

afPE Health and Safety Update – April 2024

School Swimming

School swimming

For this month's member newsletter we have decided to provide a timely reminder on the importance of learning to swim at school, and a focus on the recently introduced 9 suggested outcomes to support water safety and minimum standards for school swimming.

Sadly, drowning is still the third most common cause of accidental death in children. Along with all organisations involved in developing swimming and water safety, we believe all children should have the opportunity to learn how to swim and be taught how to stay safe in and around water.

In 2022, The Royal Lifesaving Society UK reported that there was a 46% increase in the number of accidental fatalities among children, compared to the 5-year average. 35 accidental child fatalities were reported – meaning the equivalent of a classroom of children drowned in 2022. The drowning burden across the UK has been considered a significant public health challenge.

School swimming and water safety are embedded in the school curriculum to support every child to access critical lifesaving knowledge and encourage participation in a variety of water-based sports and activities. It is likely that for some children accessing swimming at school may be their only opportunity to learn swimming and water safety skills. Without this access, some children will move through adolescence and into adulthood without this lifesaving knowledge and the opportunities it may afford them.

The Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK) continues to help reduce the number of lives lost to drowning. They continue to share their expertise and knowledge with as many people as possible, giving everyone the potential to save lives and enjoy water, safely.

Schools are encouraged to consider methods to ensure all children access this area of the curriculum. Engagement with swimming tuition and water safety education differs widely across the UK. Worryingly there is a particular disparity for those from low-income and ethnically diverse family groups. The 2022 Active Lives Survey shows that only 34.7% of children from less affluent families can swim 25m unaided, compared to 76.4% of children from high-income families. This means that children from low-affluence families are half as likely to be able to swim 25m unaided. There are similar observations when comparing white children vs children from ethnically diverse families.

There is unfortunately direct correlation between school swimming data and drowning data. The National Child Mortality Database (NCMD) has confirmed that the risk of drowning is twice as great for children from the more deprived areas of England, compared to those from the least deprived. Children of Black ethnicity are three and a half times more likely to drown compared to children of

white ethnicity, highlighting the importance of this curriculum area and the need to ensure every child no matter their ethnicity or socioeconomic status has access to quality tuition.

The RLSS have several packages schools can access, including a water safety accreditation program - [Water Smart Schools \(rlss.org.uk\)](http://rlss.org.uk)

Primary School Swimming and Water Safety

As a national curriculum subject, local authority-maintained schools must provide **free** swimming lessons to all pupils. Costs, including those associated with facilities, swimming teachers and transport, should come out of the core budget.

Primary schools can choose when they hold their swimming lessons and how often. These lessons must support **every** child regardless of their swimming ability.

For some young people, primary school might be the only opportunity they have to learn these important life-enhancing and potentially life-saving skills. This means that schools should ensure **all** young people reach the required standards before they finish Year 6, including providing additional lessons (often called top up swimming) to those pupils not meeting national curriculum requirements.

Water safety and the minimum standards for school swimming

In August 2023, Swim England worked alongside the STA to create a nine-point plan to help clarify national curriculum guidelines around performing safe self-rescue in different water-based situations.

They have produced the outcomes to clearly define what minimum standards are required in school swimming and water safety lessons.

The Department for Education has confirmed that there is no intention to alter the national curriculum requirements for school swimming.

Pupils currently are expected to complete three elements by the time they leave Year Six – be able to swim competently, confidently and proficiently over a distance of 25 metres, using a range of strokes effectively and perform safe self-rescue in different water-based situations.

While two of the outcomes are clearly defined, arguably the most important factor around self-rescue can be interpreted in different ways.

Swim England and the STA have published a number of skills to provide clarity and consistency for teachers and parents and ensure the desired protective effect is met.

The nine suggested outcomes, which should be completed by pupils in sequence in full reach depth water, are:

1. Fall-in entry and recover to surface
2. Float on the back with minimal movement for 60 seconds without floatation equipment
3. Rotate from floating on the back to a vertical position
4. Tread water for 30 seconds
5. Whilst treading water, signal for help once, by extending one arm above the head and simultaneously shouting for help then returning the arm to the water to continue to tread water
6. Swim (without floatation equipment) 15m to a floating object, using a recognised personal survival stroke (head up long arm front paddle or lifesaving backstroke)
7. Retaining the floating object take up the heat escape lessening position/posture for 30 seconds
8. Form a huddle position as a group for 30 seconds
9. Swim 15m to exit the water unaided

The outcomes also include possible reasonable adjustments for shallow water and physical impairments.

Support for primary schools

There are lots of resources to help primary schools deliver swimming and water safety lessons. There is also information for pool operators, lesson providers and parents.

Key resources:

- **Curriculum Swimming and Water Safety Resource pack**
Developed by the Swim Group on behalf of the Department for Education.
- **Swim England School Swimming Charter**
Support materials for schools and lesson providers to help you make the most of your 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** and information about the Inclusion 2024 project

Best Wishes,

The afPE Health and Safety Team