

News story: Drive to ensure all children can swim by end of primary school

Primary schools in England are set to receive extra support and improved guidance to help make sure all children can swim confidently and know how to stay safe in and around water.

Working in partnership with Swim England, the Department for Education and Department for Digital, Culture Media and Sport have today (Thursday 25 October) announced extra help for schools to make sure every child knows how to swim and be safe in and around water by the end of primary school, supported by the £320 million PE and Sport Premium.

To coincide with the announcement, Children and Families Minister Nadhim Zahawi and Sports Minister Tracey Crouch have also backed a pledge by Swim England – signed by the likes of British Olympic swimmer Steve Parry – calling on teachers and parents to do all they can to ensure children are taught swimming and water safety at primary school.

The extra support will help deliver the government's sport strategy 'Sporting Future', which committed to ensuring that every child leaves primary school able to swim. It includes:

- using the PE and Sport Premium for extra lessons for children who have not yet met the national curriculum expectation after core swimming lessons, and extra training for teachers on water safety and swimming techniques through courses provided by Swim England;
- extra guidance, provided by Swim England, will be available to help schools deliver safe, fun and effective swimming lessons; and
- a drive to boost partnerships with independent schools to offer the use of facilities, coaching and other forms of support to schools in their area.

Children and Families Minister Nadhim Zahawi said:

Swimming is great fun and helps children to stay fit and healthy. But swimming at school also teaches children vital skills on how to stay safe in and around water.

We want every child to be a confident swimmer by the time they leave primary school. By funding extra lessons for the pupils that need it most, providing extra training for our teachers and working with our independent schools to offer access to their pools and expertise, we can help children stay safe and learn to love swimming.

Tracey Crouch, Minister for Sport and Civil Society, said:

Swimming is a vital life skill that is proven to boost both physical and mental wellbeing.

We are committed to ensuring that every child who leaves primary school is able to swim. This plan will support schools and the sport sector to get more children swimming confidently and learn water safety.

The measures announced today follow a government-backed review of swimming and water safety in primary schools, which found that swimming standards vary in schools, despite being compulsory on the national curriculum. Following its recommendations, the government is working with Swim England to provide extra guidance to help schools deliver safe, fun and effective swimming lessons.

Steve Parry, Olympic bronze medallist and Chair of the Swimming and Water Safety Review Group, said:

Since my competitive days I've been championing the need for all children to be taught swimming and water safety at primary school. Along with Swim England and the Swim Group, we have been working to raise awareness of the issues and provide support for all those involved in the delivery of curriculum swimming and water safety.

Ensuring our children are able to enjoy the water safely is everyone's responsibility. That is why it's great to hear the government is raising awareness of the issue and pledging its support. We want everyone – schools, parents, lesson providers, decision makers – to do likewise and pledge to support schools to achieve our joint vision of every child having a full knowledge about water safety and learning how to swim by the time they leave primary school.

Julie Robinson, Independent Schools Council general secretary, said:

We completely agree that all primary age pupils should learn to swim – it is a basic life skill. Many independent schools with swimming pools are already working in partnership with state schools and the wider community to ensure others have the opportunity to benefit.

There is much goodwill from schools fortunate to have facilities that may be in short supply locally, and the Schools Together website features plenty of examples of partnership working.

Raising awareness of partnerships and encouraging more of this good work helps state schools and independent schools develop mutually beneficial programmes, which provide education and development opportunities to all pupils and staff involved.

Today's announcement is part of a drive to tackle childhood obesity and help children to lead healthy, active lives, with more than £1 billion invested in schools through the PE and Sport Premium to improve PE and sport since 2013.

It comes after the Education Secretary announced a cross-government school sport and activity action plan that will consider ways to ensure all children have access to quality, protected PE and sport sessions during the school week and opportunities to be physically active throughout the school day. The action plan will be launched in spring 2019.