



**YOUTH
SPORT
TRUST**

Improving children and young people's wellbeing and achievement

*A manifesto for action shaped by leading
voices from education, sport, physical
activity and health and wellbeing*

Executive summary


The Youth Sport Trust passionately believes improving children and young people's wellbeing is a national priority.

Key to this is putting the child at the centre of our thinking and unlocking the potential of physical activity including PE, sport and play to develop happier, healthier and more successful children.¹

What we're doing currently is not working – too many children are inactive, and are unhappier, unhealthier and more distracted as a result.

This manifesto for action – developed in partnership with representative and leading voices in health and wellbeing, education, physical activity and sport – sets out how to build a system which drives the transformational change needed to give every child an active start in life.





To deliver for children and young people, we are calling for a new, long-term joined-up national plan guaranteeing every child access to the UK's Chief Medical Officers' guidance of **60 active minutes a day of moderate to vigorous physical activity** by creating a nation of active and well schools. This plan should:

- 1** **resource a dedicated coordination and delivery team** working across a family of schools in every community
- 2** **introduce a new national wellbeing measurement** for children, to track progress and target interventions
- 3** **protect and increase spaces for play and physical activity** in every locality, and provide co-curricular sport for all children
- 4** **reimagine Physical Education**, making it a core subject developing physically literate children, healthy learners and active citizens
- 5** **formalise existing youth sport leadership opportunities** into a national young sport volunteers programme delivering year-round social action

We are calling on the next government to prioritise the transition to this model by starting in the most disadvantaged areas first, demonstrating the impact and generating learning to inform national implementation.

About us



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

A future where every child enjoys the life-changing benefits of play and sport



Our mission

Equip educators and empower young people to build bright futures



Together

We create opportunities for everyone to belong and achieve



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Young people are important for not only the present but also the future - physical activity will benefit the physical and mental wellbeing of future leaders.

GREG STEVENS – YOUTH SPORT TRUST YOUTH BOARD

Foreword

Children and young people's physical, mental and social wellbeing are in crisis and require immediate, urgent action.

Increasing levels of physical activity is key to the response. We can develop healthier, happier and more successful children through a new national plan, guaranteeing every child access to 60 active minutes a day, putting physical activity at the heart of schools, communities and every stage of childhood.

In this manifesto for action, we put forward proposals to initiate the systemic change needed to improve outcomes and transform lives.


The ideas within are informed by contributions from more than a hundred organisations and individuals who have generously shared their insights, experiences and suggestions with us, to enable the development of a collaborative vision detailing how to use physical activity, PE, sport and play to improve wellbeing.

Contributors have included young people, teachers and school leaders, alongside representatives from youth, health and wellbeing, physical activity and sport organisations. We are grateful to all for their participation and support for this project. In this mission we are speaking with one voice and a shared determination to achieve change.

In recent years, interest and focus on children has been missing in policy making. At a time of great division, we are optimistic that this can be a unifying vision for those of all political colours and none. After all, we share a desire to create happier, healthier children – their future will define our nation's future. The onus is on all of us to match words with action.



Ali Oliver MBE
Chief Executive Officer
Youth Sport Trust



Too many children are inactive, creating a generation that is unhappier, unhealthier and more distracted than previous generations.

We can change this by equipping educators and empowering children and young people to improve their wellbeing.

Making progress begins with providing daily opportunities to be physically active and have fun.

This is crucial not only to help young people now, but for their development as the leaders of tomorrow.

This is a generation in urgent need of support. More of the same is not enough.

The time for change is now.



Abhishna Yogarajan
Chair
Youth Sport Trust Youth Board



A generation needing change

Children and young people are in the midst of a wellbeing crisis. Their physical, mental and social wellbeing are all in decline, leading to children being unhappier, unhealthier and more distracted than previous generations.



Unhappier

17.2%

of children aged **11-16 years old** with a probable mental health disorder had not exercised in the previous seven days, a level of inactivity four times higher than those unlikely to have a mental disorder (4.4%).²



Unhealthier

23.4%

of **Year 6 pupils in England** are classed as obese and rates of obesity are higher than before the pandemic.³



**More
distracted**

3 in 5

(62%) **parents** believe that digital distractions mean their children are spending less time being active.⁴

Physical activity – including PE, sport and play – brings a wide range of benefits that can improve wellbeing.



We have offered you the solutions and what we want to happen – you need to be the ones who make the change.

EMILY THOMPSON – YOUTH SPORT TRUST YOUTH BOARD

A young person who is physically active on a regular basis will have better:



Mental health

- > Happiness
- > Resilience
- > Equipped to tackle anxiety and stress



Physical health

- > Cardiovascular fitness
- > Healthy weight
- > Energy levels



Social wellbeing

- > Less lonely
- > More trusting
- > Improved communication and teamwork skills



Evidence also shows that **being physically active improves brain function**, including learning, memory and concentration.

By increasing physical activity levels, we can develop young people who are *happier, healthier, and ready to learn.*

Too many children are inactive

The UK's Chief Medical Officers recommend all children and young people aged 5-18 should **engage in moderate to vigorous physical activity for at least 60 minutes each day**, or at least 20 minutes each day for disabled children and young people. Toddlers and pre-school children should be active for 180 minutes per day.⁵

However, at present too many children are physically inactive.

LESS THAN HALF

47%



of all children and young people in the UK are meeting the UK's Chief Medical Officers' guidelines for being physically active.⁶

LESS THAN HALF

43%



of parents know that children should be active for at least **60 minutes or more a day**.⁷



47%

of parents say the cost-of-living crisis has had a negative impact on the number of opportunities their children have to be physically active and take part in sport.⁸

Being physically active is enjoyable, supports learning and is good for our NHS.

67%



of children say they would like to be more active in school. Low rates of physical activity are not because of a lack of enthusiasm.⁹

The UK would save more than

£1 billion

in healthcare spending linked to inactivity if it was as active as other European nations.¹¹



91%

of primary and

63%

of secondary aged pupils say being active helps them learn.¹⁰

We need to take action to match that enthusiasm and aspiration to be more active with opportunities, to guarantee all children access to **60 active minutes a day, through PE sport and play.**

Guaranteeing children 60 active minutes a day

The scale of the change needed requires a new, long-term, joined-up national plan guaranteeing every child access to at least 60 active minutes a day of moderate to vigorous physical activity as recommended by the UK's Chief Medical Officers, by creating a nation of active and well schools. This guarantee must include opportunities for at least 20 minutes of physical activity each day for disabled children and young people, and 180 minutes for toddlers and pre-school children.

Schools, care and education settings are the beating heart of communities and uniquely placed to reach every child. Building active and well schools in every area offers the most effective route to give all children an active start in life to protect their physical, mental and social wellbeing. Activity in schools should be aligned with community provision and participation, to embed daily opportunities to be active.

A new plan should build on the ambition of previous government strategies to develop and implement a comprehensive vision putting physical activity at the heart of every school and community. Key to success is better coordination across government departments, instilling a commitment to increasing children's activity levels to improve their wellbeing as a priority across Whitehall.

This requires long-term joined-up policy and funding. As a minimum, any investment or spending which creates opportunities for children to be physically active should be maintained in real terms over the next Parliament. Investment should be aligned to clear measurements and targets, establishing how success will be demonstrated to ensure accountability and transparency.

Integral to progress is a national campaign to raise awareness of the UK's Chief Medical Officers' guidance for children to be active for at least 60 minutes a day. Time is of the essence and urgent action is needed. A campaign highlighting how active children should be –



and why – should be targeted at different groups including children and young people, parents and carers, and teachers and schools.

However, activity levels will only increase if capacity and opportunities match demand. More of the same will not do, we need systemic change including interventions that span schools, families and communities and are tailored and targeted to reach every child. National leadership and ambition alongside local empowerment and support are needed now to develop a plan guaranteeing every child access to 60 active minutes a day.



A dedicated and coordinated delivery team

A plan to increase children's activity levels should maximise the unique position of schools. This should be underpinned by a dedicated coordination and delivery team working across families of schools, creating regular opportunities for play and physical activity including sport. When budgets are constrained, using networks to share ideas, develop new approaches and scale what works can deliver incremental, sustained progress.

This coordination and delivery team should collaborate nationally and be locally embedded to provide a cohesive and broad offer, tailored to the education landscape and shaped flexibly to respond to local needs. Resourced with a full-time workforce to drive delivery in every community of schools, this team can provide local coordination, creating opportunities to be active through partnerships with local clubs and providers. Informed by previous approaches, this infrastructure will provide capacity to develop active and well children.

Data should be used to prioritise investment and strategies towards those with the greatest need based on levels of deprivation and inactivity, informing place-based and community-led approaches. No child should miss out, with accessibility and inclusion at the forefront of every intervention.

Activity to further capitalise on the role of schools, care and education settings as community hubs and trusted institutions should make greater use of their facilities for play, physical activity and sport outside the school day. Local physical activity plans should maximise school and community facilities. Building on the Opening School Facilities programme delivered by Active Partnerships in collaboration with StreetGames, ukactive and the Youth Sport Trust, this is vital where participation is lowest or access to spaces limited. This should align to long-term capital investment in school facilities and put movement at the heart of education, before, during and after the school day and in school holidays.



We recommend

Resource a dedicated coordination and delivery team working across a family of schools in every community

Target resources towards the most under-served communities and lowest participating children

Support the development of active and well schools

Increase use of existing facilities to provide physical activity and sport outside the school day

Collaborate nationally to make the most effective practice, common practice

Did you know?

97%

of teachers believe sport and play is good for mental wellbeing.¹²

Measuring wellbeing to improve health and happiness

Children's wellbeing – physical, mental and social – is in crisis. Improving their wellbeing requires better measurement, to understand the scale of the challenge and make progress.

The introduction of a national wellbeing measurement for children and young people should be part of a broader focus on their needs at government level. The Children's Charities Coalition has called for a cross-government strategy for babies, children and young people to elevate their needs up the political agenda, backed by an outcomes framework. We are proud to add our voice to theirs.

Such a measurement would provide a wealth of data which is holistic and children centred to inform future investment and interventions. Not only would it help identify areas and communities needing support, but it would demonstrate the interventions having the greatest impact and encourage their implementation more widely.

School outcomes – including attainment, enjoyment and

attendance – all have the potential to be affected and improved by regular physical activity and the adoption of wellbeing principles. However, at present there is an absence of data and a domestic evidence base demonstrating this is the case. An investigation into domestic and international approaches which prioritise physical activity and wellbeing within schools should explore their impact on outcomes and inform future policy making.

Whilst many schools are already prioritising wellbeing, others need greater support to embed wellbeing principles. Progress requires engagement of teachers and school staff, empowering them to create change. National Professional Qualifications in education should highlight how wellbeing can be prioritised within and beyond the classroom in support of learning. This should be inclusive of physical activity and extend to topics such as nutrition, sleep and digital interaction, providing an education that equips children to manage their wellbeing effectively.



We recommend

Introduce a new national wellbeing measurement for children, to track progress and target interventions

Align a wellbeing measurement to a new cross-government strategy for babies, children and young people

Harness this data to inform future investment and interventions at a national and local level

Commission an investigation into the impact of physical activity and wellbeing on school outcomes

Use National Professional Qualifications to embed wellbeing principles and best practice across education

Did you know?

65%

of parents said pupil wellbeing was important when choosing a secondary school, ahead of location and other factors

Providing daily opportunities for physical activity, sport and play

Every child should have access to regular opportunities for play and physical activity in their local area, as well as guaranteed opportunities to participate in co-curricular sport, helping them achieve at least 60 active minutes a day.

All children should have sufficient time, places and spaces where they can play freely and have fun, supporting socialisation and creativity. Play England has called for legislation to introduce play sufficiency across England, replicating and building upon approaches in Scotland and Wales – we wholeheartedly echo that call. By creating a duty for local authorities to provide sufficient play and recreation opportunities in every community alongside a properly equipped workforce and high-quality provision, this approach would guarantee play for every child.

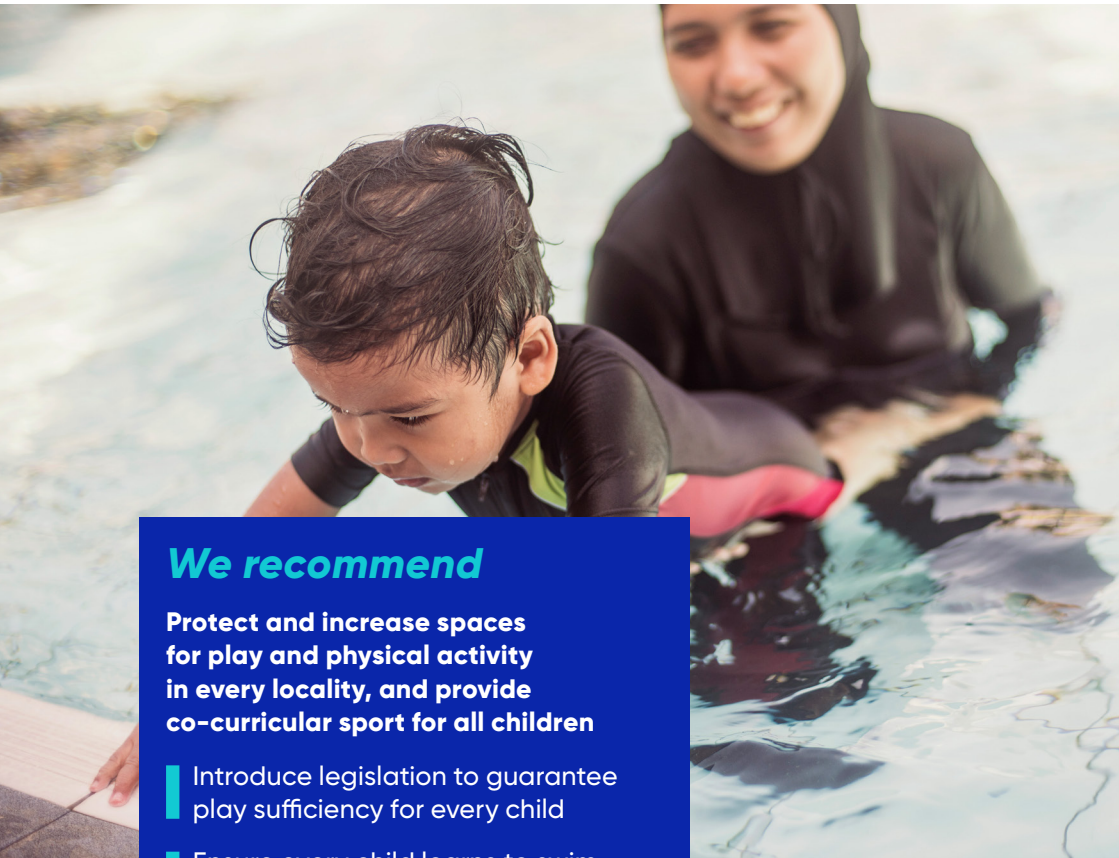
Being physically active contributes to the development of critical skills for life, and this extends to swimming and water safety. Primary schools must be supported to provide

swimming and water safety provision so every child has the opportunity to learn how to swim and know how to be safe in, on and around water.

We must also create active communities and citizens for the future. Planning policy should be driven by active design principles to make being physically active a part of everyone's life, with young people given a voice, including by informing local physical activity plans.

As with access to play, access to co-curricular activities and sport varies across different communities and groups.

Every child should have the opportunity to discover physical activities they enjoy, through guaranteed access to free after school activities and sport every week, encouraging physical activity and the chance to try a range of activities. This sort of wrap around provision could help in tackling issues such as antisocial behaviour, gang crime and childcare for working parents between 3–6pm.



We recommend

Protect and increase spaces for play and physical activity in every locality, and provide co-curricular sport for all children

Introduce legislation to guarantee play sufficiency for every child

Ensure every child learns to swim and understand water safety by the time they leave primary school

Prioritise active design principles and include youth voices within future development

Guarantee all children free access to after school activities and sport every week and opportunities to be active within wraparound care and co-curricular provision

Did you know?

JUST

27%

of children say they regularly play outside their homes, compared to 71% of the baby boomer generation.¹³

Elevating the role of PE in schools

Physical Education (PE) should be at the core of schools and the curriculum to develop physically literate children, healthy learners and active citizens, facilitate positive relationships with movement and support regular physical activity.

Physical development starts early and too many children are behind before starting school. Every child aged 0–5 should be empowered to achieve the recommended amount of physical activity, enabled to explore the world and learn through movement and play. Early years educators must be supported through training, with physical activity and play developing the whole child integrated into daily routines from an early age.

Upon starting school, every child should access two hours of high-quality, inclusive PE each week. Post the global pandemic, we must acknowledge the challenges faced by a generation – making PE a core subject, as recommended by the Association for Physical Education Task Force, is a bold and positive response to this. Through a reimagined

curriculum, the legacy of lockdown can be tackled.

Teachers must be supported to deliver PE at every age and stage of education through improved initial training. A comprehensive PE teacher training programme should embed a new vision for PE linked to wellbeing and include specific training in disability, ethnicity, gender stereotyping and female biology, alongside a commitment to using PE to educate on societal issues. This requires increasing the amount of training for primary school teachers, alongside a reassessment of training at secondary school level to align it to experiences and outcomes.

In addition, there should be a new system to demonstrate and recognise development through PE. The lack of assessment, benchmarking and acknowledgement of progress contributes to PE being regarded as a lower priority. Highlighting what is gained through PE, including the development of physical literacy, would increase its value to parents and students, elevating the status of PE further.



As a country we are divided by distance, class, race, gender, sexuality, religion – and yet sport is able to bridge every one of these divides if given the chance.

AMANI KOHLER
YOUTH SPORT TRUST YOUTH BOARD

We recommend

Reimagine Physical Education, making it a core subject developing physically literate children, healthy learners and active citizens

Support early years care and education settings to enable children under 5 to achieve the UK's Chief Medical Officers' guidance for physical activity

Make PE a core subject on the national curriculum giving every child two hours a week

Implement a comprehensive PE teacher training programme to reimagine the experiences and outcomes of PE

Introduce a recognition scheme to reward and evidence physical and personal development in and through PE



Did you know?

12%

In England, PE hours have fallen by 12% in the past decade.¹⁴

Empowering young volunteers and leaders through sport

Aiming to build on and enhance existing opportunities, government should formalise youth sport leadership through a national young sport volunteers programmes.

As well as developing active citizens and supporting year-round delivery of social action inside and outside schools, this would further unlock the potential of sport to provide access to skills and support the civic duty of schools and trusts. This national programme would also build a pipeline of volunteers to power community sport now and for the future. It should be developed alongside a national reward and recognition scheme offering currency and value to young people.

The development of skills such as leadership, teamwork and communication can be naturally fostered through PE. At present, this is not included within the aims of the curriculum. Explicitly referencing skills gained through participation on the PE curriculum would demonstrate its importance, codifying the

strong bond between PE and skills development, including how this supports employability.

The proposed coordination and delivery team should embed opportunities for development. Recent years have seen the growth of PE and School Sport Apprenticeships, offering a natural progression from youth sport leadership and volunteering. Increasing high-quality, skilled apprenticeships within the delivery of school sport and physical activity offers a route for young people with a passion for sport to inspire others, supporting employability and acting as a catalyst to improve the diversity and representation of the workforce.

Finally, young people must be empowered to shape their present and future. This should include a greater role for the National Youth Sport Forum in developing policy. This model should be reflected to shape local delivery plans and ensure leaders are held to account, and as a general principle all youth-oriented activities should be led or informed by youth voice.



We recommend

Formalise existing youth sport leadership opportunities into a national young sports volunteers programme delivering year-round social action

- Include the development of leadership, teamwork and life skills within the curriculum for PE
- Build on existing reward and recognition of youth volunteering in sport at a national level
- Provide high-quality skilled apprenticeships within each of the local coordination and delivery teams
- Formalise the role of the National Youth Sport Forum and include youth voice at every level

Did you know?

94%

of Gen Z (16-24s) would consider volunteering, more than any other age group.¹⁵

References

1 – The Youth Sport Trust is a proud member of the National Sector Partners Group. Find out more about our work to unlock the potential of the sport, recreation and physical activity sector: www.sportandrecreation.org.uk/policy/research-publications/unlocking-the-potential

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