

Guidance for Schools Regarding Pupil Participation in School Swimming Lessons

Water safety is now an important part of both PSHE and PE. School swimming is a statutory element of the National Curriculum for Physical Education, and all pupils should be provided with the opportunity to access swimming and water safety education during their primary school years. The responsibility for determining how individual pupils participate, and the arrangements made to support them, rests with the school. These decisions should be made by the Headteacher and relevant school staff in the best interests of each child, taking into account their individual needs, circumstances and any additional support requirements.

There may be occasions when a pupil is present at a swimming session but is not participating directly in the lesson. This could include situations where a child is unwell, has forgotten their swimming kit, or is temporarily unable to take part for another valid reason.

For pupils with SEND, anxiety-related needs or other barriers to participation, schools should consider appropriate and **reasonable adjustments** to enable access to school swimming at a level that is suitable for the individual child. In some cases, observing from the foyer or poolside alongside a member of school staff may form part of a planned, graduated approach to help build confidence, familiarity and engagement over time. However, this should be viewed as a temporary support strategy, with the longer-term aim of enabling the child to engage in swimming and water safety learning as fully as possible.

Schools should ensure that any arrangements for pupils who are not actively participating are risk assessed, appropriately supervised and communicated with parents and relevant staff. Such decisions should form part of the school's wider commitment to inclusion and ensuring that all children can access learning opportunities in a manner that is safe, appropriate and supportive of their individual needs.

We recognise the valuable partnerships that schools have with swimming providers and encourage open communication to support positive experiences for all pupils. While swimming instructors are responsible for delivering high-quality swimming lessons to participating children, decisions regarding individual pupil participation and support arrangements remain the responsibility of the school.

Schools should also remember that water safety is as important as swimming competence. Adopting a "Safety Before Strokes" approach ensures that all children develop essential knowledge and understanding about staying safe in, on and around water. Where pupils are temporarily unable to participate in the pool, learning opportunities can continue through water safety education, including the Dry Swim units available within PE Passport and key messages such as Float to Live.

By adopting a flexible, inclusive and safety-focused approach, schools can help ensure that all children are supported to engage positively with swimming and water safety, enabling them to make progress at a pace that is appropriate for their individual circumstances while meeting the statutory requirements of the curriculum.

