

Physical education and school sport

A guide for governing boards

September 2021



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National Governance Association

The National Governance Association (NGA) is the membership organisation for governors, trustees and clerks of state schools in England.

We are an independent, not-for-profit charity that aims to improve the educational standards and wellbeing of young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards and promoting high standards. We are expert leaders in school and trust governance, providing information, advice and guidance, professional development and e-learning.

We represent the views of governors, trustees and clerks at a national level and work closely with, and lobby, UK government and educational bodies.

Introduction

This guide is intended to support discussions between governing boards and school leaders about:

- making physical education (PE) a fundamental part of a curriculum that supports the educational vision for their school or trust
- how governing boards can influence and support the planning and delivery of PE as well as physical activity and sport and monitor the impact

PE helps pupils to become physically confident in a way which supports their health and fitness. [Research from Youth Sport Trust](#) has shown that PE, together with school sport and other physical activity, supports pupils' wider development including their mental health and social wellbeing. Effective delivery can offer opportunities rich in personal development – a key focal point of the current Ofsted framework – as well as creating opportunities for increased overall attainment.

Children's activity levels fell while schools were partially closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, physical activity should be central to school and trust development strategies and supporting post-pandemic recovery that focuses on the 'whole child'.

We encourage governing boards to take an active interest in their school or trust approach to PE, physical activity and sport. Boards should seek assurance that pupils develop **physical literacy**. This means pupils have:

- **motivation and confidence** – enthusiasm for, enjoyment of, and self-assurance in physical activity
- **physical competence** – the capacity to experience a variety of movement intensities and durations
- a foundation for engaging in physical activity **throughout their lives**

Youth Sport Trust

This guide has been produced in collaboration with [Youth Sport Trust](#) (YST), a children's charity, working to ensure every child enjoys the life-changing benefits that come from play and sport. Working together with partners, YST empower young people to achieve their own personal best and equip educators to change lives.

YST have developed a toolkit in collaboration with governors, trustees and sector bodies, for school governors to identify the importance of high-quality PE, school sport and physical activity in promoting and improving the health, wellbeing and wider educational outcomes of pupils in schools. The toolkit, available to [purchase from the YST website](#), provides a comprehensive set of questions for governors and trustees to use, a suggested timeline across the academic year and a series of best practice examples.

1. About physical education

PE is a compulsory part of the [national curriculum](#) for all key stages. The curriculum 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
- lead healthy, active lives

Pupils are expected to master basic movements (such as running and jumping) as well as developing balance, agility and co-ordination. They should advance to using and developing a variety of tactics and strategies to overcome opponents in team and individual games.

While academies and free schools don't have to follow the national curriculum, they are required to provide a broad and balanced curriculum that promotes the physical development of pupils.

Schools should not look to PE lessons alone to provide physical activity for pupils. YST highlight the importance of recognising PE, school sport and physical activity as three distinct strands:

- **PE:** the national curriculum subject
- **sport:** a game or competition needing physical effort and skill that is done according to the rules in which individuals or teams compete against each other
- **physical activity:** bodily movement that uses energy

The [School sport and activity action plan](#) sets out options schools should explore including lunchtime sports clubs, innovative activities such as active miles, and building activity into classroom lessons.

Each strand should be a valued feature of the curriculum and wider school life. While it is the role of school leaders to make detailed plans for delivering the curriculum, governing boards have a role in strategic discussions that ensure the curriculum responds to the needs of every child.

2. Understanding your provision

Governing boards will need to build an understanding of provision in their own setting to enable informed conversations and decision-making. Use the following prompts during discussions with school leaders to help you gain insight into your school's/trust's approach to PE, school sport and physical activity.

2.1 Is our provision inclusive?

All pupils should experience PE and school sport that engages them and meets their needs. Each school will face different challenges; governing boards will need to work together with school leaders to understand and engage pupils from various faiths and ethnic backgrounds, LGBTQ+ pupils, and those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in inspiring, accessible and meaningful PE and school sport.

YST have developed a range of [resources, advice and guidance](#) and some top tips for an inclusive PE offer, which include:

- **Consultation and engagement** with pupils and families – pupils with SEND can face particular and additional challenges to participating in high-quality PE, physical activity and sport at school.
- **Make it female friendly** – YST suggest that schools introduce more female instructors/leaders and consider single sex activities.
- Ensuring **kit and clothing** is cost effective and accessible. Does the style and cost of the PE kit present cultural and/or financial barriers? Alternatives such as full body swimwear and tracksuits instead of shorts may help to remove cultural barriers.
- **Communication** – social media platforms as well as community and faith-based centres can provide opportunities for schools to promote activities and raise awareness in a targeted way.

Girls Active case study

A [YST case study](#) shows how one school identified challenges in encouraging girls – particularly those of Muslim faith – to be physically active throughout their secondary school life. The school successfully introduced a broader programme of activity that was the result of proactive communication and consultation with pupils and parents.

2.2 Do our stakeholders help shape provision?

Some of the most powerful ways to improve participation in PE, school sport and physical activity involve engaging stakeholders and partners in developing the offer. Recommended methods include:

- Parental engagement such as workshops, consultations, forums and surveys – research tells us that parents have a significant influence on their child's achievement.
- Engagement with local community groups and schemes.
- Consultation with pupils to identify which sports they want to take part in, where and when – YST encourages schools to provide taster sessions.

The YST [Youth Voice toolkit](#) is designed to help pupils share their thoughts and feelings when it comes to PE and school sport.

2.3 Do we build partnerships?

Establishing links with partners can help schools enhance and expand their PE provision and access expertise in a cost-effective manner.

The government's [school sport and activity action plan](#) states that, outside of the school day, after-school clubs provide some of the best opportunities for children and young people to participate in sport and physical activity. Schools and external providers are encouraged to work in partnership to increase the provision of after school opportunities to engage in sport and physical activity.

PE and school sport partnerships may be developed between your school or trust and:

- professional PE/sport organisations and companies
- community organisations
- other schools, further education and higher education organisations

It is essential that all partnerships have a clear focus and that both parties agree the aims, roles and responsibilities that they have within it.

[Active partnerships](#) are strategic organisations that connect and collaborate with a wide range of local partners and can help to join-up school and community sport provision.

2.4 Do we invest in CPD?

High-quality provision requires investment in professional development to ensure that every pupil receives PE education that is tailored to their needs. Increasing the confidence, knowledge and skills of all staff teaching PE and school sport can lead to:

- the raised profile of PE and sport across the school as a tool for whole-school improvement
- a wider range of sports and activities being offered
- increased engagement in regular PE, sport and physical activity

NGA's guide to [CPD for school staff](#) highlights the need for governing boards to build an understanding of how the development needs of staff are assessed, opportunities identified and aligned with strategic priorities.

Access to high-quality CPD

The following organisations provide CPD and support for schools:

- [Youth Sport Trust](#)
 - [Association for Physical Education](#)
 - [Sport England](#)
 - [The Sport and Recreation Alliance](#)
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2.5 Do we use PE and Sport premium effectively? *(Primary schools only)*

PE and sport premium funding is provided to primary schools in England to make **additional and sustainable** improvements to the quality of provision. Schools may use the premium to develop or add to their existing offer and build capacity and capability. This may include:

- Providing staff with CPD opportunities, mentoring, appropriate training and resources.
- Partnering with external organisations or other schools to expand the range of sports and physical activities offered to all pupils and deepen the delivery of existing core PE.
- Breakfast and after-school clubs encouraging engagement in sport and physical activity.

PE and sport premium toolkit

YST provide a free [primary PE and sport premium toolkit](#) which details areas where boards should expect to see improvement where the premium is well utilised.

3. How boards can influence provision

There are many ways in which governing boards, working at a strategic level, can raise the status of PE and school sport and increase its impact.

3.1 Link PE and school sport to your vision and strategy

Ensuring clarity of vision is the first core function of every governing board. Identifying strategic goals for subject development, building the expertise and skills of staff, and linking them to outcomes in other areas – such as academic learning and behaviour – will have a demonstrable impact on achievement and wellbeing. It is strategy that sets direction, maintains focus and ensures continued improvement. NGA's guide to [Being Strategic](#) offers school leaders and governing boards a robust annual cycle for creating, monitoring and reviewing strategy.

3.2 Develop a PE and school sport policy

Where schools make PE and school sport a strategic priority, we recommend that school leaders develop a bespoke, written policy for PE that is inclusive of opportunities for sport and physical activity. A successful PE policy will make clear:

- the aims and objectives of the PE offer
- how it is delivered (including extra-curricular and opportunities outside school hours)
- the approach to recognising and addressing barriers to engagement
- how PE and sport funding will be used (in primary schools)

Integrated curriculum and finance planning

Read NGA's [guidance](#) on integrated curriculum and finance planning (ICFP) to understand how this collaborative approach works to develop the best curriculum with the resources available.

NGA Learning Link subscribers can also access an [ICFP e-learning module](#).

4. How to monitor progress, impact and outcomes

Governing boards are responsible for ensuring pupils receive a high-quality PE curriculum that inspires all pupils to succeed and excel in competitive sport and other physically demanding activities.

Progress and assessment data can help the governing board to evaluate the impact of PE provision, but this is by no means be the only measure. There will be other aspects of the whole school PE experience, including opportunities for physical activity and sport outside of the curriculum, that governing boards should consider. Sources of information could include:

Source	Description
Monitoring visits	<p>Visits to school allows governing boards to monitor relevant activity and key milestones linked to strategic priorities. This may include attending sport or stakeholder events or observing CPD, for example.</p> <p>Monitoring visits are also an opportunity to have focused discussions with subject leaders and other key staff members.</p>
Reports from senior executive leaders	<p>These reports provide an overview of progress made towards strategic priorities. This may include details of sporting events and competitions, extra-curricular activities and partnerships if these are relevant to your strategy.</p>
Case studies	<p>Case studies provide an opportunity for school leaders to highlight the impact of a whole school and holistic approach to PE on individual pupils or small groups that may not be readily visible in statistical data.</p>
Presentations from subject leads	<p>Presentations during governing board or committee meetings may be a helpful way for teachers to demonstrate the development of teaching and learning practice and its impact on pupils.</p>
Pupil voice, surveys and focus groups	<p>Listening to stakeholders is an essential part of measuring progress. Feedback from pupils may help governing boards to understand how the school/trust understands barriers to engagement in PE and whether these have been overcome.</p>
Data	<p>Data can be a useful and consistent measure of progress, particularly when combined with other sources. Examples of data include: progress measures, participation in extra-curricular activity, and the take-up-rate of relevant qualifications and attainment.</p> <p>Boards may benefit from looking at data from a range of cohorts and specific pupil types (such as disadvantaged pupils).</p>

4.1 Questions that governing boards can ask

The following are examples of the type of questions that governors and trustees might ask about PE, school sport and physical activity in their school or trust. Consider how you might use these examples to construct your own questions, specific to your context and the issue you are discussing.

- How does our school/trust ensure that the PE and extra-curricular offer is engaging and stretching for all pupils?
- How is PE inclusive and accessible to all pupils? (Consider culture, ethnicity, disability, faith, age, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity.)
- Do school/trust leaders have a good understanding of barriers to engagement and a plan in place to address these?
- How does PE, school sport and physical activity contribute to pupils' development of character, confidence and resilience? How is the progress captured?
- What strategies do we have for ensuring effective professional development for PE? How is this led and monitored?
- What quality assurance processes are in place for the provision of external providers and the impact of their delivery?
- How can PE, physical activity and school sport support COVID-19 recovery?

Further examples of questions are available within YST's [toolkit for governors and trustees](#).

NGA curriculum resources

Visit the NGA Knowledge Centre to explore more [curriculum resources](#), which include:

- [How to support and influence PSHE education](#)
 - [Arts, culture and creativity guides for governing boards](#)
 - [Relationships Education and Relationships and Sex Education \(RSE\)](#)
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Thank you for reading this guide. If you have any feedback you'd like to share, please email kcfeedback@nga.org.uk.

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