

SWIM GROUP REVIEW OF CURRICULUM
SWIMMING AND WATER SAFETY LESSONS

Recommendations to ensure all children leave primary school able to swim

2017



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This report has been developed by the Curriculum Swimming and Water Safety Review Group on behalf of the Swim Group. It was submitted to Government in March 2017.

For further information please email SchoolSwimmingReview@swimming.org.

i) FOREWORD

The inclusion of swimming within the national curriculum means there is no excuse why any child in this country should not be able to swim. Even those children who are unable to go swimming with their families have the opportunity to learn how to swim. It is fool-proof: every child goes to school therefore every child is taught how to swim. Except the data over the last five years suggests otherwise. The number of our young children at primary school who can swim remains around the 50 per cent mark. This is unacceptable.

Of course, it's not just about swimming ability. It's also about knowing the dangers of water and how to get yourself out of trouble if you fall in. We live on an island with lots of lakes and waterways – this is a necessity. Too many young people died last summer; we need to empower our children to stay safe while they enjoy our beautiful countryside.

Having the opportunity to have fun in the water is one of most important benefits of learning how to swim. Going to the pool or beach is one of easiest ways for families to spend fun, quality time together, and at the same time it is helping children to develop a healthy activity habit.

Over the past eight months we have discussed and consulted with a wide-range of representatives, all of whom are committed to ensuring all our children are taught these vital skills. We have a real opportunity to change the way swimming and water safety is delivered in schools, and how better links to the community can support this. If we do it right, we will not only be helping future generations to stay healthy and active, we will also be providing a lifetime of opportunities to enjoy swimming and hundreds of other water-based activities.

Steve Parry
Chair, Curriculum Swimming and Water Safety Review Group
March 2017

ii) INTRODUCTION

Swimming and water safety has been a statutory element of the national curriculum for physical education (PE) programme of study since 1994. However, annual research by the national governing body for swimming, Swim England¹ shows that since 2012 only half of children aged between seven and 11-years-old have met the required swimming standard².

The Government recognised the importance of addressing this by including a commitment within Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation³ to ‘establish a working group to advise on how to ensure that no child leaves school unable to meet a minimum standard of capability and confidence in swimming’ and to consider what confidence and capability really mean in swimming⁴.

In May 2016 the national Swim Group⁵, on behalf of the Government, established the Curriculum Swimming and Water Safety Review Group (“the Group”) to consider the challenges around delivering curriculum swimming and water safety lessons, and make recommendations on how to tackle these issues.

The Group comprises representatives from across the education, sport and leisure sectors and included a technical group of frontline expert deliverers (see appendix A).

Purpose and scope of the Curriculum Swimming and Water Safety Review Group:

The purpose of the Curriculum Swimming and Water Safety Review Group was to advise Government on how to ensure that all children leaving primary school are able to meet the national curriculum minimum standard of capability and confidence in swimming and safe self-rescue, including for disabled young people and those with special educational needs⁶.

iii) REPORT FROM THE CURRICULUM SWIMMING AND WATER SAFETY REVIEW GROUP

Primary schools can be divided into four groups based on their current swimming and water safety provision:

Group	School groupings	% ⁷	Needs
1	Not currently providing any curriculum swimming and water safety provision or not recording any attainment levels.	26%	Urgent guidance and support on why and how to implement effective lessons and the importance of monitoring.
2	Providing curriculum swimming and water safety lessons but not getting the results on any of the three national curriculum outcomes.	27%	Support on how to make lessons more effective
3	Providing curriculum swimming and water safety lessons and only getting results on the outcome of swimming 25 metres unaided	11%	Guidance and support on the importance of teaching all three outcomes
4	Providing lessons and all children reaching the national curriculum measures	36%	Guidance on further offers for pupils

The Group was concerned that at least six per cent of primary schools do not provide lessons⁸, and that others provide sessions but do not record attainment levels. This should be urgently addressed and schools given guidance and support on why and how to implement effective lessons. Examples including Top-up lessons and additional teacher training are discussed in greater detail, as are the challenges in needing to prioritise support.

While it is right to focus on the schools that are struggling to provide lessons, attention must also be given to those that are providing swimming and water safety lessons but not achieving the required outcomes (Group 2 and 3 schools). It is also important to ensure schools that are getting results are supported with additional resources (Group 4 schools). These different needs have been reflected in the following recommendations, which have been proposed to ensure that all schools are supported to deliver curriculum swimming and water safety lessons at the level that is right for them and their pupils. Examples include additional activities for more confident pupils such as lifesaving or water polo, and specific guidance for teachers to help all pupils to reach the desired standards.

Challenges to delivering effective Curriculum Swimming and Water Safety:

The Group reviewed research and insight from 2012 and found the following four areas consistently listed by schools as barriers to the effective delivery of swimming and water safety lessons:

- Teachers do not feel confident teaching swimming and water safety due to a lack of formal training
- Cost of transport
- Costs relating to pool hire and external swimming instructors
- Time away from the classroom disrupts the school day

In addition, although swimming and water safety is included within the national curriculum, the view of the Group was that this is not adequately enforced. Anecdotal evidence was heard from educational representatives that schools will often prioritise subjects for which they are graded, which has added to the poor attainment figures for swimming and water safety. This also reinforces research that found six per cent of primary schools did not provide any lessons for pupils in 2015.

Evidence presented to the Group showed that until inspection and reporting methods are vastly improved, attainment levels will continue to suffer. However, in the meantime, the Group presents the following recommendations as ways Government and all those involved with the delivery of curriculum swimming and water safety can improve the situation now.

Through this report, the Group has made the following recommendations to Government:

Recommendations:

- 1) Government to support a new national Top-up Swimming programme to ensure all primary school children reach the statutory standards for swimming and water safety. Initial resources should be targeted at Group 1 schools.
- 2) The Department for Education to support the national roll-out of a new Curriculum Swimming and Water Safety Resource Pack to all primary schools and curriculum swimming providers, including promotion of a new achievement award for pupils.
- 3) Swim England to continue work with international partners to agree a standardised definition of national curriculum requirements (for inclusion in the Curriculum Swimming and Water Safety Resource Pack).
- 4) Government to include the swimming programme of study within the next review of the National Curriculum.
- 5) Government to fund specific training for school teachers and teaching staff who deliver swimming lessons to ensure high quality lessons, starting with Group 1 schools.
- 6) The Department for Education and Swim Group to create a Teacher's summer school to upskill teachers in the delivery of curriculum swimming and water safety lessons.
- 7) Department for Education to add a condition as part of the Primary Premium monitoring that primary schools must publish curriculum swimming and water safety attainment levels.

- 8) The Swim Group to develop a Swimming Report template for schools as part of the Curriculum Swimming and Water Safety Resource Pack, which Ministers encourage primary schools to complete and forward to Secondary schools.
- 9) Department for Culture, Media and Sport to work with the Swim Group and Sport England to develop a question for Active Lives: Children's Survey (KPI 5) that requests information regarding swimming proficiency.
- 10) Swim England and Swim Group to support schools and local authorities to explore different types of facilities such as demountable and mobile pools, and utilising safe outdoor swimming opportunities, especially where access to water space is difficult or areas of aquatic deprivation have been identified.
- 11) Government to encourage all Local Authority areas to develop a school swimming and water safety delivery plan to support primary schools to meet their PE national curriculum requirements.
- 12) Ministers and Swim Group to meet private operators, and the Swim Group to explore the possibility of providing tax breaks for private operators to open their pools to schools.
- 13) Department for Communities and Local Government to ensure Primary School representatives are consulted regarding swimming facility closure impact assessments.
- 14) Government to provide support to the Swim Group in the implementation of a national communications campaign to raise awareness of curriculum swimming and water safety.
- 15) Government to encourage educational stakeholders, including the National Governors Association and Unions, to work with swimming and water safety agencies to raise awareness of curriculum requirements.
- 16) Secondary schools to work with national water safety groups to ensure intervention messages are strongly reinforced at Key Stage 3 and 4 to reduce the high number of incidents in these age groups.

The recommendations have been set out in the following six areas:

1. Ensuring all children meet the national curriculum requirements
2. Ensuring the national curriculum requirements are fit-for-purpose
3. Ensuring quality swimming tuition
4. Ensuring effective monitoring and evaluation
5. Ensuring access to facilities
6. Ensuring good communication about Curriculum Swimming and Water Safety

In addition, this report identifies a range of innovative ideas that the Swim Group, with the support of Government, would like to investigate as future ways of enhancing curriculum swimming and water safety. It also discusses how curriculum swimming should build greater links with community programmes such as external swimming lesson provision and clubs.

1. ENSURING ALL CHILDREN MEET THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM REQUIREMENTS

The Goal:

By the end of Key Stage 2 every child has met the minimum standard of water safety knowledge and swimming ability as stated in the national curriculum for physical education programme of study.

The Challenge:

Statutory guidance for the national curriculum for physical education programme of study in England states that:

*All schools must provide swimming instruction either in key stage 1 or key stage 2. In particular, pupils should be taught to: swim competently, confidently and proficiently over a distance of at least 25 metres; use a range of strokes effectively; perform safe self-rescue in different water-based situations.*⁹

However, recent research shows that 48 per cent of primary school children are unable to swim the national curriculum requirement of at least 25 metres unaided¹⁰, and less than half of schools work towards all three national curriculum outcomes for swimming and water safety¹¹.

In addition, the Group heard anecdotal evidence that while Special Educational Needs' Schools recognise the additional benefits of providing regular swimming opportunities for pupils, SEND pupils in some mainstream schools are being denied the opportunity to take part in sessions because of the perceived difficulties in going to the pool. Guidance is available and a more comprehensive resource pack is currently being developed by Swim England¹², but further research is required to fully understand the current landscape.

The Group found the major barriers to ensuring all children reach the minimum standard was around the lack of training and confidence of the workforce (see section 3), the quality of the lessons and the lack of an extended offer to ensure all children can swim.

Top-up Swimming is a block of intensive lessons, often held for one hour each day over the course of five days, to provide children with extra support to help them achieve the minimum requirement of at least 25 metres unaided. To help meet the current challenges, the Group recommends a programme of Top-up Swimming is rolled out and provided to all children who have not met the minimum requirements by the time they leave Primary School.

A key recommendation of the Group, therefore, is to make an additional grant available to support children in schools that are identified as low-performing sites (Group 1 schools) to access more swimming time (see recommendation 1 below). This should be through a third party, such as the CSPN or local Aquatics teams, rather than directly to schools to ensure funding is not used to support general curriculum swimming programmes.

Additional funding may also help the wider family to start swimming as the children encourage them to swim together. This would help to increase the number of adults who swim, and could be particularly impactful in communities where swimming is not thought to be a priority. Interventions such as Breakfast Swim Clubs would also provide an opportunity for young people to benefit from swimming whilst also gaining a healthy breakfast.

The Swim Group also recommends a robust Curriculum Swimming and Water Safety Resource Pack be created to include best practice delivery models and classroom-based water safety sessions, and fun and inspiring teaching methods such as play and learn activities and using storytelling to develop swimming techniques¹³. This will be developed by the Swim Group in consultation with the educational sector, and include a new achievement badge to celebrate the success of pupils achieving the statutory standards¹⁴.

Swim Group recommendations:

- 1) Government to support a new national Top-up Swimming programme to ensure all primary school children reach the statutory standards for swimming and water safety. Initial resources should be targeted at Group 1 schools.
- 2) The Department for Education to support the national roll-out of a new Curriculum Swimming and Water Safety Resource Pack to all primary schools and curriculum swimming providers, including promotion of a new achievement award for pupils.

Further areas of work for the Swim Group:

- **Curriculum swimming provision for SEND pupils**

The Swim Group commits to further investigation into the reality of swimming provision for SEND pupils, with the aim of working up a specific plan to tackle the issues surrounding disabled children's participation in swimming. This will aim to be completed before the start of the new 2017/18 academic year.

- **Electronic attainment app**

As well as producing an achievement badge for pupils who successfully complete all three national curriculum outcomes, the Swim Group will explore opportunities for a reward based app that links to an educational e-game or fun ideas for games in the pool/how to get healthy.

- **Breakfast Swim Clubs**

The Swim Group will explore practicalities around supporting primary schools with Breakfast Swim Clubs to support pupils from more deprived areas to have greater access to swimming, as well as an opportunity for a healthy breakfast.

- **Encouraging after school swimming**

As part of supporting young people through their swimming journey, the Swim Group will seek to develop suitable and appropriate links between schools and community aquatic opportunities. This would include Clubs, Open Water swimming and general participation opportunities to enable young swimmers to benefit from a structured delivery of aquatics, including family swims.

CASE STUDY: LONDON AQUATICS CENTRE SCHOOLS SWIMMING PROGRAMME

Aim of project: To create a successful model to help pupils achieve higher attainment

Project and outcome: All schools attending the programme have a minimum of 10 hours delivery over a two week period (10x1 hour lessons). The programme uses lower ratio classes (1:10) and focuses on water safety and core curriculum outcomes. Due to the longer 60 minute lessons, the swimming teacher is able to balance fun with learning. Pupils are given weekly goals to complete, and come away with a sense of achieving something over a short period of time. Schools situated close to the London Aquatics Centre use it as their sole method of delivery, while other schools use it to top up their existing delivery. The Programme achieves an average 70 per cent national Curriculum attainment rate.

CASE STUDY: PHILLIMORE PRIMARY SCHOOL FAMILY SWIMMING CLUB

Aim of project: To increase engagement within families and provide pupils with additional swimming support.

Project and outcome: The school received a Swimathon grant enabling them to run a 10 week after school club for pupils and their parents/carers. Swimming ability amongst family members was very low so they were given the opportunity of watching or taking part. The outcomes were very positive both from a community engagement perspective and in supporting pupils to improve their swimming. By the end of the year the pupils' swimming ability had risen from three per cent able to swim 10 metres unaided, to 91.2 per cent able to swim 25 metres unaided and all water safety requirements passed. In addition, there was a five per cent take-up of private swimming lessons.

2. ENSURING THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM REQUIREMENTS ARE FIT-FOR-PURPOSE

The Goal:

To ensure a national standard of curriculum swimming and water safety that challenges pupils to gain a higher level of confidence and capability, and which is understood by all deliverers.

The Challenge:

When reviewing expectations within the national curriculum for swimming, it is clear that deliverers of curriculum swimming have a wide interpretation of capability and confidence, as well as water safety and stroke standards.

Much of this is because by using *competent, confident, proficient* and *effective* together implies that swimmers should be able to use a range of strokes and demonstrate sufficient skill and knowledge for the intended outcome to be achieved. This helps instructors who are used to delivering private learn to swim programmes to focus on technique and outcomes, but it is often at the expense of ensuring the young person can safely take part in a range of fun activities in and around the water (which is more in line with the curriculum requirements).

Swim England has been working with European swimming federations and World national governing body, FINA, to look at curriculum swimming, water safety and Learn to Swim programmes. Later this year, FINA will be holding its first Conference, *Swimming for All - Swimming for Life*, to look at creating unified fundamental principles for teachers, coaches and instructors. The conference will also look at how swimming is delivered to young people around the world, in different environments and cultures. It will also address the fundamental skills required to enable young people to participate in swimming as a life skill and contribute to the reduction in drowning worldwide.

The UK is not alone in poor standards of swimming ability and defining when a child or adult becomes a *swimmer* is an ongoing piece of work. The three British swimming national governing bodies (Swim England, Swim Wales and Scottish Swimming) are working with European body, LEN¹⁵, to set minimum standards for young people aged between seven and 11-years-old in primary education across 52 countries. Initial discussions recommend the following standards:

- Swim 200 metres using different strokes
- Safe entry and exits in water
- Ability to tread water
- Take part in outdoor self-rescue practice
- Be able recognise the dangers in and around water

There is still some work to be done before a European standard is agreed. The British recommendations would include a focus on pupils being able to achieve the above skills by 11-years-old, and also that the minimum distance of 25 metres is replaced by a larger distance within the national curriculum. This would address concerns that by setting the standard at just 25 metres, schools are only aiming for this distance. The Group does not believe that 25 metres is a valid distance for a confident and capable swimmer, and so by challenging schools to teach their pupils to swim further, more will achieve a realistic swimming ability.

Overall, it is felt there should be a greater focus on building water confidence rather than stroke techniques. This would also help to create a more flexible, inclusive, cross-curriculum approach to learning that is more in line with primary school teaching.

This is supported by research that shows the key motivators for parents wanting their children to be able to swim¹⁶:

- ensure my child can swim safely if they got into difficulty (51 per cent of parents)
- ensure my child learns an important life skill (35 per cent of parents)
- increase my child's water confidence (30 per cent of parents)
- have fun in the water (23 per cent of parents)

Confidence and capability is key for young people to progress both in swimming and other water-based sports. To take part in rowing or sailing, for example, a young person will have to show a minimum standard of swimming ability but this is not based on the perfect swimming stroke, rather the ability to get themselves out of a potentially dangerous situation.

In addition, focusing on ability makes swimming less inclusive and less appealing for classroom friendship groups. A more flexible approach to meeting all three of the national curriculum outcomes would not only help this, but also allow those schools who have a high proportion of pupils who already have this ability to take part in additional activities in the water.

Insight shows that as young people move into secondary school they require a change from what they have historically known as *swimming* to meet their needs as teenagers. This includes informal, semi-structured sessions and opportunities for peer socialising¹⁷. Examples of new sessions such as Swim Ninja¹⁸, the in-water obstacle course, could be created so they are suitable for curriculum swimming lessons as well as out of school activities.

A standardised meaning of *capability* and *confidence* needs to be effectively communicated to all deliverers of curriculum swimming through the Curriculum Swimming and Water Safety Resource Pack and targeted interventions such as Top-up Swimming and additional training. Deliverers of curriculum swimming need to focus on giving pupils strong aquatic physical literacy skills that will contribute to the development of swimming strokes, water safety and enjoyment in the water. The ability to swim *technically correct* strokes remains an essential skill, but ensuring pupils are safe in and around water, having fun and learning skills that will help them progress not just in to swimming but other aquatic sports as well, is paramount.

Swim Group recommendations:

- 3) Swim England to continue work with international partners to agree a standardised definition of national curriculum requirements (for inclusion in the Curriculum Swimming and Water Safety Resource Pack).
- 4) Government to include the swimming programme of study within the next review of the National Curriculum.

3. ENSURING QUALITY SWIMMING TUITION

The Goal:

To ensure a knowledgeable, confident and capable workforce delivers high quality swimming and water safety lessons to all children in Key Stage 1 or 2.

The Challenge:

Research shows that 94 per cent of primary schools are delivering curriculum swimming yet only 52 per cent of pupils are reaching the minimum requirement. In addition, the swimming national curriculum statement has three parts (25 metres distance, effective use of strokes and water safety) and while 89 per cent of primary schools say they work towards the distance, only 63 per cent admit to focusing on strokes, and only 48 per cent on water safety¹⁹. This points to either a lack of ability to teach the requirements, a lack of knowledge about the outcomes, or both. While the awareness element will be discussed further in section 6, the fundamental issue is ensuring that all deliverers of curriculum swimming are capable and confident to deliver efficient lessons to the standard as defined in the national curriculum.

The Group has identified the following key challenges for deliverers of curriculum swimming and water safety:

- There is no statutory requirement for primary teachers or support staff to undertake professional learning for the teaching of swimming and water safety.
- Many external providers replicate their private swimming lesson plans with schools rather than take into account the national curriculum programme of study.
- The average primary school class includes pupils with a range of swimming and learning abilities which requires a different teaching approach to private lessons.

The average time a class is in the pool is 33 minutes and the average number of lessons is 16²⁰, so the lessons must be effective. The number of schools that separate pupils based on swimming ability is limited, so the sessions have to be fun and flexible enough to ensure all pupils remain engaged.

Throughout the consulting period, the Group discussed whether to recommend schools only take pupils who are unable to swim the minimum requirement of 25 metres to swimming lessons. This would help with cost and transport challenges faced by schools. However, the Group felt that the requirement for all children to meet all three outcomes, especially water safety, was too important to deny every child the opportunity to participate.

To help external providers meet the national curriculum programme of study, a refreshed set of session plans and resources will be produced by the Group that clearly sets out outcomes and fun, cross curriculum activities that can be implemented for mixed ability classes. These will be included in the Curriculum Swimming and Water Safety Resource Pack as referenced above.

Over 300 tutors are currently trained to deliver the National Curriculum Training Programme, and 11 teacher training colleges include it in their programmes²¹. Since January 2015, 3,558 school staff have been upskilled through this programme and feedback shows head teachers value this additional ability. All deliverers of curriculum swimming should ideally be supported to go through specific training, but if cost is an issue then the Swim Group recommends a phased approach starting with underperforming schools (Group 1 schools).

Swim Group recommendations:

- 5) Government to fund specific training for school teachers and teaching staff who deliver swimming lessons to ensure high quality lessons, starting with Group 1 schools.
- 6) The Department for Education and Swim Group to create a Teacher's summer school to upskill teachers in the delivery of curriculum swimming and water safety lessons.

Further areas of work for the Swim Group:

- **Effective delivery models for curriculum swimming and water safety**
The Swim Group, in partnership with stakeholders, will conduct further research around delivery methods of swimming and water safety (including international) and create national models for intensive and weekly lessons.
- **Virtual reality swimming and water safety lessons**
The use of virtual reality headsets within classroom environments is becoming more popular. Swim England is currently scoping the use of VR-initiatives that help children prepare for swimming lessons by introducing them to a pool environment without leaving the classroom. If realistic, water safety lessons could also be delivered using similar VR technology to help bring water-based environments within a classroom setting.

4. ENSURING EFFECTIVE MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The Goal:

To establish an effective monitoring and evaluation measure for curriculum swimming and water safety attainment levels to ensure all pupils are provided with a high level of tuition and are able to swim before they leave primary school.

The Challenge:

Despite it being part of the national curriculum, primary schools are not required to report on their swimming and water safety provision or attainment levels. The Group has heard evidence that this not only impacts on the level and quality of provision, but also on how much information is shared with parents and secondary schools about a pupils' ability²².

Since 2012 Swim England has conducted annual research into the levels of swimming attainment in primary school children. This has helped provide insight into the state of primary school swimming and allowed Swim England to develop programs to try and change it, such as the School Swimming Charter²³. This data provides an important look at the national picture, but is not detailed enough for results to be scrutinised at a local level. The Group was also concerned by the lack of measures related to SEND pupils and swimming attainment (see above). Without a consistent measure, the Group does not believe it will be possible to accurately measure progress and improvement²⁴, which is why Swim England is looking at the development of a robust monitoring tool (see below).

Throughout the consultation, partners referenced the importance of Ofsted inspecting curriculum swimming and water safety lessons as being 'the silver bullet' for ensuring schools deliver swimming. However, the Group recognised that tasking Ofsted with monitoring curriculum swimming is currently a challenging ask so would welcome the opportunity to work closely with Ofsted in setting quality standards for curriculum swimming.

In addition, the Group is committed to investigating current PE and School Sport Accreditation programmes that support the provision of Quality Assured School programmes with a view to creating a similar award for curriculum swimming and water safety²⁵. Swim Group will also be working with Learn to Swim software management companies with the aim of recommending data share options for schools. Although these are not robust measures, they should be seen as ways of providing supportive evidence in the absence of a national, government-led monitoring system.

Swim Group recommendations:

- 7) Department for Education to add a condition as part of the Primary Premium monitoring that primary schools must publish curriculum swimming and water safety attainment levels.
- 8) The Swim Group to develop a Swimming Report template for schools as part of the Curriculum Swimming and Water Safety Resource Pack, which Ministers encourage primary schools to complete and forward to Secondary schools.
- 9) Department for Culture, Media and Sport to work with the Swim Group and Sport England to develop a question for Active Lives: Children's Survey (KPI 5) that requests information regarding swimming proficiency.

Further areas of work for the Swim Group:

- **Development of a robust monitoring tool**

The Swim Group has identified suggestions for a national monitoring tool based on three budget ranges²⁶. In addition to exploring practicalities of these, the Swim Group will work with partners to evaluate current monitoring methods with the aim of making further recommendations to Government.

- **Development of a Just Swim tracker**

Swim England is investigating a new tracker linked to the existing Swim England Just Swim app. This could provide an avenue for reporting performance, to reward children for their achievements, and create a channel by which they can share their personal achievements and success with parents and friends. There is the potential for this to be used outside of curriculum swimming sessions, encouraging families to swim together.

5. ENSURING ACCESS TO FACILITIES

The Goal:

All primary schools have access to local facilities that allow them to teach swimming and water safety to all pupils, including disabled young people and those with special educational needs.

The Challenge:

Most primary schools (72 per cent) access public facilities for their swimming, with the rest using their own pool (15 per cent) or another private facility (10 per cent)²⁷. For those accessing local authority or Leisure Trust facilities, there is a clear tension between the cost, location and availability of suitable swimming facilities versus the expectation of schools. Schools list the key challenges relating to facilities as transport costs, the impact of lessons on the school day, and the cost of hiring swimming teachers²⁸.

Insight suggests that the barriers relating to timetabling can be overcome through greater communication between facility and provider²⁹, and costs relating to delivery of lessons can be reduced by upskilling school teachers to support swimming teachers.

To help with transport and pool hire costs, the Group recommends local authorities support schools to work together to coordinate swimming lessons and develop partnerships with local transport companies. A number of areas already provide support through local delivery plans that help primary schools to share pool time or coaches.

The average distance for a school to travel to their local pool is 2.8 miles, but there are a number of schools that struggle with access³⁰. For these schools, innovative pool ideas should be explored and supported. This includes schools and the local community coming together to invest in temporary pools, identifying safe open water swimming options, and developing relationships with private swimming facilities to gain access. The Group also proposes relevant Government departments work with the Swim Group and private facility operators to investigate the possibility of tax breaks for private operators who open up their facilities for schools.

CASE STUDY: SUFFOLK NORSE SWIMMING

Background: Suffolk Norse Swimming is part of Suffolk Norse, a Joint Venture Company between Suffolk County Council and Norse Commercial Services. It operates a fleet of mini buses and coaches to meet the transport needs of schools across the county. The swimming service works very closely with its transport team and together they provide a one-stop-shop for the organisation, administration and implementation of school swimming lessons across Suffolk.

Impact: Approximately 3,800 children swim weekly with the service and because all aspects of school swimming are included (pool hire, curriculum materials, training for school staff and swimming instructors), there is less work for individual schools, greater efficiency in resources and pupils are all receiving the same high quality tuition.

During the consultation, the Group found a key concern across the sector remains the closure of local swimming facilities. The majority of school swimming takes place in Local Authority owned pools, but with Leisure budgets being cut, there is concern about the impact on curriculum swimming lessons. While the issue of pool stock was outside the remit of the Group, members call for greater recognition by the relevant Government departments (including DCMS, DCLG, Treasury) that Local Authority pools are an essential element in the delivery of school swimming; and that school swimming contracts play an important role in helping these facilities to remain open and accessible for local communities. As such, closure impact assessments should include consultation with education representatives.

In addition, where support is required, the Group suggests that schools with their own swimming facilities work with local partners in the management of their pools and are incentivised to expand access to the local community to ensure they remain viable.

Swim Group recommendations:

- 10) Swim England and Swim Group to support schools and local authorities to explore different types of facilities such as demountable and mobile pools, and utilising safe outdoor swimming opportunities, especially where access to water space is difficult or areas of aquatic deprivation have been identified.
- 11) Government to encourage all Local Authority areas to develop a school swimming and water safety delivery plan to support primary schools to meet their PE national curriculum requirements.
- 12) Ministers and Swim Group to meet private operators, and the Swim Group to explore the possibility of providing tax breaks for private operators to open their pools to schools.
- 13) Department for Communities and Local Government to ensure Primary School representatives are consulted with regarding swimming facility closure impact assessments.

Further areas of work for the Swim Group:

- **Facility mapping exercise**

As part of a wider mapping exercise relating to facilities, the Swim Group will include school locations to ensure an accurate picture of facility access for primary schools. The Group will engage with the Sport England facilities team and include safe outdoor swimming areas and access to existing programmes such as Swim Safe and outdoor adventure centres. Where access is poor, suggestions will be made for alternative arrangements, such as temporary pools.

- **Scoping for a Swimming School Community Links Programme**

It is proposed that scoping for a Swimming School Community Links Programme takes place to allow local partnerships to establish, or develop, existing Aquatic Youth Clubs or After School Swim Clubs. Rather than running an application process, it is suggested a more efficient system would be to allocate funding on a County Sports Partnership basis and focus on quality links rather than quantity. The Partnerships would also receive a guidance pack on the development of School to Community Links.

CASE STUDY: BISHOPS CASTLE LEISURE CENTRE – SPARC, SHROPSHIRE

Background: In March 2016 a campaign started to raise money to keep the swimming pool at Bishops Castle leisure centre open once funding from Shropshire Council stopped. Eight local primary schools use the pool for their curriculum swimming lessons; if the centre shuts the nearest pool would be Ludlow or Shrewsbury which would be a coach trip of between 45mins – 1 hour (or more if proposals to move the Shrewsbury pool goes through). The community has raised £60k and they won £12,500 from the M&S Energy Community Fund, but with the Council's Joint Use Funding due to be reduced from £68k to £3k in April 2017, there is concern that the pool will be forced to close.

Potential impact: The eight local primary schools will not be able to access a local facility within school time. The schools should be supported in making alternative arrangements, such as a temporary pool facility, which would also benefit the wider community.

6. ENSURING GOOD COMMUNICATION ABOUT CURRICULUM SWIMMING AND WATER SAFETY

The Goal:

Everyone involved in the delivery of curriculum swimming and water safety lessons, including schools, parents, operators and pupils, is aware of its importance and committed to ensuring all pupils reach the required standard during Key Stage 1 or 2, or before they start secondary school.

The Challenge:

The Group found a considerable lack of awareness regarding the national curriculum swimming programme of study and particularly the three targets; 12 per cent of primary schools and 50 per cent of parents were unaware of the three outcomes³¹. Feedback from the National Governors' Association also indicated that not all Governors were aware there was a requirement within the national curriculum for swimming and water safety.

The Group also heard anecdotal evidence that despite the allocation of PE and Sports Premium funding and guidance from the Department for Education on how to use it, 18 per cent of primary schools were still finding cost a clear barrier to swimming³² and requests for parental contributions were resulting in some pupils being excluded. As part of the proposed new Curriculum Swimming and Water Safety Resource Pack, the Group advises the inclusion of clear guidance on how the PE and Sport Premium funding can be used, including activities that will provide additionality for curriculum swimming sessions such as Top-up Swimming, mini-polo sessions and lifeguard training, which could also help with costs.

There is agreement across the swimming and educational sectors that a key part of the Group's work must involve a comprehensive communications plan to raise awareness of and encourage engagement in curriculum swimming and water safety. Key focuses of the plan would include bespoke messaging to schools, educational stakeholders, deliverers of curriculum swimming, parents and pupils on the following:

- Benefits of swimming and learning to swim.
- The importance of learning about water safety.
- Guidance on how to talk about swimming and drowning prevention projects to encourage a more positive association with swimming.
- How to get involved in national swimming and water safety campaigns such as Swim Safe³³, the Big School Swim³⁴, School Swimathon³⁵, Drowning Prevention Week³⁶.

To help reinforce the messages, the Group recommends the relevant Government department(s) support a coordinated national communications campaign with branding and implementation support³⁷. In addition, the Group recommends an annual Curriculum Swimming and Water Safety round-table for key stakeholders, hosted by Ministers and organised by the Swim Group, to discuss relevant issues.

Clear evidence was also presented to the Group that water safety lessons should not stop at Key Stage 2. In 2015, 32 young people drowned, 23 of whom were aged between 15 and 19-years-old³⁸. Research shows a correlation with young people feeling they are more confident in the water than their ability suggests. As a result, the Group was in agreement that the Department for Education should look at supporting secondary schools to work with national water safety groups and ensure water safety intervention messages are strongly reinforced at Key Stage 3 and 4.

Swim Group recommendations:

- 14) Government to provide support to the Swim Group in the implementation of a national communications campaign to raise awareness of curriculum swimming and water safety.
- 15) Government to encourage educational stakeholders, including the National Governors Association and Unions, to work with swimming and water safety agencies to raise awareness of curriculum requirements.
- 16) Secondary schools to work with national water safety groups to ensure intervention messages are strongly reinforced at Key Stage 3 and 4 to reduce the high number of incidents in these age groups.

Further areas of work for the Swim Group:

- **National Communications campaign**
The Swim Group will continue to work with partners to develop a marketing and communications campaign to raise awareness of curriculum swimming and water safety. The scale of the campaign will be dependent on Government support.

iv) NEW WAYS OF ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE

Data from the Swim England Tracker has found a substantial drop off rate for weekly and monthly swimming by young people aged over 12-years-old. While 11-year-olds still have a very positive outlook regarding swimming benefits and the reasons why it's good for you, 15 to 17-year-olds see swimming as lacking goals. However, nine per cent of 11-year-olds say they do not have anyone to go swimming with and nine per cent also state that their swimming technique isn't very good.

These statistics suggest new types of fun, informal swimming sessions are required to help young people stay engaged in swimming and through this, improve their technique.

- **Fun swimming activities such as *Swim Ninja*** (an in-water obstacle course that includes entry-level swimming skills stages and tasks) can help introduce new swimmers and their family/friends to swimming and water safety. Schools, clubs and leisure providers should be encouraged to complement traditional technical swimming lessons with activities which encourage children to get in the pool and have fun in the water.
- The funding of aquatic after school or breakfast clubs should seek to create suitable and appropriate links between schools and community aquatic opportunities. These could include **Aquatic Youth Clubs** or **Life Saving No Rules Swimming**. This will enable young swimmers to benefit from more *un-structured* delivery of aquatics.
- The development of **After School Family Swim Sessions** could address parent concerns that when taking their child swimming they are unsure of what activities would help their child develop aquatic skills.

v) CONCLUSION

Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation is bold in scale, scope and ambition for the delivery of sport and physical activity. It was very welcome news for the swimming industry that curriculum swimming and water safety was highlighted as one of the key measures.

The success of our elite sports people over the last 20 years gives us all reasons to be proud of our sporting prowess. We now have an opportunity to make an impact at grassroots level in a sport which makes us healthier, more active, builds character and provides a vital life skill. We have, unfortunately, learnt through the process of performing this review that underrepresented groups disproportionately miss out on swimming and we must focus attention on shifting this trend.

It is concerning that although learning to swim has been a statutory national curriculum requirement for over 20 years, there are nine million adults in England who can't swim³⁹. This is compounded by the statistic that one person drowns every 20 hours in the UK⁴⁰ despite swimming being the only sport that can save your life.

It is also recognised that although the focus of this paper has been on curriculum swimming provision, it is essential that clubs and parents also play their role in teaching children to swim. Only with this unified approach will we take advantage of all the social good that can come from harnessing the power of an essential life skill for all.

I would like to thank all the contributors to this curriculum swimming and water safety report for their many days spent researching the key issues and helping to propose solutions to improve swimming provision in our schools. I look forward to working with industry partners to take on the exciting challenge of turning these recommendations into action.

Steve Parry
Chair, Curriculum Swimming and Water Safety Review Group
March 2017

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Swim England is the brand name of the Amateur Swimming Association (the ASA). In April 2017 the ASA re-branded to Swim England. For more information visit www.swimming.org/swimengland.
- ² Swim England Schools Research, 2012-2016
- ³ Published December 2015 www.gov.uk/government/publications/sporting-future-a-new-strategy-for-an-active-nation.
- ⁴ Sporting Future, p33
- ⁵ The Swim Group consists of representatives from across the swimming sector. It was set up by Sport England in 2015 and is chaired by the Swim England CEO.
- ⁶ See Appendix A for Terms of Reference
- ⁷ These figures provide an indication of the percentage of schools within each group based on current available insight (Swim England Schools Research, 2016). A broader sample, either through national monitoring or working with partner agencies and local educational authorities to identify schools who are not providing lessons, would provide more robust data.
- ⁸ Taking School Swimming Seriously: The 2014 School Swimming Census, p3; 6 per cent relates to the number of schools who responded, it is anticipated the actual number will be higher.
- ⁹ www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-physical-education-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-physical-education-programmes-of-study
- ¹⁰ Swim England Schools Research, 2015
- ¹¹ Based on a sample size of 228 primary schools; Swim England Schools Research 2016
- ¹² Current guidance can be found via www.swimming.org/schoolswimming/useful-school-swimming-resources-teachers/. A full SEND Swimming Resource pack for schools is currently being developed by Swim England to include training and delivery guidance. Two examples of video resources (still in production) are: Skills and Strokes www.vimeo.com/195288457/1ea8967045 and Interviews with Young People www.vimeo.com/194981468/d473047d2b
- ¹³ Examples of current resources can be found via the School Swimming Charter Pack and online at www.swimming.org/schoolswimming/useful-school-swimming-resources-teachers
- ¹⁴ Similar award schemes already exist in smaller European nations (e.g. Latvia). A comparative to England would be the Danish Swim Federation's Licences to Swim which every young person receives once they achieve the equivalent standards in curriculum swimming, which will be explored in more detail by the Swim Group.
- ¹⁵ Ligue Européenne de Natation www.len.eu
- ¹⁶ Swim England Parents Research, 2016
- ¹⁷ Swim England 11-17 Behaviour Change Research, June 2016
- ¹⁸ See section iv: New ways of engaging young people
- ¹⁹ Swim England Schools Research, 2016
- ²⁰ Swim England Schools Research, 2016. The research also showed that that average time schools allow for lessons is 76 minutes.
- ²¹ Swim England statistics

- ²² 51 per cent of parents said they are not made aware by the school (Swim England Parents Research 2016); 83 per cent of secondary schools do not know the swimming levels of incoming students (Swim England and School Swimming Census, 2014)
- ²³ The School Swimming Charter was created by Swim England in 2014. Over 700 schools are currently signed up to the Charter. www.swimming.org/schoolswimming
- ²⁴ A separate costings document and suggestions for monitoring methods and costs has been provided with this report.
- ²⁵ afPE and Youth Sport Trust currently provide programmes.
- ²⁶ A separate costings document has been provided with this report.
- ²⁷ Swim England Schools Research, 2016
- ²⁸ Swim England Schools Research, 2016
- ²⁹ Swim England Insight suggests that schools and facilities would both be happy to look at programming and ensure all schools in the area schedule their lessons at a similar point.
- ³⁰ Swim England Schools Research, 2016
- ³¹ Swim England Schools and Parents Research, 2016
- ³² Taking School Swimming Seriously: The 2014 School Swimming Census
- ³³ Swim Safe is a joint initiative between Swim England and the RNLI that provides children aged between seven and 14-years-old with practical skills to help them stay safe while swimming outdoors. It runs annually over the summer holidays and since 2015 also provides a dedicated schools programme: <https://swimsafe.org.uk>
- ³⁴ The Big School Swim was first held in April 2016. Over 160 primary schools across the country took part, using special resources provided by Swim England. www.swimming.org/schoolswimming/big-school-swim-2016-resources
- ³⁵ Since launching in 2013, School Swimathon has doubled in size with 220 schools and 9,423 pupils taking part. The event challenges pupils to 'Swim their best' and last year 89 per cent swam further than before and 96 per cent of non-swimmers registered a distance. www.schoolswimathon.org
- ³⁶ Drowning Prevention Week is run annually by the RLSS. As well as a national awareness campaign, they provide support materials for schools. www.rlss.org.uk/water-safety/drowning-prevention-week/
- ³⁷ See separate costings document for further details and costs.
- ³⁸ National Water Safety Forum: WAID data 2015, www.nationalwatersafety.org.uk/waid/reports.asp
- ³⁹ Swim England Adult Swimming research, 2015
- ⁴⁰ RLSS Drowning Prevention Week 2017 statistics, www.rlss.org.uk/water-safety/drowning-prevention-week

APPENDIX A

The Curriculum Swimming and Water Safety Review Group comprised representatives from across the education, sport and leisure sectors and included a technical group of frontline expert deliverers.

Review Group members:

Swim Group	Nuffield Health
Swim England (formally The ASA)	Parent Teachers Association (PTA)
Association for Physical Education (afPE)	Places for People
County Sports Partnership Network (CSPN)	RLSS
Cultural and Leisure Officers Association (CLOA)	Saje Impact
Department for Education	Serco
Everyone Active	Sporta
GLL	Sport England
National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT)	Youth Sport Trust
National Governors Association (NGA)	Zoggs

Technical Group members:

Swim Group	Durham School Swimming
Swim England – Workforce representative	Everyone Active
Birmingham School Swimming	Nottingham City School Swimming
Buckinghamshire Learning Trust	Phillimore Park Community Primary School, Sheffield
Devon Education	Suffolk Norse Swimming
Doncaster City Leisure Trust	

Terms of Reference

Purpose and Scope: To advise Government on how to ensure all children leave primary school able to meet a defined minimum standard of capability and confidence in swimming, including disabled young people and those with special educational needs.

Objectives:

- To identify the challenges schools and school swimming providers face in providing quality swimming tuition, and advise on solutions.
- Define what confidence and capability means in relation to school swimming ability, especially with reference to disabled young people and those with special educational needs.
- Advise how to ensure school swimming is delivered in a way that caters for all children.
- Identify what government and others can do to tackle the challenges faced by schools and swimming providers.
- Establish key metrics that can be monitored to accurately gauge national attainment.
- Contribute to the draft Curriculum Swimming and Water Safety Review report.

APPENDIX B

DEFINING CAPABILITY AND CONFIDENCE

The need for a standard definition of capability and confidence in relation to the swimming national curriculum programme of study, and the work that is being undertaken to define this, has been discussed above in *Ensuring the national curriculum requirements are fit-for-purpose* (recommendation section 2, p13).

In the meantime, the following guidelines have been created through consultation with members of the Technical Group to set the national standard. An expanded version including stroke descriptors and videos, would be included as part of the proposed Curriculum Swimming and Water Safety Resource Pack.

1. National curriculum outcome: Swim competently, confidently and proficiently over a distance of at least 25 metres.

- Swimming *at least 25 metres* should be viewed as an absolute minimum. Every Year 6 child should achieve this distance, with an expectation that the majority of pupils will swim significantly further.
- The *swim* should be continuous and completed without undue stress. The stroke or strokes used should be as strong at the end as at the start of the distance.
- In completing *at least 25 metres* some element of this must include in deep water, defined as greater than shoulder depth.

2. National curriculum outcome: Use a range of strokes effectively.

- The strokes used should be recognisable to an informed onlooker. The minimum expectation will be:
 - Alternative strokes: Front Crawl, Backstroke
 - Simultaneous strokes: Breaststroke, Butterfly

3. National curriculum outcome: Perform safe self-rescue in different water-based situations.

- Emphasis should be on young people being able to safely enter and exit the water. This includes falling in and using ladders to get out of pools.
- The ability to tread water and keep yourself afloat is vital for safe-self rescue, as is the ability to get back to the side.
- Schools should also ensure pupils have practical experience of using their skills in outdoor swimming environments, such as the sea, canals or rivers. The Swim Safe schools programme run by Swim England and the RNLI provides practical water safety sessions for schools during the summer term and are committed to working with schools to ensure all pupils are able to access a session by 2020.

This report has been developed by the Curriculum Swimming and
Water Safety Review Group on behalf of the Swim Group.

For further information please email [**SchoolSwimmingReview@swimming.org**](mailto:SchoolSwimmingReview@swimming.org).