

**TEACHING SWIMMING  
AND WATER SAFETY AT  
KEY STAGE 1 OR 2  
A GUIDE FOR  
PRIMARY  
SCHOOLS**

**PRIMARY  
SCHOOLS**



Developed by the Swim Group to support Primary Schools to deliver high quality swimming and water safety lessons at Key Stage 1 or 2.

This guide has been produced by Swim England on behalf of the Swim Group. The content has been developed by experts from a range of organisations involved in the provision of swimming and water safety lessons in primary schools.

This series of guides for primary schools, parents, pool operators and swimming teachers, is designed to ensure all children meet the requirements of the national curriculum PE programme of study by the time they leave primary school in Year 6.

It also aims to ensure the consistent delivery of swimming and water safety lessons across the country that fully support the teaching of the three outcomes.

## **A Guide for Primary Schools**

The following information provides an overview for primary schools on how to make the most of your curriculum swimming and water safety provision. It should be read in conjunction with the document **Primary School Support Materials** which has more detailed information including lesson planning, roles and responsibilities, safety, use of funding and reporting attainment.

A separate **Water Safety Resource** is also available to support the delivery of this important element of the curriculum.

For more information and support materials visit [www.swimming.org/schools](http://www.swimming.org/schools).

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# WHY SHOULD PRIMARY SCHOOLS TEACH SWIMMING AND WATER SAFETY?

1

Swimming and Water Safety is included within the national curriculum PE programme of study.

2

Primary school is the only opportunity some young people will have to learn these important life-enhancing and potentially life-saving skills.

3

Swimming is an activity with numerous physical, mental and developmental benefits for all young people.

As an island nation with a wide range of rivers, lakes and canals, water is everywhere. At some point in their life every child will be around water.

By the time a child is ready to leave primary school they should be able to swim, know how to get out of trouble if they fall into water, know the dangers of water and understand how to stay safe when playing in and around it.

It is part of the national curriculum PE programme of study for England, so all local authority-maintained primary schools must provide swimming and water safety instruction. School teachers should also have the necessary knowledge, skills and competence to plan, teach and assess all three elements safely and effectively.

Other state funded schools, like academies and free schools, must provide a broad and balanced education – and that should include teaching pupils to learn how to swim and about water safety.

## **Benefits of water safety and swimming lessons:**

- Learning to swim allows pupils to have fun in the water with family and friends.
- Water safety is an essential life-saving skill.
- Swimming provides numerous physical and mental benefits throughout a pupils' life.
- Knowing how to swim provides access to many other water-related activities – and careers.
- Learning about water safety in different water environments and situations is vital to staying safe in and around water.

# NATIONAL CURRICULUM REQUIREMENTS: SWIMMING AND WATER SAFETY

Swimming and water safety is included within the national curriculum PE programme of study for England<sup>1</sup>. The purpose of this area of the curriculum is to ensure that all pupils:

- Develop competence to excel in a broad range of physical activities
- Are physically active for sustained periods of time
- Engage in competitive sports and activities
- Lead healthy, active lives.

The importance of swimming and water safety has been recognised through the inclusion of a specific programme of study. The three outcomes listed aim to ensure all pupils meet a minimum standard of swimming and water safety capability and confidence by the time they leave Key Stage 2.

## THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM PE PROGRAMME OF STUDY

Swimming and water safety instruction must be provided in either Key Stage 1 or Key Stage 2. Schools should provide sufficient swimming opportunities to ensure all pupils make progress and achieve their very best in swimming and water safety.

By all pupils this includes those with special educational needs, those with a disability or impairment and those whose first language is not English.

The requirement is for all Year 6 pupils to meet the statutory minimum standard of capability and confidence in swimming and safe self-rescue, as set out in the national curriculum.

### The three requirements

The minimum requirement is that, by the time they are ready to leave Key Stage 2, every child is able 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

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<sup>1</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-physical-education-programmes-of-study](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-physical-education-programmes-of-study)

## What do the outcomes mean?

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

This means demonstrating:

- a continuous swim of more than 25 metres without touching the side of the pool or the pool floor without the use of swimming aids. Whenever possible, at least part of the swim should be completed in deep water, defined as greater than shoulder depth. This is because 'competence' and 'proficiency' can't be assured if the swim takes place in shallow water only.
- the stroke, or strokes, are as strong at the end of the swim as at the start, and that the swim is completed without undue stress.
- the stroke or strokes are recognisable to an informed onlooker.

Using an ineffective stroke and just managing to swim 25 metres does not meet the minimum requirement. Nor does it provide the skills necessary for pupils to be able to self-rescue if they get into difficulty. A competent, confident and proficient swim over a distance of more than 25 metres is the minimum requirement to meet the national curriculum outcomes. It is hoped that a number of pupils will be able to swim significantly further, although evidence of this is not required for primary schools to officially record (although could be considered for parent and secondary school reporting).

### 2. Use a range of strokes effectively

Pupils should be able to use a range of strokes and make choices about the strokes they use to achieve different outcomes and be certain of success.

To do this they need to experience simultaneous and alternating strokes, on their front and back, and be able to adapt them for a range of purposes and intended outcomes. Examples of an intended outcome might be a swim of 50 metres, or using an effective leg kick to tread water successfully.

Swimming strokes do not have to be perfect; the emphasis should be on effectively achieving the required aim rather than precision hand or feet movements.

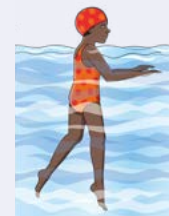
#### Examples of adapting strokes for different outcomes: front crawl



Use front crawl with face down and aquatic breathing to swim in a competitive race



Use front crawl with head up to play water polo



Use a front crawl-type leg kick in a vertical position to tread water

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

Pupils should know the dangers of water and understand how to act responsibly when playing in or near different water environments. This includes understanding and adhering to national and local water safety advice, being able to use appropriate survival and self-rescue skills if they unintentionally fall in or get into difficulty in the water, and knowing what to do if others get into trouble.

To ensure pupils fully understand this important area, 'water-based situations' should not only cover how an incident could occur, but also different types of water space.

Examples of **how** an incident could occur:

Falling into water when playing on a footpath	Falling out of a boat
Swimming in clothes	Becoming tired
Sustaining an injury	Being out of one's depth
Hampered by weeds or underwater hazards	Rough water or tides

Examples of **where** an incident could occur:

Homes and gardens	Swimming pools
Beaches	Rivers
Canals	Reservoirs

## Lesson delivery

Regardless of whether lessons are led by teaching staff or swimming teachers, every pool-based lesson should be organised, structured, controlled and continuously monitored.

Warm up and contrasting activities should also be programmed, structured and controlled. 'Free play' or unstructured swimming that lacks purpose and clarity will not help pupils reach the national curriculum standards.

They also need to be fully assessed so that overall swimming and water safety attainment levels can be published. More detail about how and when to do this can be found later in this resource.

## Beyond the minimum requirements

The aim of the national curriculum swimming programme of study is to ensure every child has a basic knowledge of swimming and water safety.

Within a class or year group, pupils are likely to hold a range of abilities in these areas. Regardless of prior swimming experience, it is important to ensure all pupils are offered the same lessons initially to provide consistency. This is particularly important with regard to the water safety lessons as this is an area which can never be over-taught.

For pupils who reach the minimum swimming and stroke requirements quickly, it is important to provide access to other activities that will help them stay engaged and continue to grow their confidence and capabilities in the water.

### **Examples of additional activities in the pool:**

- Using a range of swimming skills and strokes for different purposes (see table above). This could include basic water polo or synchronised swimming elements.
- Swimming longer distances and for increasing amounts of time. Taking part in events such as School Swimathon, the School Games swimming galas or the Big School Swim can provide different activities.
- Swimming in different water environments such as a lake or the sea. As well as activity centre programmes, the free Swim Safe programme provides an opportunity to learn about outdoor swimming and water safety.
- Approved lifeguard or life-saving training, such as the Rookie Lifeguard programme.

## **PLANNING YOUR SWIMMING AND WATER SAFETY LESSONS**

Organising swimming and water safety lessons can seem daunting, particularly for schools without their own on-site facilities. There are lots of myths around how lessons should be organised, who needs to pay for them, and how they should be delivered.

Below is an overview of the key information. More details, support documents and case studies, can be found in the Resource Materials section.

### **Who should deliver swimming and water safety lessons?**

Across the country, schools tend to use one of three models to deliver swimming and water safety lessons:

- 1. Primary schools deliver all aspects themselves:** The school team takes responsibility for organising lessons at either an on-site or off-site venue. This could include a school-based pool or leisure facility. Trained members of the teaching and support staff deliver the lessons.
- 2. Support provided by local school swimming services:** Dedicated school swimming services work with schools to organise transport, instruction and the hire of facilities and lifeguards via comprehensive, centrally administered one-stop-shop arrangements.
- 3. External providers administer and deliver the programme:** Third party, external providers such as pool operators or swim schools, administer swimming and water safety lessons at their own sites or the school's on-site facility. This often includes the 'whole package' such as timetabling, the provision of swimming instructors, lifeguards and sometimes transport.



There are lots of elements that will determine which model is best. This includes the confidence of teaching staff to deliver the programme, access to facilities and the level of additional support in the local area.

For schools setting up a new programme, or for those who want to check and challenge their current provision, a list of issues to consider is included in the resource materials section.

## Funding for swimming and water safety

Swimming and water safety is a national curriculum subject. Therefore, it must be free to all pupils and costs should come out of the core budget. This includes costs associated with facilities, swimming teachers and transport.<sup>2</sup>

### Using the PE and Sport Premium

The PE and Sport Premium<sup>3</sup> is provided to schools to make additional and sustainable improvements to the quality of PE and sport that is offered.

It cannot be used to cover costs of delivering swimming and water safety lessons as part of the national curriculum programme. However, schools are able to utilise their funding to provide additionality.

Examples of how to utilise the PE and Sport Premium to support swimming and water safety lessons:

- **'Top-up' swimming lessons**

Additional lessons for pupils who have not reached the minimum standards. These could be held at the end of the timetabled swimming and water safety programme, or at a separate time (for example, during the summer term). The ability of pupils in the water is measured at the end of Year 6, so it is important to ensure all pupils have been given the appropriate support to successfully reach these outcomes.

- **Upskill teachers and support staff in the delivery of lessons and activities**

Upskilling those involved in the delivery of swimming and water safety lessons will help to provide a better experience for your pupils in the water, and may also save money. If your swimming lessons are delivered by external swimming teachers, confident staff will be able to support the lessons, helping to bring the ratios down and potentially reducing the number of swimming teachers required. For schools that run their own lessons, adding additional training will help to ensure more pupils reach the minimum standards.

The swimming National Curriculum Training Programme (NCTP)<sup>4</sup> developed by national governing body, Swim England, provides a comprehensive programme, including lesson cards and plans.

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<sup>2</sup> Advice about charging and voluntary contributions can be found in the Department for Education document Charging for School Activities (2018) [www.gov.uk/government/publications/charging-for-school-activities](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/charging-for-school-activities)

<sup>3</sup> [www.gov.uk/guidance/pe-and-sport-premium-for-primary-schools](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/pe-and-sport-premium-for-primary-schools)

- **Introducing new sports or activities**

Ensuring pupils remain engaged with swimming and water safety lessons, particularly if they are already strong swimmers, will help them to stay active and build a habit. Introducing synchronised swimming, water polo or lifesaving, or entering national events such as School Swimathon or the Big School Swim, would provide new skills.

For more examples of how to utilise the PE and Sports Premium to support curriculum swimming and water safety lessons, see the resource section<sup>5</sup>

## When to teach swimming and water safety

Schools can decide when to teach swimming and water safety. It must be provided in Key Stage 2 if pupils have not met the national curriculum requirements in full by the end of Key Stage 1. When determining which year group(s) to take swimming, schools should consider:

- Depth of the pool: shallow water (in which pupils can stand) is better to gain water confidence. Older and more able swimmers might benefit from deeper water.
- Amount of time available for swimming: younger pupils are likely to need more time to change and get ready for swimming.
- Availability and gender of adult helpers: younger pupils are likely to need more help to get ready for the swimming lesson.

Across the country more pupils swim in Years 3, 4, and 5 than any other year group. Some schools provide additional swimming lessons for those pupils who, towards the end of Year 6, have yet to meet the national curriculum requirements in full ('Top-up swimming').

## Frequency and length of swimming and water safety lessons

The time of year, frequency and length of lessons can be determined locally. While there is no set number of lessons that should form a curriculum swimming and water safety programme, it is important that sufficient time is given to ensure all pupils meet, or exceed, the full national curriculum requirements. A number of different models are used (see below), and factors such as pupils' abilities, timetable and resources may impact on the decision. When discussing the most appropriate format, it is important to keep in mind the time it takes to travel to and from the pool and the time it takes for changing.

- **Frequency of lessons**

There are a range of options available to schools, from short intensive programmes to weekly lessons throughout Key Stage 2. Schools are encouraged to provide as many practical swimming and water safety lessons as possible.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.swimming.org/schools/school-swimming-training/](http://www.swimming.org/schools/school-swimming-training/)

<sup>5</sup> Guidance for using PE and Sports Premium funding [www.swimming.org/library/documents/559/download](http://www.swimming.org/library/documents/559/download)

### **Programme models**

- The same pupils could attend weekly sessions for a full academic year.
- Pupils from one year group could attend for half a year and then again in the next academic year.
- Pupils could swim during the same term in each of the three consecutive years.
- Intensive programmes with daily lessons have been found to work well, particularly for pupils in Year 5 and Year 6 who are in danger of not meeting the national curriculum requirements (these vary from 10-15 days).

- **Length of lesson**

In an indoor, heated pool 30-45 minutes in the water is optimum to allow adequate time for warm-up, the main theme, a contrasting activity, and for activities to be explained and organised.

For schools that have to travel a significant distance to the venue, lessons of between 45 minutes to 1 hour can be requested. It is also worth considering going for fewer weeks, or an intensive programme that take place daily.

- **Utilising travel time**

While it is impossible to fully teach swimming and water safety outside of the water, there are a number of activities that can be done in the classroom or on a bus travelling to a pool. These include discussions about water safety, safe swimming and self-rescue skills, quiz sheets and resources, and a question and answer session about the lesson. Some schools also utilise televisions in coaches to show relevant films.

## What to teach

To meet the three national curriculum requirements for swimming and water safety, lessons should focus on developing some or all of the following skills and strokes in different water-related contexts:

- how to enter and exit the water
- floatation
- submerging
- rotating from back to front and front to back and regaining an upright position
- pushing and gliding and an understanding of streamlining
- aquatic breathing
- moving effectively and efficiently through the water using alternating and simultaneous strokes on front and back, such as front crawl, back crawl, breast stroke, side stroke
- swimming longer distances and for increasing amounts of time
- using swimming skills and strokes for different purposes such as water polo and synchronised swimming
- survival and self-rescue skills: treading water, Heat Escape Lessening Position (HELP) and Huddle positions, floating and resting in the water, attracting attention, sculling and swimming in clothes/buoyancy aids
- water safety: knowledge and understanding of different water environments, how to stay safe when playing in and around water including recognising flags and warning signs and understanding national and local water safety advice
- what to do if others get into difficulties: stay safe: shout, signal; throw, do not go into the water; raising the alarm 999
- play competitive games such as water polo and apply basic principles suitable for attacking and defending.

*More information about what to teach can be found in the Primary School - Support Materials.*

## ASSESSING SWIMMING AND WATER SAFETY ACHIEVEMENT

By the end of Year 6 every child must have an understanding of water safety, be able to swim a minimum of 25 metres unaided, and understand safe self-rescue.

Schools can choose how they assess water safety and swimming competence. As with other subjects, assessment should be on-going and inform teachers of the next steps in learning.

<b>Achievement</b>	<b>Attainment examples</b>
Perform safe self-rescue skills	Floating, treading water, attracting attention
Use different strokes and swimming skills for different outcomes	Swimming lengths, play water polo, tread water
Swim competently, confidently and proficiently further than 25 metres	Swim increasingly longer distances using a range of strokes, compete in a race or gala
Talk about how to behave when in and around water and how to help in an emergency	Be able to explain where incidents could take place and what number to call for help

Pupils should demonstrate they meet these elements with certainty, and on more than one occasion. By repeating the attainment objectives, this will help build confidence and ability. When assessing the elements, always consider the extent to which pupils' skills and strokes would enable them to get themselves out of trouble if they unintentionally fall in to water or get into difficulty.

Simple scenarios can be useful to provide a context for pupils to choose and use strokes and skills purposefully and for teacher's to assess competence.

### **Assessment scenario**

You've fallen into the water unintentionally. You are wearing a pair of shorts and t-shirt.

Without touching the sides of the pool or the pool floor:

- enter the water and float for 30 seconds
- rotate and swim on your front for 15 metres
- tread water for 30 seconds. Try to attract attention
- rotate and swim on your back for 15 metres
- return to the side of the pool and exit the water safely.

Repeat the assessment in different water based situations.

## **Accountability for progress and achievement**

School teachers are accountable for pupils' attainment, progress and outcomes<sup>6</sup>. Regardless of whether school teachers or an external swimming teacher delivers the lesson, the school teacher should at all times be aware of what their pupils are doing, how well they are progressing and what they need to do next in their learning.

Schools should be involved in the planning and delivery of swimming lessons and assessing pupils' attainment, satisfying themselves that what is being taught is appropriate and will help all pupils make progress and achieve. Regular and frequent dialogue should take place between school teachers and swimming teachers so that both are aware of what pupils are being taught and what they are learning.

<sup>6</sup> Teachers' Standards, DfE: 2011






As is the case with other national curriculum subjects, assessment of pupils' ability to meet national curriculum requirements should be undertaken and reported to parents by the school teacher. This should include an assessment of individual pupils' ability to meet the swimming and water safety targets, what their pupils have achieved and what they need to do to improve and continue with their swimming on an annual basis.

## Reporting pupils' attainment

Schools are required to publish their swimming and water safety attainment levels as part of their reporting requirements for the PE and Sport Premium.

This should be on their website and should state what percentage of pupils within their Year 6 cohort meet the national curriculum swimming and water safety requirements to perform safe self-rescue in different water-based situations, use a range of strokes effectively and swim competently, confidently and proficiently over a distance of at least 25 metres.

As some swimming and water safety programmes will be delivered in years 3, 4 or 5, it is understood that the data might need to be held until they reach Year 6. In addition, it is accepted that some of the information may be out of date as some pupils may have received additional swimming lessons outside of school. However, the emphasis is on what schools know about their pupils' attainment in relation to the national curriculum, and the impact of the swimming and water safety programmes.

Support for review and reflection - considering the 5 key indicators from DfE, what development needs are a priority for your setting and your students now and why? Use the space below to reflect on previous spend, identify current need and priorities for the future.	
Key achievements to date:	Areas for further improvement and baseline evidence of need:
Meeting national curriculum requirements for swimming and water safety	Please complete all of the below:
What percentage of your current Year 6 cohort swim competently, confidently and proficiently over a distance of at least 25 metres? <b>N.B.</b> Even though your children may swim in another year please report on their attainment on leaving primary school.	%
What percentage of your current Year 6 cohort use a range of strokes effectively [for example, front crawl, backstroke and breaststroke]?	%
What percentage of your current Year 6 cohort perform safe self-rescue in different water-based situations?	%
Schools can choose to use the Primary PE and Sport Premium to provide additional provision for swimming but this must be for activity <b>over and above</b> the national curriculum requirements. Have you used it in this way?	Yes/No
Created by:   	Supported by:  

Regular updates to parents and guardians during the swimming and water safety programme should also be provided. This will help them to understand what their child should be learning and how proficient they are in the water. Information should also be included within final Year 6 reports.

# CONTINUING THE SWIMMING JOURNEY: FROM KEY STAGE 2 TO KEY STAGE 3

Learning to swim and understanding how to stay safe in the water is not just about passing a test and ticking a box, these basic requirements will help young people to have the best chance of acting responsibly around water and surviving in it.

There should be no need for a child to leave primary school without achieving the minimum national curriculum requirements for swimming and water safety. However, where this happens, schools should signpost pupils to summer school courses at local pools or encourage parents to take their children swimming.

Despite not being a formal part of the PE curriculum at Key Stage 3, 4 or 5, many secondary schools continue to develop swimming and water safety skills to ensure confidence, knowledge and ability is retained.

As such, information about pupils that have not achieved national curriculum swimming and water safety requirements should be communicated to the next school so they can put into place additional support to help them become competent and proficient swimmers.

It is vital this happens: young people who are unable to swim are at greater risk around water and may not be able to take part in other water-based activities at secondary school. The older they are the more at risk they can become as they begin to associate with their peers and friends rather than adult family members. It is known that peer-pressure can cause young people to take greater risks and get themselves into dangerous situations around water, sometimes with tragic consequences.

## Swim Group comment:

“It is important to remember that meeting the minimum national curriculum requirements for swimming and water safety does not guarantee the safety of a child when in, on, or near water.

Education and professional learning should be on-going, and all those responsible for young people should take every opportunity to explain the dangers of water and provide on-going opportunities to develop and improve swimming, survival and self-rescue skills.

Although not in the national curriculum for Key Stages 3, 4 or 5, the recommendation from the Swim Group is that by Key Stage 5, every young person should be able to swim 400m competently. They should also know, and understand, the individual peculiarities and characteristics of inland and coastal water so they can make informed decisions about enjoying the water safely and responsibly.”

## Additional links:

- Association for Physical Education (afPE)  
[www.afpe.org.uk](http://www.afpe.org.uk)
- Department for Education information on swimming and water safety  
[www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-physical-education-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-physical-education-programmes-of-study](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-physical-education-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-physical-education-programmes-of-study)
- Guidance for the management of outdoor learning, off-site visits and learning outside the classroom  
[www.oeap.info/what-we-do/oeap-guidance](http://www.oeap.info/what-we-do/oeap-guidance)
- Health and safety in swimming pools HSG179  
[www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)
- RLSS - runs the annual drowning prevention week  
[www.rlss.org.uk/drowning-prevention-week](http://www.rlss.org.uk/drowning-prevention-week)
- Safe Practice: in Physical Education, School Sport and Physical Activity  
[www.afpe.org.uk/physical-education/safe-practice-in-physical-education-school-sport-physical-activity-2016/](http://www.afpe.org.uk/physical-education/safe-practice-in-physical-education-school-sport-physical-activity-2016/)
- Swim England  
[www.swimming.org/swimengland](http://www.swimming.org/swimengland)
- Swim Safe - outdoor swimming and water safety programme  
[www.swimsafe.org.uk](http://www.swimsafe.org.uk)
- Youth Sport Trust  
[www.youthsporttrust.org](http://www.youthsporttrust.org)