



# Members Health & Safety Update

**March 2026**

## **A Message from the afPE H&S Team:**

We are often asked questions about the **supervision of school swimming** so below we have put together a checklist for schools to consider when planning and delivering their curriculum swimming offer.

We have also added a section on **goggles** as the wearing of these is also a frequently asked question.

Effective school swimming delivery happens when the purpose, expectations and outcomes are understood by all those involved

## **Key stakeholders:**

- The Pool Operator
- School staff
- Swimming teachers
- Parents/carers and students

Are staffing levels sufficient for supervision?	
Do staff know their roles and responsibilities?	
Do school staff have a clear role for the session	
Do they understand the limits of their role?	
Are they confident on the poolside? This may involve supporting pupil progress by working alongside them in the water.	
Do they communicate effectively and appropriately with the other adults on safety issues?	
Do they regularly carry out head counts during, as well as at the beginning and end of, sessions?	
Do they know, understand and be able to apply the pool normal operating procedures (NOPs)?	
Are school staff suitably dressed for the role they are to play in the lesson?	
Do staff have adequate group-management and leadership skills and knowledge of the group (e.g. for students with SEND)?	
Do staff have any of the activity specific skills required?	
Have student size, experience and ability been considered in the selection process?	
Do staff: student ratios reflect the needs of the students?	
Is a group register available? Has it been taken to the pool?	
Are medical backgrounds known by the staff involved? Where appropriate, are these shared with the swimming teacher prior to session 1 commencing?	
Is clothing appropriate and swimwear is fit for purpose?	
If pool provider staff are assisting you with some aspect of changing facility supervision, roles and procedures need to be shared between both parties to ensure shared understanding.	
<b>Travel:</b>	
Does the form of transport chosen meet legal and employer requirements, including?	
Do the staff team on the transport have the necessary discipline and control standards to manage the group needs	

Are the register and head count consistent before setting out on journey?	
Are embarkation and disembarkation points safe?	
Are the emergency action plan and critical incident arrangements known?	
<b>At the pool venue:</b>	
Is acceptable behaviour assured?	
Are periodic head counts carried out?	
Are facilities and supervision appropriate?	
Ensure the changing rooms are adequately supervised. Any arrangements which involve the deployment of pool staff to support the school with supervision needs to be assured and consistent.	
Have personal effects been removed for the session?	
Is the emergency action plan clear, and has it been communicated to all staff involved and to students?	
Who has been assigned the role of counting the students out of the pool and off the poolside? Staff should walk around the pool at the end of each aquatics lesson to ensure that all areas are clear of students.	
Are all students aware of the necessary procedures? Learning the importance of taking increasing responsibility, for personal safety routines, including: reporting any illness and responding immediately to all instructions.	
<b>Evaluation of Programme:</b>	
Are there any near misses/incidents to review?	
Have injuries been recorded and the outcome followed up?	
Can any improvements be made for the next session?	
Is any feedback necessary to head teacher (HT)/subject leader (SL)/staff/activity leaders/students/ parents?	
Are any adjustments to the planning necessary to inform/ improve future sessions	
How is student progress reported?	

## Swimming Goggles

Within short curriculum swimming lessons (typically 20–25 minutes' water time) for beginners, or for single, short races in school galas, goggles are **not** considered to be necessary.

Pupil's learning to swim or improving their swimming ability often do not swim in straight lines, and as a result, they might get close to, or come into contact with, other swimmers. If goggles are worn any contact with others (e.g. the flailing arm of a beginner learning a new stroke) might result in injury to both the swimmers wearing the goggles and those who are not. Feeling confident and safe in the water, and swimming underwater, should not be dependent on wearing goggles, neither are goggles designed for such activity, as the eye pressure cannot be relieved.

However, they are recommended when swimming at competition level and for extended, regular training sessions as they can help to maintain the required body position and improve vision through the water.

When swimming goggles are used, they should be made of unbreakable plastic or rubber materials. The British Standard for the manufacture of goggles (BS 5883:1996) includes the requirement that the packaging should contain instructions regarding their putting on and removal. Pupils should be taught to remove goggles by slipping them off the head and not by stretching the retaining band as wet plastic is slippery and may cause injury to the eye area. Where goggles are not properly fitted, they may mist up and adversely affect visibility.

Given the potential for injury in curriculum lessons, the teacher responsible for the group should have the prerogative to require any pupil to remove their goggles for reasons of safety if they are constantly adjusting, removing and replacing them. The teacher is not responsible for fitting or adjusting the pupils' goggles. Where a pupil does wear goggles, they need to be able to carry out the task of fitting them independently.

As with the management of any risk in PESSPA, all aspects of the situation should be taken into consideration before the school, along with the provider (if lessons are taken externally), decides about policy regarding the wearing of swimming goggles. Where any employer policy regarding water safety exists, they should be adhered to. Having considered these, schools should fully inform parents of the points raised in the guidance, and the decision of the school in light of this.

In some cases, according to the stage and ability of the pupil, the use of goggles may be permitted. The reasons for the decisions either way should be fully explained in the risk assessment for that activity.

In a swimming pool environment, pupils who are very short-sighted may not be able to see the teacher's gestures or read any signage unless they are in extremely close proximity. Not being able to see the teacher clearly can also affect the clarity of receiving verbal instructions, which might impact significantly on safety. In cases of extreme short-sightedness (myopia), prescription goggles, which are now more widely available and reasonably priced, may result in a safer swimming experience for the pupil.

In cases of extreme short-sightedness or in rare instances where individuals have particularly sensitive eyes or wear contact lenses, schools should require a parental letter stating that the pupil has particular needs to warrant the use of goggles. Such a letter would have the status of simply being informative and **would not constitute any form of indemnity** should injury arise later through the misuse of the goggles. Additional medical certification about such particular needs is costly to obtain and should **not be sought** as this information is likely to have been previously set down in the pupil's records.

When pupils complain of eye irritation during swimming sessions, the cause, in almost all cases, is an incorrect chemical balance in the water. If several pupils are reporting eye irritation as a result of swimming, the pool provider should be informed. This imbalance can be eradicated. In other situations, from hospital

records, irritation might result from a reaction to the chemicals used to clean the lenses of the goggles at home.

Swimmers who are training daily usually wear goggles because they are exposing their eyes for long periods to the effects of the chemicals in the water. In some cases, the tissue around the eyes does not dry out between training sessions and thus becomes more susceptible to infection. Goggles offer regular swimmers some protection against this happening.

When parents request the wearing of goggles because of their child's particular need, the school should inform them that the teacher in charge retains the prerogative to require the removal of the goggles for reasons of safety.

We hope you have found this newsletter useful.

Best wishes,

**Nicky Scott and Jan Hickman**  
**Health and Safety Officers**  
**The Association for Physical Education**