

A lesson learned?

Whatever the London legacy, the news that more than half of children leave primary school unable to swim 25m unaided sent shock waves across the country. Six months on, **Roger Guttridge** asks what has been done to put things right – and what more can be done in the future



do dance, gymnastics, team sports, striking sports and then take a class of kids in swimming – in six hours. It's laughable. We need to address teacher training.

'The vast majority of school swimming is delivered by leisure operators so we are keen to work with them as well.'

Additional funding

Another key feature of the ASA campaign is to encourage schools to allocate enough hours to swimming lessons. 'There is an additional £150m going into school sport now – that's a minimum of £9,000 per school but some schools will get a lot more,' says Mr Glenn. 'We are not asking headteachers to spend all this money on school swimming – we are asking them to review their current

It was a shocking statistic and it certainly captured media attention: 51 per cent of children can't swim 25 metres unaided. *Learning the Lesson – The Future of School Swimming*, a report from the ASA and Kellogg's, attracted more media attention than anyone could have dreamed of: acres of newsprint, air-time on national television news programmes and even overseas coverage including American television news. But getting the media attention was a battle won, not a war. The key question now is: what has been done to remedy the situation – and what is planned for the future?

'We've done quite a lot,' says Jon Glenn, the ASA's head of youth and community. 'From the learn-to-swim census, we did put some intentions in place that we are going to do. The first was that there will be a website specifically for schools and that goes live in November. The Department for Education have put a link from their information page and we are asking them to endorse our site.'

'We have the National Curriculum Training Programme that is aimed at school teachers and swimming teachers as well. So we can upskill those that are already teaching. School swimming is completely different to learn-to-swim delivery. There is certainly a different ethos.'



Jon Glenn

'We are working on a pilot programme with the Department for Education on swimming qualifications for students that are going into primary school teacher training. At present, they get six hours for PE in the whole of their teacher training – not just for swimming. Some don't get any. That means they have to

Supporting the schools

With school swimming seen as one of the ways of turning around the nation's learn-to-swim statistics, the ASA has drawn up a list of ways in which it will offer support.

They include:

- continuing to provide and develop new products to support school swimming
- providing continual professional development (CPD) for teachers
- giving information, advice and resources to schools
- delivering innovative partnership programmes such as Pools4Schools and Make a Splash
- encouraging schools to accredit their learn-to-swim programmes to show quality assurance
- launching a school swimming website for teachers and others involved in school swimming
- working with all government departments to ensure that 'this essential life skill' is delivered



Good practice: case study 1

Next step for County Durham

Following the Department for Education funding changes for schools in April, Durham County Council formed a school swimming management group with the aim of maintaining a co-ordinated county-wide primary school programme.

The group, which included council staff and head teachers from schools with learner pools, declared its understanding of swimming as an 'important life skill' and its commitment to sustaining the Durham high quality swimming programme'.

The existing programme already included a minimum of one swimming lesson a week for all Durham schools throughout the school year.

This led in 2011-12 to 80 per cent of year 6 children attaining the minimum key stage 2 target of swimming at least 25 metres unaided. To maintain this success rate after the reorganisation of school funding, the management group developed a new service level agreement for schools, offering:

- a school swimming development officer to organise, manage and co-ordinate the primary school programme, including transport for schools
- guaranteed tuition by fully qualified level 2 teachers
- a detailed results analysis at the end of each term for schools
- continual professional development for swimming teachers (minimum three days a year)
- training for school staff to assist with swimming lessons
- a monitored school swimming programme, including regular lesson observations and evaluations.
- guidelines and information on the swimming programme, including course outlines, sample certificates, details of responsibilities and direct contact numbers
- optional deep water sessions in the summer term for those year 6 pupils who have not achieved the KS2 standard
- the signposting of 'gifted and talented pupils towards appropriate opportunities'

More than 95 per cent of schools in County Durham have bought into the new service, reinforcing their faith in the programme. Durham will also promote the ASA's Get Safe campaign throughout June and July to make children aware of the dangers posed by water.

The cost is an annual sum received every April and is calculated by a formula based on class sizes and distance to pool. The programme currently involves 212 primary schools and 10 teaching staff plus casual staff. It uses eight primary school pools and eight leisure centres across the county.

Early feedback suggests that schools are happy with the high quality service.

ASA plea to counties

The ASA has urged county sport partnerships across the country to get behind the campaign to increase swimming provision in schools.

A letter from the governing body's head of youth and community, Jon Glenn, tells them that although swimming is a statutory requirement for primary schools, not all schools are fulfilling their obligations.

'Some of the schools in your area may not be meeting this requirement so we urge you to challenge them in order to make swimming and water safety an absolute priority for use of the funding,' says the letter, timed to coincide with the release of an additional £150m to be spent on PE and school sport.

The letter reminds county sport partnerships that schools are required to provide swimming instruction in key stages 1 or 2. In particular, children should be taught to:

- swim 'competently, confidently and proficiently' over at least 25 metres
- use a range of strokes effectively such as frontcrawl, backstroke and breaststroke
- perform safe self-rescue in different water-based situations

The letter urges partnerships to not only ensure that schools are fulfilling their statutory obligations for swimming and safety but looking at ways to help children who are not reaching the minimum standards - for example by providing booster lessons or 'top-ups'.

Partnerships are also encouraged to make sure schools are getting the best out of their teaching staff and that individuals involved in school swimming take the National Curriculum Training Programme as a minimum qualification.

'We urge you to work with schools in your area to look carefully at the school swimming provision to address the decline in the number of children learning to swim,' adds the letter.

◀ provision and start dialogue with their school swimming provider. We are asking schools to monitor and evaluate - we need to ask what we are getting. Record-keeping and checking up on those records is an agreed part of it as well.'

Ofsted, the school inspection body, would seem to be the obvious people to monitor school swimming, but that's not something they do at present. 'We are having conversations with Ofsted,' said Mr Glenn. 'They will be looking at the way this £150m is spent. We wish Ofsted to inspect and I think we can help. We can accredit school swimming programmes as part of swim21. That's the line we are going to take with Ofsted. We are trying to make it a lot easier for schools to use swim21.'

Better partnerships

The RNLI and Surf Life Saving GB are other organisations the ASA is talking to, along with the Royal Life Saving Society with which

there is a well-established relationship. 'We are quite clear on the messages. There need to be better partnerships in the future. We are also working with a couple of programmes including GLL to get swimming lessons into the Olympic Park.

'London's Make a Splash is a big programme. It's one of London Mayor Boris Johnson's Olympic legacy programmes, and we have just signed a contract for another two years. The BBC have shown an interest in following the pupils' progress at a school where very few of the children can swim.'

New curriculum

The revised school swimming curriculum, which starts in 2014, has two key features. One is that all children must have school swimming lessons - though there is no stipulation about how many lessons or for how long. The other centres on the ability to 'self- ▶



Good practice: case study 2

School swimming offer

The ASA has issued a 'School Swimming Offer' designed to show primary schools how they can use some or all of the additional £150m in funding to improve school swimming.

Every primary school in the country will receive a minimum of £9,000 and the 'Offer' includes some examples of how this could be used.

- £3,000-£4,000 is the average cost of providing 40 lessons for 30 children including qualified swimming teacher, pool time and transport
- £1,000 could be used to extend swimming lessons into a second term, financing 10 additional lessons for 30 children
- £850 is the estimated cost of 10 intensive half-hour lessons to boost the swimming ability of 10 swimmers who are just below the minimum key stage 2 standard of being able to swim 25 metres
- £500 could improve the quality of lessons by training 10 teachers and/or teaching assistants in modules 1 and 2 of the National Curriculum Training Programme
- £80 will buy a set of school swimming resources, including the Teacher's Complete Framework with 'must-have information' on all four frameworks and a learn-to-swim games pack to deliver a fun approach in lessons
- £7.50 to £15 an hour is how much it costs to reduce class sizes by adding additional teachers

'Significant success' for West Country city

Everyone Active are claiming a 'significant success' rate across the West Country city of Bristol, where they run the city council's swimming pools.

The leisure operator says the proportion of children able to swim 25m when they leave primary school in Bristol is now 80 per cent - well above the national average of 49 per cent.

The announcement was made to mark the 10th anniversary of their provision of intensive school swimming lessons for key stage 2 children in Bristol.

'The aim of the school swimming scheme is to ensure that children leave primary school with the ability to swim at least 25 metres unaided,' say Everyone Active.

'With national statistics demonstrating that the average state school spends only eight hours and 15 minutes a year delivering swimming lessons to its students, it is encouraging news that Bristol and Everyone Active are leading the way in providing high quality school swimming.'

'There is also a highly successful learn-to-swim scheme in Bristol, with over 4,000 children and adults learning to swim each week.'

Gary Teagle, contracts manager for Everyone Active in Bristol, said: 'I am delighted that swimming pools in Bristol are providing both a successful school swimming programme and an award-winning learn-to-swim scheme.'

'We have developed both of these schemes in conjunction with Bristol City Council and are pleased that the children of Bristol are learning this life skill and leaving primary school with the ability to swim at least 25 metres.'

Good practice: case study 3

Bude's swim Safe initiative

More than 2,300 children are better equipped to deal with open water emergencies following a Swim Safe pilot project at Bude, Cornwall, last summer.

The RNLI approached the ASA about holding the safety initiative at Bude Sea Pool following the 2012 learn-to-swim census.

The scheme, run jointly by the two organisations, ran six days a week for five weeks between July 29 and August 30.

The initiative was targeted at both summer visitors and local youngsters aged seven to 14 and able to swim 25m.

The twin aims were to:

- give children visiting the coast an opportunity to understand and learn about the differences between swimming in a pool and swimming in open water with all the attendant challenges
- encourage parents to consider the differences and risks of pool swimming and swimming at the coast

The 40-minute sessions at the sea pool were completely free and included in-water tuition by accredited ASA teachers and beach safety advice from RNLI lifeguards.

At the end of the session, each child received a goody bag containing a certificate marking their attendance, tee shirt, swimming cap and information on beach and swimming safety. Bude's partially man-made tidal pool, which sits under the



cliffs, was chosen for the initiative because it was seen as demonstrating the ferocity of the sea environment but with the control of a pool structure.

For local children unable to swim, a programme of top-up lessons was organised for local schools during the autumn term.

The initiative attracted extensive media coverage including national and regional TV and radio.



Prince puts learn to swim on media map

Prince William's involvement in the ASA learn-to-swim campaign played a huge role in attracting media coverage at home and abroad - and the governing body are hoping it can be repeated in the future.

The Duke of Cambridge - a former school swimmer and university water polo player - agreed to throw his weight behind the *Learning the Lesson* report after a request from the English Schools Swimming Association (ESSA), of which he is patron.

'I had a conversation with John Stiven [ESSA secretary] and he agreed to ask him - and Prince William said yes,' said Jon Glenn, ASA head of youth and community.

'Having a member of the royal family doing that gave us a huge push.

'We got unprecedented coverage - worldwide coverage. And we had the main TV evening news programmes in this country talking about school swimming. Coverage included CNN and BBC World, reaching a worldwide cumulative audience of 449 million people.

'We were delighted with the coverage and so were the Palace.

'We are looking at developing that relationship with ESSA to push it forward in the future.'

◀ rescue' in certain situations. 'Swimming 25m in a swimming pool is fine but it's absolutely nothing if you go in the sea or a lake, where it's cold and you can't see where you are going and there are fish or jellyfish,' says Mr Glenn. 'Children need to be aware of that cold water shock. That's why we had a lot of drownings over the summer. The minimum of 25m is still there but to me that's a red herring. That's the minimum standard not *the* standard.'

Swimming clubs

While swimming clubs have a traditional role in the teaching of swimming, Mr Glenn believes the initial focus should be on school swimming. 'Clubs say they have professional coaches. They say they know best but my challenge is: Do you fully understand the National Curriculum? There is the wider safety element that needs to be built into it. If we have more time, fantastic - let's look at bilateral breathing or doing butterfly. But first we need to make sure children who fall in a canal can get themselves out.

'For some children, National Curriculum will be their only opportunity to learn to swim. Some parents aren't going to pay for more. If we muck that up we are going to have less people participating in the future. Unless we teach people to swim they are highly unlikely to learn to swim. If your parents don't swim, you are highly unlikely to get your parents taking you swimming. In Manchester, 54 per cent of children have never been in a swimming pool.

'We need to make sure the people who are delivering school swimming have the right skills.'

Parents' responsibility

Mr Glenn said some parents were not doing enough. 'Parents have a responsibility as well. There is an expectation that parents will contribute to their children's ongoing swimming - helping them out and going as a family. In many cases, parents are not doing enough. There are great offers out there in learn-to-swim. A family swim costs less than a KFC bucket. Steve Parry once said that if you gave up smoking for a week, you could pay for your children's swimming lessons. But there are people out there who don't want to give up smoking.'

Three steps forward

1. New website dedicated to school swimming
2. Schools to monitor and evaluate swimming provision
3. Parents should do more to help their children learn to swim

Good practice: case study 4

Crash courses in Plymouth

Everyone Active have launched what are effectively crash courses in swimming for youngsters in the Plymouth area.

Using the state-of-the-art Plymouth Life Centre and a smaller pool at nearby Plympton, the leisure operators are offering three weeks of daily lessons for children in year 4 and others in year 5, who have not achieved the National Curriculum standard.

The half-hour lessons run for 15 consecutive school days and those who are still unable to swim 25 metres after that are then offered a 50 per cent discount off the cost of other swimming lessons.

'We are trying to encourage them to come back and achieve these standards,' says Ian Cotton, Everyone Active's regional swim manager.

'It's really like a crash course so we can follow their progress. And the children themselves feel they are making progress each day.

'Every child that comes through the schools programme also gets free family swims for four people - one or two adults and two or three children.'

Children who have already achieved the National Curriculum standard are given a rolling programme comprising one-third swimming, one-third diving and one-third water polo.

'We are trying to give the strongest swimmers something different as well,' says Mr Cotton.

The pilot project began in 2012 and involved 2,000 children in the first year, of whom 92 per cent were deemed to have improved as a result.

Just over 50 per cent achieved the National Curriculum standard but many of the youngsters still have another year or two to achieve it by the national target age of 11.

'This year we are targeting year 4 but year 5 children who don't achieve the target can come back to swim again with the year 4s,' said Mr Cotton.

He said that, ideally, Everyone Active would like to extend the programme to other areas but this is not always possible because few pools are as big and versatile as Plymouth Life Centre.

'It depends on the timetables and pool programmes,' he said. 'It might be more difficult but we will look at adjusting it at some of these facilities.'

For more information on school swimming:

www.swimming.org/schoolswimming
or email schoolswimming@swimming.org

For information on the National Curriculum Training Programme

www.swimming.org/asa/teaching-and-coaching/nctp
phone 01509 640 463 or email nctp@swimming.org