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Impact of Coronavirus on school swimming and water safety

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Foreword



Catherine West MP

Member of Parliament for Hornsey and Wood Green
Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Swimming

Swimming and Water Safety is a vital life skill that every child should have.

Aside from the numerous health and wellbeing benefits of swimming, it is no exaggeration to say that learning how to swim, and about the importance of water safety, are skills that could one day save a life.

With drowning sadly remaining one of the most common causes of accidental death in the UK, this is more important than ever.

Covid has hugely impacted on every facet of our children's education and placed pressures on schools and teachers up and down the country. With pools closed for much of 2020, school swimming and water safety is no different and this report highlights the impact Covid has had on school swimming and water safety attainment levels.

As Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Swimming, I passionately believe that all children should have the opportunity to learn these skills. Even before Covid we were seeing some worrying inequalities between the outcomes for black children and children from other ethnically diverse communities, as well as children from less affluent families.

We must all work hard to eliminate these inequalities and that we make sure that every child is leaving school set up to enjoy the water safely for the rest of their lives.

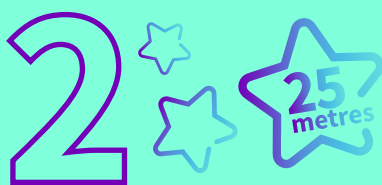
Current state of school swimming

The National Curriculum states that all schools must provide swimming instruction either in key stage 1 or key stage 2.

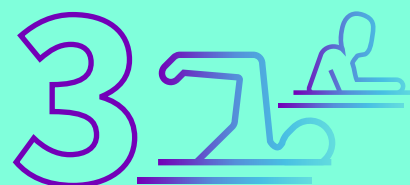
In particular, pupils should be taught to:



Perform safe self-rescue in different water-based situations.



Swim competently, confidently and proficiently over a distance of at least 25 metres.



Use a range of strokes effectively, for example front crawl, backstroke and breaststroke.

Despite this, even before Covid, almost one in four children could not swim the statutory 25 metres when they left primary school.

With schools having returned to face to face learning, DfE operational guidance to schools advises that they should “Teach an ambitious and broad curriculum in all subjects.¹ However, concerns remain that foundation subjects may be squeezed as schools focus on core subjects.

The PE and sport premium provides primary schools with £320m of government funding to make additional and sustainable improvements to the quality of the PE, physical activity and sport offered through their core budgets. It is allocated directly to schools.

The Department for Education relaxed the ring-fencing arrangements for the PE and sport premium in the 2019 /20 academic year to allow any unspent grant to be carried forward into the 2020/21 academic year.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/schools-coronavirus-covid-19-operational-guidance#curriculum>



Impact of Covid

With pupils not receiving face-to-face learning for a significant part of the 2020-21 academic year school swimming lessons were inevitably massively affected.

Additionally, even when schools were 'open', public swimming pools across the country were shut, meaning that for schools without their own pool, it was not possible for lessons to take place.

By looking at the latest *Active Lives* participation data for children we can begin to understand the impact of Covid on participation.

Impact to the 2020/21 academic year

1.88 million children

across all year groups will have missed out on swimming participation throughout the 2020/21 academic year.

Primary school aged children missed out on most of the swimming participation with **1.5 million children** missing out. Years 1 and 2 will suffer the most with over 700,000 children in these year groups missing out on participation.²



240,000 fewer children
will be able to swim 25 metres by the end of the 2020/21 academic year.

An estimated 4.61 million children were able to swim 25 metres in 2019/20, now that number is estimated to fall to **4.37 million** in the 2020/21 academic year.

- In 2019/20, the overall percentage of children in primary school able to swim 25 metres was 64%. In 2020/21 this is predicted to fall to 61%.
- In 2019/20, 77% of children left primary school (children in year 7) able to swim 25 metres. In 2020/21 this is predicted to fall to 75%.

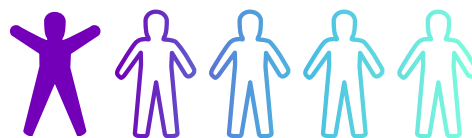
² See Appendix, Table 1.

Impact to the 2019/20 academic year

247,000

missed out on swimming participation during the summer term of the 2019/20 academic year.

Active Lives indicates that **59,000** children participated in swimming during the summer term, and based on the average participation of the autumn and spring terms, **307,000** children would have participated if no restrictions had been put in place during the summer term.



That's less than 1 in 5 children going swimming in the summer term.

- Around 56% of these children were in years 1 and 2. The impact of the summer term restrictions has disproportionately impacted the lower year groups as this is where participation is most common and ability is traditionally lowest.

50,000 children

are now **unable to swim 25 metres** that would have been able if they had participated in swimming during the summer term of 2019/20.

A photograph of a swimmer in a pool, wearing a white swim cap and goggles, swimming towards the right. The water is clear and blue, with some bubbles visible. The swimmer's arms are extended forward, and their head is above water.

Future Impact

Assuming that participation will return to normal at the start of the 2021/22 academic year and no additional top-up lessons will be provided to the affected school children, then we can see a real danger of a lost generation of swimmers. In particular, those who are currently in years 1 and 2 will have a significantly lower attainment level than their predecessors.

This would see almost

1.2 million children leaving primary school over the next five years unable to swim.³

³ See Appendix, Table 2.

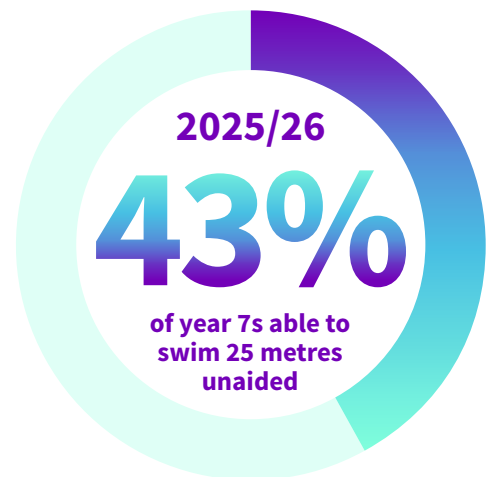
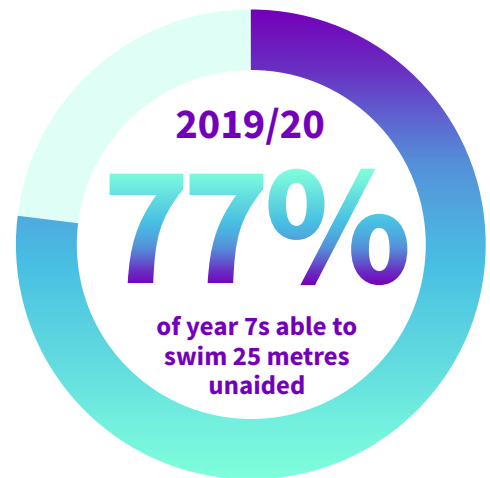
The impact on ability will have a larger impact on **younger children**.

- In five years' time projections based on previous attainment rates year on year, show that only 43% of children in year 7, the current year 2s, will be able to swim 25 metres unaided.
- Based on projected pupil population estimates, this equates to 282,000 children in year 7 able to swim 25 metres. This would be around 235,000 fewer children able to do so compared to the last reported total of year 7s in the 2019/20 academic year.

These children are in urgent need of swimming lessons and general swimming participation or else we will see a huge knock-on effect to their ability that could continue into adulthood.

Overall, in five years' time, **52% of children across all year groups will be able to swim 25 metres, down from 64% in 2019/20.**

- 2019/20: 4.61 million children are estimated to be able to swim 25 metres. Based on these projections and projected population estimates, this falls by just under 900,000 to 3.72 million in the 2025/26 academic year.



64% 2019/20



52% 2025/26





Tackling inequalities

Before Covid, we already saw inequalities in school swimming and water safety attainment levels, with **47%** of children from the least affluent families able to swim 25 metres in year 7.

Impact on children in most deprived areas of England

Of the 1.88 million children estimated to have missed out on swimming participation, an estimated **411,000** of these children live in the most deprived areas of England.⁴

By the end of the 2020/21 academic year, **54%** of children living in the most deprived areas of England be able to swim 25 metres. In comparison, 68% of children living in the least deprived areas will be able to do so.

In five years' time, children in year 7 in the most deprived areas of England, only 35% will be able to swim 25 metres. In comparison, 77% of children in year 7 living in the least deprived areas will be able to swim 25 metres.

35% Most deprived



77% Least deprived



As with other audiences or groups that this analysis looked at, years 1 and 2 of the 2020/21 academic year are the main driver for this drop as it's crucial these age groups begin learning to swim at their age.

⁴ Most deprived refers to the most deprived 30%, so children living in the bottom three deciles of deprivation (IMD 1, 2 & 3). The least deprived refers to the opposite.

Impact on children of Black, Asian and other minority ethnic groups in England

Of the 1.88 million children estimated to have missed out on swimming participation, an estimated **532,000** of these children come from ethnically diverse communities.

- This figure shows that children from Black, Asian and other ethnically diverse communities have been disproportionately impacted. This figure is 28% of the total, more than double the proportion of UK population that is from diverse ethnic communities.

By the end of the 2020/21 academic year, **51%** of children from diverse ethnic communities in England be able to swim 25 metres. In comparison, **66%** of White British children will be able to do so.

- This follows the same historical trend that children from diverse ethnic communities are less likely to be able to swim 25 metres when compared to White British children.

In five years' time, children from Black, Asian and other diverse ethnic communities, only 33% will be able to swim 25 metres. In comparison, 49% of White British children in year 7 will be able to swim 25 metres.

33% Diverse ethnic communities



49% White British



What needs to happen?

Schools, in amongst the myriad of other priorities now that face to face learning has resumed, should recognise the importance of teaching their pupils how to swim and be safe in the water, and the benefits of these skills for a child's all round development.

It is vital that pupils who missed out on school swimming and water safety lessons as a result of the disruption caused by the pandemic have the opportunity to catch up.

Schools should use the PE premium to improve their school swimming and water safety attainment levels.

In particular schools should:

- Run catch up sessions for pupils that missed out on lessons due to the pandemic.
- Run holiday clubs targeted at pupils who are not meeting the curriculum requirements.
- Ensure there is a good sharing of information when pupils move from primary to secondary school.
- Publish their school swimming and water safety attainment levels.

The Government should make PE a core subject in the National Curriculum.

- Government, both national and local, must provide adequate investment in swimming facilities to improve access to water.

For parents who are able to, they should:

- Complement school swimming sessions by enrolling their child on to swimming lessons or family swim sessions.

What support is there for schools?

Curriculum Swimming and Water Safety Resource Pack

Developed by the Swim Group on behalf of the Department for Education. These free packs provide practical guidance on how to plan, deliver and report on curriculum swimming and water safety.

Swim England School Swimming Charter

By becoming a charter school, schools can access support materials for schools and lesson providers to help make the most of their swimming and water safety lessons.

National Curriculum Training Programme

To ensure school staff are confident in delivering school swimming and water safety lessons.

Advice on using the Primary PE and Sport Premium

For swimming and water safety, and how to report on attainment figures.

Inclusion Hub

Top tips, resources, case studies and programmes from the Youth Sport Trust to help engage all young people in school sport activities.

Appendix

Impact to the 2020/21 academic year

Table 1

School year	Missed swimming participation	% split of total missed participation
Year 1	360,300	19.2%
Year 2	348,300	18.6%
Year 3	216,600	11.5%
Year 4	239,100	12.7%
Year 5	190,600	10.2%
Year 6	140,400	7.5%
Year 7	115,500	6.2%
Year 8	96,400	5.1%
Year 9	71,600	3.8%
Year 10	53,400	2.8%
Year 11	45,000	2.4%
Total	1,877,300	

Future impact

Table 2

Academic year	Year 7s (having left Primary school unable to swim 25 metres)
2021/22	175,058
2022/23	181,446
2023/24	222,506
2024/25	233,368
2025/26	374,177
Total	1,186,555

Forecasting Tables

*Calculated using growth rates of ability in previous years, assumes participation will resume as normal from 21/22 onwards.

Table 3

% - Complete forecasting using AAGR (2)									
	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25	25/26
Year 1	0.24	0.29	0.21	0.13	0.16	0.19	0.24	0.29	0.35
Year 2	0.42	0.42	0.37	0.25	0.20	0.24	0.30	0.36	0.44
Year 3	0.52	0.52	0.52	0.46	0.31	0.25	0.30	0.37	0.45
Year 4	0.62	0.62	0.56	0.54	0.52	0.35	0.28	0.34	0.42
Year 5	0.70	0.70	0.72	0.67	0.62	0.59	0.39	0.32	0.39
Year 6	0.75	0.76	0.74	0.72	0.71	0.66	0.63	0.42	0.33
Year 7	0.77	0.78	0.77	0.75	0.74	0.74	0.68	0.65	0.43
Year 8	0.80	0.79	0.80	0.78	0.77	0.76	0.75	0.69	0.66
Year 9	0.80	0.79	0.80	0.78	0.78	0.77	0.76	0.75	0.69
Year 10	0.81	0.80	0.81	0.80	0.79	0.79	0.78	0.77	0.76
Year 11	0.81	0.80	0.81	0.80	0.80	0.79	0.78	0.77	0.76
Overall	0.65	0.65	0.64	0.61	0.58	0.56	0.54	0.52	0.52

Table 4

Population estimates									
	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	24/25	25/26
Year 1	161,000	191,300	139,700	84,600	103,900	123,300	146,100	173,200	212,500
Year 2	288,700	289,300	248,900	161,800	130,900	160,800	190,900	226,100	268,100
Year 3	352,500	358,000	355,600	306,600	199,500	161,500	198,300	235,400	278,900
Year 4	414,200	419,400	385,100	370,600	347,000	225,800	182,800	224,400	266,400
Year 5	462,200	460,300	474,400	453,100	415,900	389,600	253,600	205,200	251,900
Year 6	475,700	496,800	484,600	477,600	482,500	442,800	414,900	270,000	214,500
Year 7	482,100	507,400	517,800	500,800	502,600	507,500	465,600	436,100	282,000
Year 8	495,200	495,000	520,200	524,000	514,000	515,800	520,700	477,600	445,300
Year 9	485,400	488,600	499,900	506,200	522,900	513,000	514,600	519,400	472,400
Year 10	478,700	485,500	496,700	499,900	509,800	526,500	516,400	517,900	521,300
Year 11	453,100	465,700	488,400	485,300	493,300	502,900	519,300	509,200	508,800
Overall	4,548,600	4,657,300	4,611,300	4,370,400	4,222,400	4,069,500	3,923,000	3,794,600	3,722,100