% vs 65%)<sup>142</sup>
- Are less likely to feel they belong in sport compared to their non-disabled peers<sup>143</sup>

Young disabled people are more likely to report barriers to being physically active than their non-disabled peers. Only 7% of young disabled people say that 'nothing stops them' from trying new sport compared to 18% of non-disabled young people<sup>144</sup>. 6 in 10 young disabled people would like more opportunities to take part in sport<sup>145</sup>.

# Individual level

## Ethnicity



### What do we already know?

Sport England's Active Lives (Children and Young People) report continues to show that children from Black, Asian and other ethnicities are the least likely to be physically active<sup>146</sup>:

**41% of young people from a Black ethnicity** meet physical activity guidelines, compared with 43% from an Asian ethnicity, 42% from an 'other' ethnicity and 51% from a White British ethnicity

### What is the latest evidence?

New research this year highlights some of the challenges that young people from a Black ethnic background experience with regards to school. Black secondary pupils were least likely to feel that their school is inclusive and treats them the same as everyone else<sup>147</sup>.

In addition, research by Women in Sport<sup>148</sup> with Black girls finds that they are the least physically active of any group with only 1 in 7 being active outside of school and only 37% of Black girls achieving the recommended physical activity levels. Black girls report additional barriers such as family responsibilities, cultural commitments and studying. They also report that sport is not always a space where they can be themselves, with 1 in 2 Black girls reporting that they have to limit parts of their cultural identity in a sport and physical activity environment compared to 1 in 3 girls from a White British background.



## Individual level Affluence

### What do we already know?

Current economic challenges continue to affect many families, while family affluence continues to be a barrier to accessing physical activity opportunities. Consistently, research shows that young people from the least affluent backgrounds have lower physical activity levels.

**19% of families** reported that they have had to cut down on local sports groups / clubs that involved them or their children<sup>149</sup>

**8% of young people** in hygiene poverty (not being able to afford everyday hygiene and personal grooming products<sup>150</sup>) report they don't play outside or play sports because they can't wash themselves if they get dirty<sup>151</sup>

**26% of young people** reported that if their family had more money to afford activities out of school it would encourage them to do more sport or get more active<sup>152</sup>

**37% of parents** said they had struggled to afford activities outside of school for their child in the last 12 months<sup>153</sup>

### What is the latest evidence?

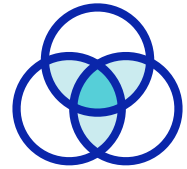
The effect of family affluence continues to translate into young people's physical activity participation data:

**Sport England's latest Active Lives data** shows that those from least affluent families are least likely to be active, with 45% meeting the recommended levels compared to 58% of children from the most affluent backgrounds. This gap has widened in the last year (45% vs. 57% in 2023/2024)<sup>154</sup>

**Research conducted in English primary schools** published in 2025 found that pupils from schools within higher areas of deprivation were less likely to be active<sup>155</sup>

School-based provision can provide a free to access opportunity for all young people to be active. The EEF identifies that pupils from more disadvantaged backgrounds may therefore benefit more from physical activity interventions in schools than their peers due to associated barriers around costs<sup>156</sup>

# Multiple characteristics of inequality



## What is the latest evidence?

Recent research has taken this further, exploring how having multiple characteristics of inequality (being female, from a Black, Asian or Other ethnicity, from a less affluent family and having a disability or educational need) result in even lower physical activity levels and experiencing even more barriers to being active.

**Sport England's Active Lives data** shows that children with two or more characteristics of inequality are least likely to be active, 40% meet the recommended activity levels compared to 54% of those with no characteristics of inequality. This gap has widened in the last year (40% vs. 52% in 2023/2024)<sup>157</sup>

**Girls with two or more characteristics** of inequality are significantly and 30% more likely to not like taking part in PE or to feel confident when doing physical activity compared to girls with no characteristics of inequality<sup>158</sup>

**Similarly, girls with two or more** characteristics of inequality are significantly and 60% more likely to not take part in physical activity compared to girls with no further characteristics of inequality<sup>159</sup>

**Activity Alliance data** shows that disabled girls are three times more likely to say they do not feel confident when being active compared to their non-disabled peers (24% vs 8%)<sup>160</sup>

**Youth Sport Trust Girls Active data** shows that disabled girls agree to a significantly greater extent that they don't have the same opportunities as boys in school to do the sports and activities they want to do, when compared with non-disabled girls. 36% of disabled girls agree they have the same opportunities as boys whilst 49% of non-disabled girls agree<sup>161</sup>

The Youth Sport Trust's Class of 2035 report also report forecasts that, if trends continue as they have been, these groups are likely to continue experiencing lower quality of delivery of activity and lead to worsening engagement with physical activity<sup>162</sup>.



***Interpersonal level***



## Interpersonal level

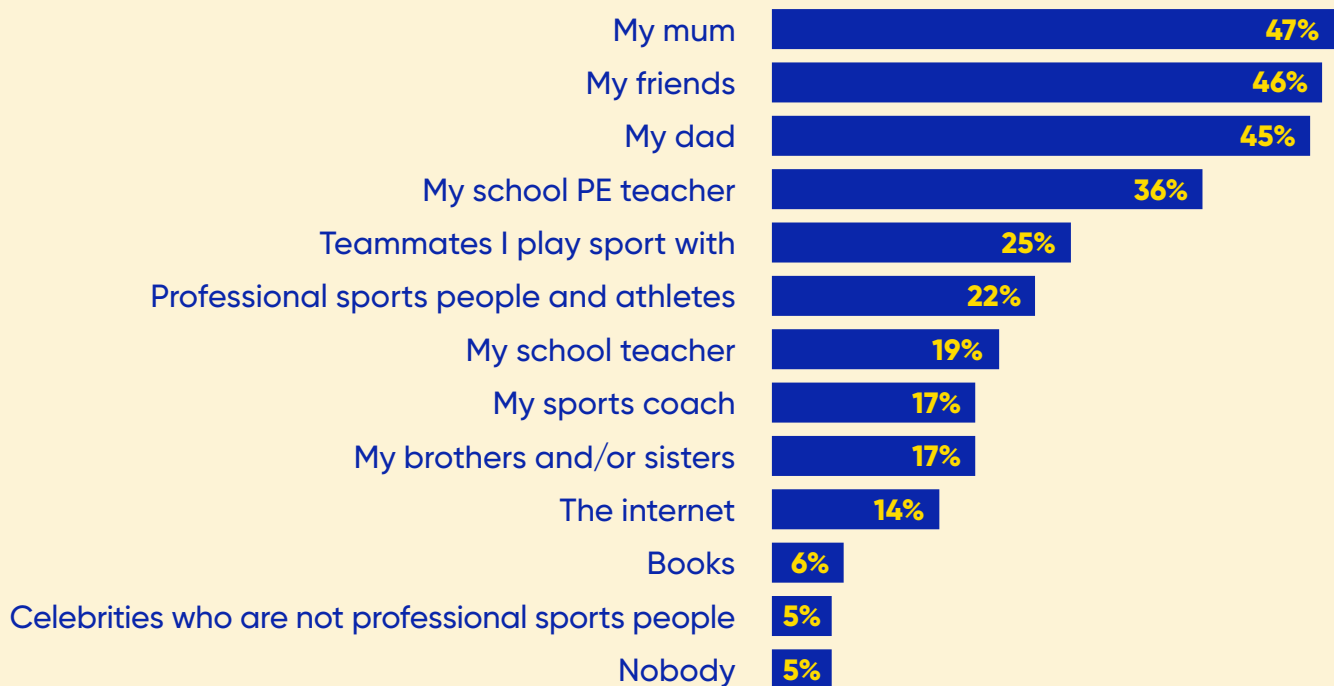


### What do we already know?

Insight from the children's survey conducted as part of the Youth Sport Trust Class of 2035 report reiterated that interpersonal relationships, such as those with peers and parents, play a hugely important role in encouraging young people to be physically active.

For example, young people are most inspired to be active by those closest to them, including their Mum (47%), their friends (46%) and their Dad (45%). School PE teachers also play a role (36%), as do teammates (25%) and professional sports people/athletes (22%)<sup>163</sup>.

### Who or what inspires you to be active?



## Interpersonal level



### Peer influence

#### What is the latest evidence?

Young people continue to report that their friends are a key source of influence for how physically active they are.

- **73% of young people** report they would like to be grouped with their friends for sport, physical activity and PE at school<sup>164</sup>
- **Having fun with friends** was identified by girls and boys as the second most important motivator to them being active at schools<sup>165</sup>
- **46% of young people** say that their friends inspire them to be active<sup>166</sup>
- **Parents** rate their children's friends as most likely to inspire their child to be active (63%)<sup>167</sup>

Nonetheless, peers can also negatively influence young people's participation and attitudes towards PE, sport and physical activity. For example, boys agree to a significantly greater extent than girls do that 'some sports are for girls and 'some sports are for boys', with 39% of boys agreeing with this and 22% of girls<sup>168</sup>. 1 in 5 girls report not liking taking part with boys and 1 in 4 girls don't like other people watching them be active when at school<sup>169</sup>.

### Parental influence

#### What is the latest evidence?

92% of parents agree that sport and play are important parts of every young person's education and development<sup>170</sup>. Parents are aware of the different benefits of sport and play for young people and they identify that being physically active helps with young people's physical health, mental health, life skills and social wellbeing.

## Interpersonal level



Positively, the proportion of parents who recognise the benefits of sport and play for young people have increased since measures began in 2022. Parental awareness and acknowledgement of the following benefits of sport and play have increased: giving a sense of belonging (62% up from 49% last year); social wellbeing (73% up from 61% last year); increased confidence (73% up from 64% last year); self-regulation/behaviour (58% up from 49% last year) and resilience (58% up from 51% last year). This suggests that parents' attitudes are improving, and it is hoped that, with time, this supports increased participation in PE, school sport and physical activity for young people.

### How does sport and play help young people?



Recent evidence from parents of 7–11-year-olds report that their children enjoy physically active play as a form of movement, with top activities including visiting the playground (56%), riding a bike, (46%), dancing (44%) and playing tag / chase (43%)<sup>171</sup>.

## Interpersonal level



This research also showed how the majority of parents are aware of the role they play in influencing how active their children are:

**80% of parents** say their own physical activity habits heavily or somewhat influence how active their child is<sup>172</sup>

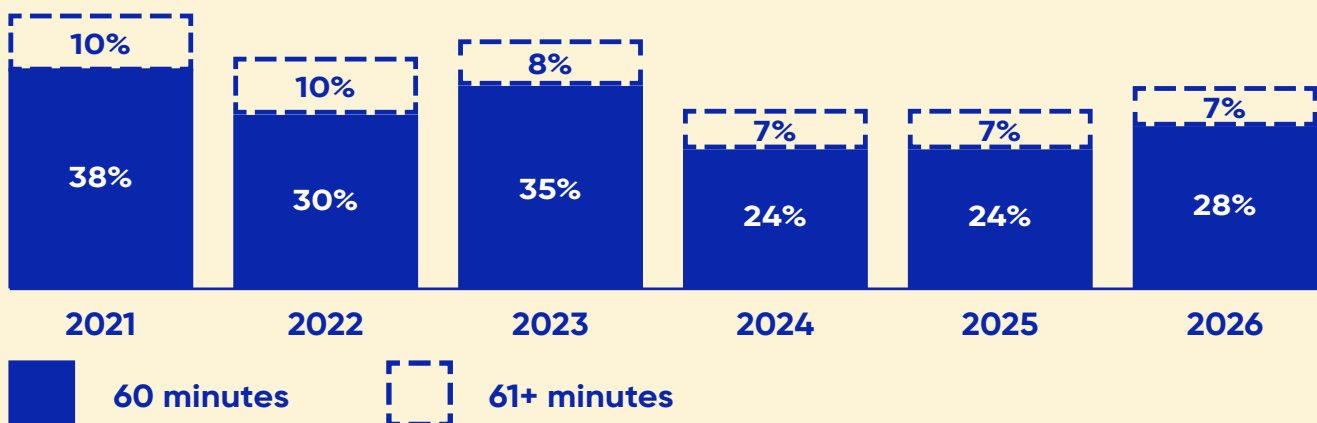
**80% of parents** agree that they encourage their children to be active and play sport. Parents of primary aged pupils were more likely to agree to this than parents of secondary aged pupils (12-16) or older (17-18) (84% vs 76%, 77% respectively)<sup>173</sup>

**Parents identified dads (57%)** as the top response to what inspires young people to be active, **closely followed by mums (51%)**<sup>174</sup>

However, parental awareness of how active young people should be is still low. Data collected this year demonstrates that awareness continues to plateau

**35% of parents** are aware of the amount of time young people aged 5-18 years old should be physically active<sup>175</sup>. This is a slight increase from last year, but not a statistically significant increase

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



What is particularly concerning about low parental awareness of recommended physical activity levels for children, is that most parents are still concerned that their children are not active enough, with 82% of parents say they are concerned that young people today are not getting enough physical activity<sup>176</sup>.



**School level**





## School level

### What do we already know?

Schools play a unique role in providing universal access to PE, sport and physical activity for young people. For many young people, school is their only access point to any physical activity. We know, however, that many schools face ever-mounting barriers to providing and prioritising quality PE, school sport and physical activity opportunities.

### School provision of PE, school sport and physical activity

#### What is the latest evidence?

Concerningly, one in ten (11%) young people report that they never do any sport or physical activity beyond PE; this increases with age to 20% of 15–16-year-olds not taking part in sport or physical activity outside of PE<sup>177</sup>. Young people in schools responding to the latest Youth Voice survey were also more than twice as likely as young people in college or sixth form to participate in sports clubs (47% vs 19%)<sup>178</sup>. This reinforces the role schools play in supporting physical activity.

Government guidelines recommend that schools should provide 30 minutes of physical activity to children throughout the school day. However, recent academic research found great variation in the amount of physical activity schools offer, with some schools providing twice as much as others<sup>179</sup>. Sport England Active Lives latest data shows that only 46% of young people are active for 30 minutes within the school day. Positively, though, this is a slight increase from last year (45%)<sup>180</sup>.

**Only 46% of young people are active for 30 minutes** within the school day<sup>181</sup>

**One in ten (11%) of young people report that they never do any sport or physical activity** beyond PE<sup>182</sup>



## School level

Parents also believe their children's school plays an important role in supporting children to be active.

**Two thirds (66%)** of parents expect that primary schools should provide at least 30 minutes of physical activity

**Three quarters (74%)** of parents expect secondary schools to provide at least 30 minutes<sup>183</sup>

**Over half of parents** are less worried about physical activity for their children during term time and assume that school activity is enough<sup>184</sup>

Nearly half of parents (47%) with children aged 4-17 believe that their child should get more time for sport and play during the school day in curriculum<sup>185</sup>. The majority (86%) of parents also believe that schools should provide at least 2 hours of PE per week to every pupil<sup>186</sup>.

Parents surveyed as part of the Government 'Let's Move' campaign also noted that children's physical activity levels suffer a seasonal dip, with the weather and darker evenings identified as key barriers to children's physical activity<sup>187</sup>. This highlights the importance of opportunities, time and places to be active during the school day in autumn and winter.

Recent key driver analysis by Savanta as part of the Youth Sport Trust Class of 2035 research identified the school environment to be a significant driver of young people's physical activity levels<sup>188</sup>. In particular, having a school that encourages young people to be active at break / lunch time and being a school where young people enjoy taking part in PE at school were key drivers of children's physical activity levels. However, only 58% of parents believe that their child enjoys PE at school; parents of primary aged pupils were more likely to agree to this statement than parents of secondary aged pupils (37% strongly agree vs 22% strongly agree)<sup>189</sup>.

Around two thirds (68%) of young people agree that their school encourages them to be active<sup>190</sup>. Students in years 3 and 4 agree to a significantly greater extent that their school encouraged them to be active compared with students in years 10 and 11 (77% versus 67%). Despite this, 70% of young people would like to be more active in school<sup>191</sup> and one in three (34%) young people say they would like to be more active in PE lessons<sup>192</sup>.

## School level



### Spotlight on Youth Sport Trust research School-related insight from young people<sup>193</sup>



As well as predicting future trends, the Youth Sport Trust's Class of 2035 report included a nationally representative survey, conducted with 1,002 young people aged 5–16 across the UK.

Insight from this survey demonstrated that the top three factors that would encourage young people to be more physically active are school based, with young people being motivated by:

- Having better equipment/facilities in school (41%)
- By their school offering an after-school club where they could try different sports (39%)
- Being able to choose what activities they can do at school (38%)<sup>194</sup>

The research also highlighted that a third of young people reported having at least one lesson cancelled at school in autumn term 24/25. PE was the by far the most cancelled subject (17%). The main reasons PE was cancelled were that the teacher or space was not available. Worryingly, one in five (21%) of young people said that when their PE classes were cancelled, they spent the spare time participating in a different type of activity, meaning that young people are missing out on their time to be physically active, especially important for those with reduced opportunities to be active outside the school day.

## Lack of prioritisation of PE, school sport and physical activity in schools

### What is the latest evidence?

Schools do not always prioritise PE, particularly around exam time and compared to core subjects. The Children's Society's Good Childhood report found some teachers report that a focus on attainment in schools has led to reduced access to PE<sup>195</sup>.

■ PE is the most frequently cancelled subject<sup>196</sup>



## School level

Only 57% of teachers surveyed as part of the Youth Sport Trust's annual teacher survey reported that their school provides a minimum of 2 hours of PE per week as a way of encouraging their pupils to be physically active<sup>197</sup>. The figure was higher amongst schools in more affluent areas than those in more deprived areas. Similarly, previous Teacher Tapp data showed that only 71% of primary teachers surveyed deliver 2 hours or more PE in a week<sup>198</sup>. This is reinforced by the continuing fall in the proportion of teaching time allocated to PE, as demonstrated through the Department for Education's school workforce data. The latest data shows that PE continues to account for a smaller share of teaching time in English secondary schools than in previous years<sup>199</sup>. Since the data collected in 2011/12, the amount of teaching time spent doing PE has fallen from 8.6% to 7.3%.

**Just 7.3% of teaching time is allocated to PE in English secondary schools; this has been continually falling since 2011/12<sup>200</sup>**

Concerns are also being raised about the confidence of teachers to teach PE. The latest working lives of teachers and leaders report<sup>201</sup> found that primary teachers under 35 were less likely to report feeling confident teaching PE compared to older teachers. Having this confidence is important to ensure a young person has a quality experience of PE. A recent study<sup>202</sup> with 10–11-year-olds found that practitioners who adopt a more meaningful PE pedagogy are more likely to engage children who are reluctant to participate.

Beyond PE, analysis based on historical breaktime data<sup>203</sup> demonstrates that children at KS1 now have 23 minutes per day less breaktime than they did in 1995. For secondary pupils in KS3, they have 17 fewer minutes per day. Equally, research on the state of active outdoor play in primary schools found that opportunities for active outdoor play declines as children age, with only 10% of schools offering opportunities for daily active outdoor play at Key Stage 2 compared to 27% at Key Stage 1 and 98% in the Early Years<sup>204</sup>.

## School level



Four in 10 children would like more time to be active at break and lunchtime and a third (32%) of parents with children aged 4-17 believe children should get more time for sport and play during breaktime and lunchtimes<sup>205</sup>. Primary school teachers were twice as likely as secondary school teachers to report that their school encouraged active breaks and lunchtimes (79% compared to 38%).

### Spotlight on Youth Sport Trust research

#### What the future holds<sup>206</sup>



The Youth Sport Trust Class of 2035 Report predicts future trends of a number of measures surrounding young people's wellbeing. It found that if current trends in time allocated for break and lunchtimes at school continue, by 2035 primary aged pupils will have 60 minutes less for breaktimes, and secondary pupils will have 85 minutes less per week, with shorter lunchtimes and a removal of afternoon breaks<sup>207</sup>.

Further, the research forecasts that if current trends continue then schools will narrow the focus of their school sport offer, particularly in the most deprived communities, compounding the reduced participation and engagement opportunities in more socioeconomically deprived communities.

Providing a wide range of extra-curricular sports and activity clubs was also identified by teachers as the most common activity schools do to encourage pupils to be physically active<sup>208</sup>. However, evidence shows that although many schools have extra-curricular sports provision, opportunities and facilities are not being maximised. Research working with primary schools in 2025 found that fewer than 50% report using outdoor areas after school<sup>209</sup>. Youth Sport Trust Class of 2035 data also found that in the last 6 months, just 58% of young people said they had attended an extra-curricular club that included physical activity<sup>210</sup>.

The Youth Sport Trust parents survey<sup>211</sup> found support amongst parents for increasing access to extra-curricular physical activity. Half (47%) of parents would support their child's school adopting more extra-curricular clubs and activities in order to increase physical activity levels. 57% would support them to provide a wider variety of sport and physical activity options. 39% of parents of children aged 4-17 believe that children should get more time for sport and play after school in extra-curricular time.

## School level



### Barriers to facilities

#### What is the latest evidence?

With increasing barriers for young people to be physically active outside of school, the school environment is seen as even more vital to ensure access to physical activity for all young people. The Youth Sport Trust Class of 2035 report found that better equipment and facilities in school was the top motivator reported by young people that would encourage them to be more active<sup>212</sup>. However, inequalities of provision mean that not all young people access these opportunities within school.

**41% of young people report that if they had better equipment or facilities in school, it would encourage them to do more sport or be more active<sup>213</sup>**

Beyond school, decreasing access to sports facilities has been reported; according to the Youth Voice Census, young people without employment are more likely to report this (59% had access in their local area in 2025 compared to 66% in 2024)<sup>214</sup>.

The number of young people attending Alternative Provision (AP) settings has increased by nearly 5% from last academic year and this increase is a continuing trend<sup>215</sup>. Despite research<sup>216</sup> showing the potential value that PE has in these settings, many AP settings have identified lack of space for PE, limiting the opportunities they can provide for young people to be active<sup>217</sup>. Just over half (57%) of APs reported having access to an outdoor playground and a third (36%) reported that the facilities they had for PE were poor or very poor<sup>218</sup>.

Only three quarters of children (73%) are able to swim 25 metres unaided by year 7, despite this being part of the national curriculum<sup>219</sup>. Previous Sport England Active Lives data (2023)<sup>220</sup> found that teachers in a third of state primary schools in England reported offering none or less than 10 swimming lessons per pupil in the academic year 2022/23. Rising costs of swimming lessons and access to swimming pools reinforces the important role that schools play in ensuring that all young people learn to swim.

## School level

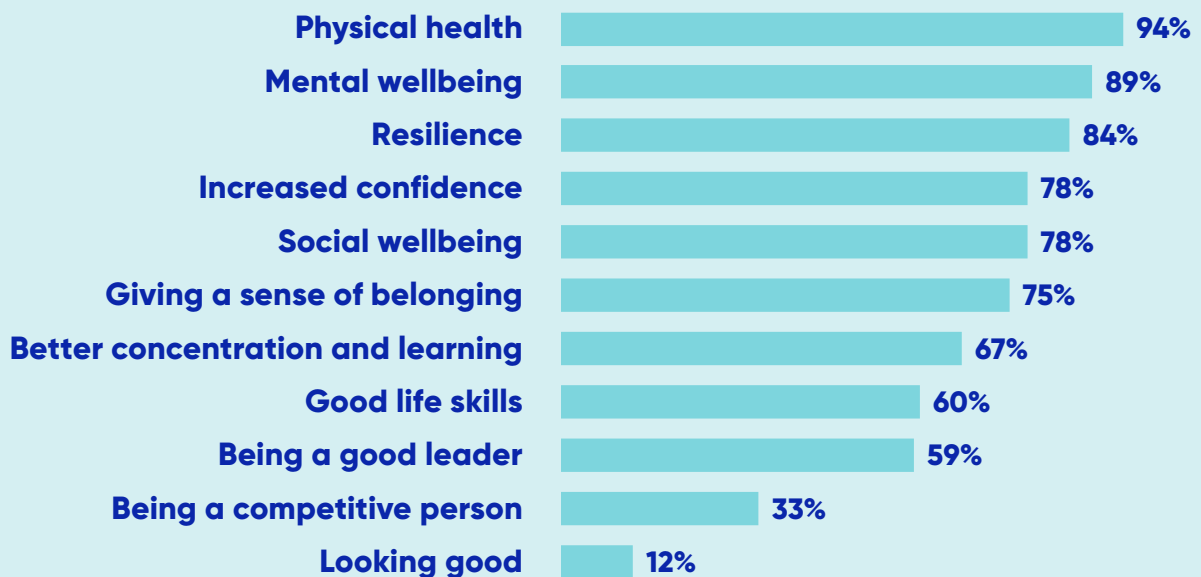


### Teachers' attitudes towards being active

#### What is the latest evidence?

Similarly to parents, teachers are aware of the benefits of sport and play for young people. In particular they identify the role that being active has on physical health, mental wellbeing, resilience, social wellbeing and increased confidence<sup>221</sup>.

#### How does sport and play help young people?



However, whilst two thirds of teachers (65%) correctly identified that schools are recommended to provide a minimum of 30 minutes of physical activity for children each day, only just over a third of teachers (36%) are aware that children aged 5-18 years old should be active for an average of 60 minutes per day overall<sup>222</sup>. Whilst this is a significant increase in awareness amongst teachers since last year (34%)<sup>223</sup>, it is still too low.

Despite the many challenges and barriers, there are several key adaptations to provision that schools can consider in order to increase access to physical activity opportunities for their young people.

## School level



### Opportunity for schools Active travel



Sport England's Active Lives data shows that active travel is the second most common physical activity for young people and this proportion has increased since last year<sup>224</sup>. 39% of parents would support their child's school promoting active travel to school in order to increase activity levels<sup>225</sup>. However, less than a third (32%) of teachers report that their school encourages active travel to school to support their pupils to be physically active<sup>226</sup>.

The Education Act for England 1996<sup>227</sup> states that local authorities must **promote the use of sustainable modes of travel to meet the school travel needs of their area** (i.c. section 508A). In December 2025, councils across England were given an additional £626 million in funding to help them deliver walking, wheeling and cycling schemes.

### Opportunity for schools Active Breakfast Clubs



The Government is investing a further £80 million between April 2026 and March 2027 to increase the number of school breakfast clubs, particularly in schools with more than 40% of students eligible for free school meals<sup>228</sup>. Systematic review evidence reported that breakfast consumption has a positive effect on cognition and that tasks requiring executive function and memory were facilitated more reliably by those who had eaten breakfast<sup>229</sup>.

36% of parents would support their child's school adopting an active breakfast club in order to increase activity levels<sup>230</sup>. However, only one in ten (11%) teachers report that providing an active breakfast club is something their school is doing to encourage pupils to be physically active<sup>231</sup>.

Following calls from Youth Sport Trust and other organisations for breakfast clubs to deliver enrichment activities including play and sport, the Government has recently launched a new process to explore how this can be delivered and where organisations can support schools<sup>232</sup>. This follows a change in Government guidance for schools on delivering breakfast clubs, which highlights the opportunity to deliver enrichment (including sports and physical activities) within these<sup>233</sup>.

## School level



### Opportunity for schools Active Uniforms



Global evidence suggests that in countries where young people are required to wear a school uniform, fewer young people meet the recommended physical activity levels<sup>234</sup>. Meanwhile, researchers in Australia found that changing school policy from a standard uniform to an 'active uniform' (one that enables young people to be physically active throughout the school day) led to significant improvements in physical activity levels in primary aged children<sup>235</sup>.

In England, just 17% of teachers report that encouraging an 'active uniform' is something their school is currently doing to encourage pupils to be physically active<sup>236</sup>. This is despite 55% of young people wanting to wear a different school uniform and trainers all day that allow them to be active<sup>237</sup>; 29% of young people report that an 'active uniform' would encourage them to do more sport or be more active<sup>238</sup>.

In 2025, Youth Sport Trust research with YouGov found that 74% of parents would support their child's school introducing an 'active uniform' in primary schools<sup>239</sup>.

Government guidance, also supported by recent recommendations from the Class of 2035 Commission<sup>240</sup>, for schools in England has recently been changed to recommend that schools consider how comfortable a school uniform may be and identifies that some schools have adopted 'active uniforms' to support schools to promote physical activity throughout the day<sup>241</sup>.

### Opportunity for schools Active learning



Physically active learning is 'the integration of movement within the delivery of academic content'<sup>242</sup>. Evidence from Italy demonstrates the benefits of physically active learning<sup>243</sup>. Recent evidence from the UK examined physically active mathematics lessons on the cognitive function of primary aged students<sup>244</sup>. They found that physically active lessons led to improvements in cognitive function and gross motor skills (movements that use the whole body) over a two-year period.

However, only 35% of primary teachers and just 6% of secondary teachers report that promoting active learning in classrooms is something that their school does to encourage pupils to be physically active<sup>245</sup>.

## School level



### Opportunity for schools Improving youth voice



There is a wealth of evidence demonstrating the benefits of youth voice on inclusion, engagement and autonomy. In particular, facilitating student voice in PE is known to ensure that PE is authentic and meaningful for young people. Feeling heard also helps to engage young people with school<sup>246</sup>.

Over three quarters (77%) of young people surveyed as part of the Youth Sport Trust Class of 2035 research agreed that they would like a say in which activities they do in PE and extra-curricular sports clubs<sup>247</sup>. This year, Sport England's Active Lives survey asked young people whether they felt their opinions are listened to by the adults that run and organise their sport and physical activity opportunities. They found that only a third (32%) of young people strongly agreed that they felt listened to. Strong agreement with this decreased with age and young people from the least affluent backgrounds and with more characteristics of inequality were least likely to strongly agree.

Equally, only 19% of teachers surveyed as part of the Youth Sport Trust annual teacher survey reported that they used youth voice to review their school's PE offer<sup>248</sup>. This was lower in secondary schools than primary schools (15% compared to 23%).



***Societal level***



## Societal level

### What do we already know?

There are several societal level factors that influence children's overall wellbeing, which must be considered when trying to understand the barriers and enablers to improving young people's engagement with PE, school sport and physical activity.

According to this year's Good Childhood Report from The Children's Society<sup>249</sup>, informed by youth voice, factors that impact young people's wellbeing the most include pressures at school, appearance, assumptions, stereotypes, and the influence of social media, as well as the overwhelming nature and content of news through social media. The remainder of this section will therefore focus on the societal level influence of digital devices and social media on young people.

### Digital displacement and social media

#### What is the latest evidence?

In today's society, screens and digital technologies are part of everyday life. Research from across the UK suggests high use of screens amongst young people. Latest data from a Government funded longitudinal cohort study, Children of the 2020s<sup>250</sup>, found that 98% of children aged 2 years old watched television, videos or other digital content on a typical day. Notably, new Government guidelines<sup>251</sup> recommend that children under 2 should avoid all screentime, other than for 'shared activities that encourage bonding, interaction and conversation'. For 2–5-year-olds, the new guidelines limit screentime to less than one hour per day.

The Youth Sport Trust Class of 2035<sup>252</sup> research also found that four in five young people aged 5–16 years say they own a laptop or smartphone device that connects to the internet that is just for them, 34% of young people reported spending at least three hours per day in front of a screen excluding schoolwork and 39% of young people prefer being online to being active. Global comparison evidence shows that 15-year-olds in the UK spend more time on their digital devices than the average OECD country<sup>253</sup>.

**34% of young people** reported spending at least 3 hours per day in front of a screen excluding schoolwork<sup>254</sup>

86% of parents, surveyed as part of the Youth Sport Trust annual parent survey, agreed that young people are spending too much time online and not enough time with each other in person, while nearly three in ten parents (28%) are concerned their child is addicted to social media<sup>255</sup>.



## Societal level

**Nearly two fifths of parents** believe that the internet negatively affects their child's health<sup>256</sup>. A quarter (26%) of young people agree that spending a lot of time online has a negative impact on their physical health<sup>257</sup>. **The majority (78%) of parents** also feel that parents using screens themselves a lot has a negative impact on their children and how active they are<sup>258</sup>.

**Over three quarters (77%) of parents** agree that digital distractions mean their children are spending less time being active<sup>259</sup>

The majority of parents (78%) would also support a ban on social media for children under 16. Parents of primary aged pupils were more likely to support a ban than parents of secondary aged pupils<sup>260</sup>. This is slightly higher than the general population, where 74% of adults reported they would support a ban on social media accounts for under 16-year-olds<sup>261</sup>. Indeed, the latest Good Childhood Report identified that high intensity use of social media appears to have a detrimental effect on children's wellbeing, but acknowledged that further research in this area is needed<sup>262</sup>.

**78% of parents** would support a ban on under 16s using social media<sup>263</sup>

Increasingly, use of screens has been linked to a lack of school readiness amongst younger children. The Children of the 2020s study found that 2-year-olds with higher screen time had lower vocabulary development and increased emotional and behavioural problems<sup>264</sup>. Equally, over half (52%) of reception teachers say children spending more than 2 hours per day on electronic devices is contributing to fewer children being ready for reception<sup>265</sup>.

The online world can, however, offer an opportunity to introduce young people to different sports and activities. 63% of parents feel that technology is important to help their child find out about new sports to try<sup>266</sup> and increasingly young people are using online resources to learn new sports skills (36%), discover different sports (27%) and use apps to support their health (24%)<sup>267</sup>. Nearly a quarter (24%) of young people say they are using devices to help them stay healthy<sup>268</sup>.

Nonetheless, time on screens can also take away from time being active. After school young people are most likely to spend time watching TV or being on their phone (54%) rather than playing outside (38%) or doing organised sports (30%)<sup>269</sup>. A recent Nuffield Foundation report also found that young women felt digital connections limited their playfulness and physical activity in their secondary school years<sup>270</sup>.



## Societal level

**39% of young people** also report that they prefer playing online than being active and 1 in 6 young people report to have stopped playing sport to remain online<sup>271</sup>

**77% of parents** agree that digital distractions mean their children are spending less time being active<sup>272</sup>, a significant increase from 70% last year<sup>273</sup> and 38% of parents agree that spending a lot of time online affects their child's physical health<sup>274</sup>

**One in six (17%) parents** also agree that their child has stopped doing exercise or sport because they are too busy on a screen<sup>275</sup> while 67% of parents believe that a ban on social media would increase children's physical activity levels<sup>276</sup>

**One in six (17%)** report that they have stopped playing sport to remain online<sup>277</sup>. This has increased from last year where just 12% of children reported this<sup>278</sup>. Therefore, more needs to be done to ensure that screens and social media are not becoming a barrier to young people achieving the recommended physical activity levels, and the potential positive uses of technology for activity are maximised.

## Mobile phone use in school

### What is the latest evidence?

In England, non-statutory guidance from the Department for Education recommends that all schools should be mobile phone free environments. The Education Secretary announced in January 2026 that schools in England should ban phones throughout the whole school day<sup>279</sup>, which has recently been extended to a legal ban on smartphones in schools in England. In Scotland, headteachers have government guidance to implement phone bans. Similarly in Wales, while there is no ban, headteachers also have the power to ban mobile phones in schools. Northern Ireland are considering a ban, with a report on a phone-free pilot scheme in schools due to be published soon.

Recent evidence certainly supports a ban on mobile phones in schools in England. Given a choice, 85% of teachers responding to a Teacher Tapp survey said that they would choose policies that would restrict phone use all day, including break and lunchtime and only 11% said they would allow them at break and lunchtime<sup>280</sup>.



## Societal level

Recent evidence has also demonstrated an increase in how many school leaders in England report that young people can bring their mobile phone to school but cannot access it during the school day<sup>281</sup>, with 53% of school leaders reporting this in May 2025. However, still a quarter of teachers (24%) in England surveyed as part of the Youth Sport Trust annual teacher survey identified mobile phones and social media as one of the top challenges their school is facing at the moment<sup>282</sup>.

46% of parents from across the UK believe that a ban on phones in school would increase their child's willingness to be physically active at break and lunchtimes, while 69% of teachers agree that when students have access to their mobile phones at break and lunchtime, they are less physically active<sup>283</sup>.

### Spotlight on new research:

Schools are spending over 100 hours per week managing phone use in schools<sup>284</sup>



Recent research conducted by the University of Birmingham explored the cost impact of mobile phone policies in schools and the impact on pupils' mental wellbeing. They compared schools with restrictive mobile phone policies to those with permissive mobile phone policies.

Their findings show that schools are spending a significant amount of time managing phone related behaviours. Whilst time spent was lower in schools with a restrictive policy, it still accounted for over 102 hours per week. This was compared with 108 hours per week in schools with permissive phone policies. School phone policies were not found to be associated with differences in pupil mental wellbeing or quality of life.



***Political level***



## Political level

### What is the latest?

Since the last PE and School Sport report was released, there has been significant policy change affecting PE and school sport. Many of these changes reflect ideas put forward in Youth Sport Trust's 2024 manifesto, released ahead of the election, and following advocacy efforts from across our sector. Key latest developments are discussed below.

The Government's response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review, in which they committed to revisiting the aims of compulsory PE across all four key stages to support the development of fundamental movement skills and participation in sport and physical activity, highlights the role of PE in supporting pupils' wellbeing and educational outcomes. The PE GCSE subject is also being reviewed to make sure the purpose is distinct from the Key Stage 4 curriculum. The updated PE curriculum is currently being redrafted, before being introduced as part of the rollout of the new national curriculum in schools from September 2028.

The response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review also highlighted an ambition for every school to provide a new core enrichment offer for all children, beyond the statutory curriculum. This will include enrichment across five themes: sport, civic engagement, arts and culture, nature and adventure, and life skills to build resilience and opportunity. In order to support schools to deliver this new offer, a new Enrichment Framework is expected to be published by the Department for Education by the end of the 2025/26 Academic Year.

To support changes across PE and school sport, in July 2025 the Prime Minister announced plans for new School Sports Partnerships, with an ambition to ensure all young people have equal access to high-quality sport and extracurricular activity. Procurement for a new national partner to deliver the PE and School Sport Partnership Network is expected to begin shortly, with its remit including to build strong partnerships between schools, local clubs and National Governing Bodies, and to ensure inclusive best practice is shared and adopted widely across all schools in England. This follows a recent announcement from the Department for Education confirming new levels of investment in PE and school sport, including for the new PE and School Sport Partnerships Network, funding for facilities, and the phasing out of the Primary PE and Sport Premium. Further information is expected in due course.



## Political level

Meanwhile, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport is providing £16.8m of grant funding to an organisation or consortium to deliver the Enrichment Expansion Programme, which aims to create support for schools to meet the Enrichment Framework. An ambition is to broker partnerships between school, enrichment providers and other key stakeholders to increase the number of young people accessing high-quality and varied enrichment offers, aligned to grant funding to approximately 400 schools to improve their overall enrichment offer. Notification of the successful applicant is expected in July 2026.

Schools' delivery of enrichment, including achieving the benchmarks within the new Enrichment Framework, are expected to be included in the Personal Development and Wellbeing area of the new Ofsted report cards from September 2026. Further information about a schools' enrichment offer is expected to be provided in new digital school profiles in the future, which are currently being piloted before a national rollout in September.

Elsewhere, recent changes to guidance provided by the Department for Education have highlighted ways to support participation in PE and school sport, as well as being more active across the school day. These include encouraging schools to design inclusive PE kit and offer a choice of items to improve comfort, and to consider adopting an Always Active uniform to allow pupils to move freely and promote physical activity throughout the school day.

In addition, as the rollout of free breakfast clubs in primary schools continues, guidance for school highlights the opportunity to link breakfast clubs with activities across a series of themes, including sports and physical activities. To support this, the Department recently announced a new Breakfast Clubs Enrichment Activities partnership opportunity, to help schools deliver a more active and enriching breakfast club offer.

At a broader school level, the Every Child Achieving and Thriving white paper sets out the Government's vision for education over the next decade, with targets for improvements in attendance, attainment and inclusion. Policy development across education can be expected to reflect the three broad themes unpinning the white paper: shifting the approach from narrow to broad, delivering inclusion, and improving attendance. Linked to the white paper are proposed SEND reforms, which include an ambition for more children to be educated in a local mainstream school. The Inclusion 2028 programme (funded by a grant from the Department for Education and delivered by a consortium led by Youth Sport Trust) shows PE and school sport can be powerful ways to include and support children with special educational needs and disabilities, and learnings from this programme can inform future policy development in this space.



## Political level

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act has now been passed, which includes the expansion of free breakfast clubs and a cap on the number of branded uniform items schools can require parents to purchase. During the passage of the Bill through Parliament, proposals for a new national wellbeing measurement programme for children and young people were debated, building on the Our Wellbeing, Our Voice campaign's work. Whilst in this instance a national wellbeing measurement programme was not included in amendments to the Bill, it may be an area of future focus with the majority of MPs (69%) and parents (63%) agreeing we need to measure young people's wellbeing.

The recently published Youth Matters National Youth Strategy includes a number of proposals to ensure more young people participate in high-quality sport and physical activity, including running a public-facing campaign to increase awareness of the importance of physical activity, and improving access to places and spaces to be active. This will include £400m being invested in new and updated grassroots community sports facilities, increasing access to outdoor spaces, expanding the Better Youth Spaces programme for/to existing and new youth facilities, and (through the Education Estates Strategy) creating new pathfinders to pilot how surplus spaces in the education strategy can be used flexibly for wider community needs, including access to physical activity.

Finally, the Government will soon respond to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee's Game On inquiry report. The Committee put forward a series of proposals for an increased role for PE and physical activity across the school week, improved PE kit and uniform to encourage physical activity, strengthened teacher training, greater accountability for usage of the Primary PE and Sport Premium, and increased investment on sport and recreation over the next decade aligned to a new cross-government strategy.

**69% of MPs agree** that we need to measure young people's wellbeing if we are going to improve it<sup>285</sup>

**63% of parents agree** that there should be an agreed way for the wellbeing of children to be measured<sup>286</sup>



## Political level

Examples of national policies and practice from other countries to endeavour to improve access to high-quality PE, sport and physical activity include:

### Highlighting International Practice<sup>287</sup>

#### Slovenia



In Slovenia, all communities must have accessible sport facilities, programs, and playgrounds available for public use, and they are legally obliged to provide co-funding and cooperate with local sports organizations.

### Highlighting International Practice<sup>288</sup>

#### Denmark



In Denmark, there are several national policies that support physical activity for children and adolescents across daycare, school, transport, city planning, leisure, and health policies. Danish legislation requires local municipalities to make facilities available for sports clubs and other voluntary associations and to provide financial support for activities for young people under the age of 25.

### Highlighting International Practice<sup>289</sup>

#### Finland



The 'Finnish Schools on the Move' programme aims to promote physical activity and reduce sedentary time across the school day. It does this by establishing a physically active operating culture in schools to strengthen schools' capacities to increase physical activity.

The programme has been shown to significantly increase moderate-vigorous physical activity across the school day, as well as significantly reduce sedentary time across the school day, though no changes in whole day moderate-vigorous physical activity were seen.



# *Conclusions*

# Conclusions



The fifth PE and School Sport Report published by the Youth Sport Trust summarises the latest research, evidence and insight from across the UK and internationally. In doing so, the report continues to demonstrate the role of physical activity including PE, school sport and play in solving the challenges that young people face today, including around physical health, mental wellbeing, social wellbeing and school outcomes and readiness. The report also collates evidence to summarise the barriers and enablers of participation for young people across different themes.

In summary, not enough young people across the UK are sufficiently active. Young people with particular characteristics of inequality, such as being a girl, from a low affluence family or from Black, Asian or 'Other' ethnicities are less likely to be active enough and those with two or more characteristics see their participation reduced further. Young people's health and wellbeing are suffering, with forecasted trajectories not looking positive.

Schools, which provide a universal access point for PE, sport and physical activity for young people, are under significant pressures. PE provides the building blocks of physical literacy, which in turn build life-long habits of being active, whilst travel to and from school, breaks during the school day and extra-curricular experiences are vital in providing opportunities to be active. However, many children never do sport or physical activity beyond PE, time for play and being active during break and lunchtimes in schools is being squeezed, the proportion of teaching hours dedicated to PE is falling and PE is by far the most cancelled subject. Just over half of teachers report that their school provides a minimum of 2 hours of PE a week, with provision lowest amongst schools in less affluent areas.

Despite being aware of the numerous benefits of PE, school sport and physical activity for young people, only just over a third of teachers and parents are aware that young people should be active for an average of 60 minutes per day. Young people are also generally positive about physical activity; they feel PE lessons are important and report that sport makes them feel better about themselves. However, beyond the physical benefits, they are less aware of the wider benefits of PE, school sport and physical activity, and including its role in supporting mental wellbeing or building life skills.

In a world where children and young people are facing significant pressures and challenges within education and when entering the workforce, it is especially important that we can communicate and demonstrate and provide access to the benefits of PE, school sport and physical activity beyond purely physical health, raising awareness of its role in supporting mental wellbeing and building social and essential life skills.

# Conclusions



Additionally, digital technology is displacing physical activity in children and young people's lives, with devastating impacts on health and wellbeing. A third of young people spend at least three hours per day in front of a screen, excluding schoolwork. Increasingly, use of screens has been linked to lack of school readiness amongst younger children, including reduced vocabulary development and increased emotional and behavioural problems.

Notable developments in policy change have the potential to turn the tide on many of the issues that this report highlights, including plans for a new PE curriculum, improved enrichment offer in schools and through the forthcoming PE and School Sport Partnerships Network. It is imperative these opportunities are grasped to give all young people access to high-quality opportunities.

As the Government considers its long-term ambitions for children's health and wellbeing, Youth Sport Trust's Class of 2035 research warned of the negative impacts if the trends of this concerning childhood crisis continue. Following a series of discussions and informed by data and experiences, the Class of 2035 Commission, chaired by Dr Paula Franklin and bringing together healthcare experts, published a set of recommendations designed to prioritise movement, play and sport to deliver the best outcomes for children and young people.

We hope the following recommendations from the Commissioners will help shape future policy and drive coordinated action across sectors:

- **Raise awareness** of the UK Chief Medical Officers' physical activity guidance for children among healthcare professionals
- **Strengthen** and expand the social prescribing pathway for children and young people
- **Deliver** a minimum amount of physical activity within every school and early years setting
- **Increase** skills and competence for staff in the PE and School Sport Network
- **Implement** a national wellbeing measurement programme for children and young people
- **Create** a national, cross-government Children and Young People's Physical Activity Strategy.



# ***Methodology and references***

## Methodology and research

This is the fifth 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 [www.youthsporttrust.org/research-listings/research](http://www.youthsporttrust.org/research-listings/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. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 4465 adults of which 1052 are parents who have children aged 18 and under. Fieldwork was undertaken between 2nd - 4th February 2026. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+). Where comparisons are made to 2025 data, all figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 4188 adults of which 1076 are parents who have children aged 18 and under. Fieldwork was undertaken between 20th - 24th February 2025. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

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 11,000 teachers questions each day and reweights the results to make them representative.

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

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