



Pupil Voice



Our students'
views on PE,
sport and
being active
at school

Being Active in Merton Schools

Key Stage 2 children surveyed across the academic year 2024–25

Purpose

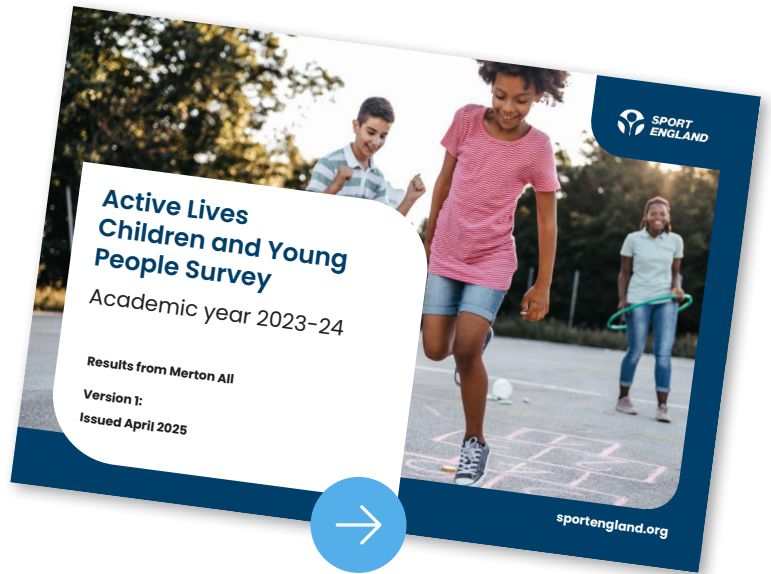
To create a culture where all children can thrive and enjoy physical education (PE), school sport and being active, it is vital that we listen to the voices of our young people.

The Merton School Sport Partnership (MSSP) wanted to capture the voices of students from all areas of our Borough, and especially from those children that weren't as engaged in their PE lessons, or as active as their peers; as well as those from under-represented groups (as evidenced within our Merton School Sports Survey school level participation data).

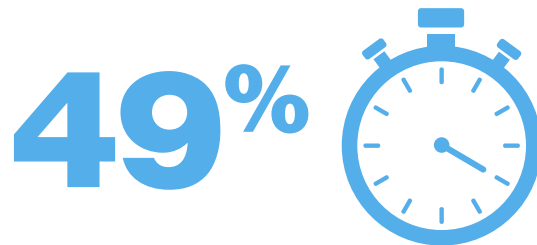
In September 2024 we set about planning our in-person Pupil Voice project which listened to the voices of 250 children from Key Stage 2 (KS2). We would like to thank Sukpal Uppal, Participation and Engagement Manager, London Borough of Merton, for his support in this planning process. We have also worked alongside Janna Scott, from the Merton Borough of Sport team, to listen to the views of KS 4/5 students at our three Special Schools; to better understand their specific needs, interests and the barriers they face to being active and enjoying PE and sport both in school and the community.

Our aim was to discover what Merton's least active children enjoyed about PE and sport at their schools, the barriers that they face, and how they would like it to look in the future. This included their school swimming lessons, delivered by our local provider, Better (GLL).

In addition, MSSP used this opportunity to gain vital feedback about the sports events and festivals we deliver across the school year. In the academic year 2024–25, MSSP delivered 67 primary school sports events in a range of sports and for children of all abilities. We wanted to find out what is important to our relatively inactive children when they come to a sports event and how we can ensure that those attending future events and competitions have a positive experience which supports a lifelong love of being active.



Over the academic years 2023–24 and 2024–25, all Merton Primary and Secondary schools (Special Schools are not included by Sport England in this process) were invited and encouraged to complete the Sport England Active Lives survey. Data from the Merton Schools report in 2023–24 suggests that 49% of students surveyed were active for at least 60 mins per day across the week.



Attitudes towards sport and physical activity (years 3–11 only) suggested that 54% agreed strongly that they enjoyed taking part in exercise and sports, 68% agreed strongly that they understand why exercise and sports are good for them and 26% agreed strongly that they find exercise and sports easy. In years 1–2, 68% love playing sport, 78% love being active and 78% find sport easy.

Data from this will also be used to contribute to our insight and future planning to engage more children to be active every day.

“Youth voice” is an umbrella term that captures a spectrum of activities that focus on meaningful engagement with young people, to understand their views and involve them in shaping solutions and decisions that will affect them.

Sport England - (2025)

The Process

Each year, as part of their affiliation with MSSP, schools are tasked to complete 'The Merton School Sports Mark' (MSSM) Excel spreadsheet survey. This self improvement tool provides schools with a quantifiable framework to identify their strengths and areas to improve, against the government and MSSP recommendations for PE and physical activity.

To improve the equity and inclusivity of MSSP's and the school's provision, the MSSM also gathers valuable data around the different characteristics of children that are accessing extra-curricular sport/physical activity (PA) and representing their school at events. This helps to inform us which children are not accessing the opportunities, and to consider their protected characteristics including:

1. Gender
2. Pupil Premium
3. Global Majority
4. Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
5. Those with Educational Health Care Plans (EHCP)

Primary Schools

Based on their own data, the PE coordinator in each primary school was asked to select around six relatively inactive pupils from those underrepresented groups to take part in the discussion groups.

- Between September 2024 and March 2025, MSSP visited every primary school in our affiliated network (43), and delivered a Pupil Voice session with the six selected children from years 4, 5 and 6 (two schools provided eight children)
- The Pupil Voice session consisted of a 25–30 minute focus group, where the children were asked to answer questions relating to what they liked about the PE provision at their school. The answers would then lead to discussion points around these topics.

After the focus group, the children were shown seven statements relating to our sporting events and asked to rank them in order of importance:

- Activities and the event are safe
- Adults are friendly and make me feel confident
- It is fun
- Good quality and clean facilities
- Good quality and knowledgeable referees
- Medals and trophies are awarded
- Winning the *REFSPECT award (*an award voted for by all participating schools at our events. Given to the school who best display the values of fair play, respect and kindness to others)



Special Schools

A separate Pupil Voice project has been conducted alongside the Merton Borough of Sport team, specifically for the SEND schools Perseid, Cricket Green and Melrose. These sessions combined a range of more interactive activities, picture cards and stickers to support and enhance the conversations and questioning of students (and in some cases their supporting staff helped with responses). Surveys were also sent home to parents and carers to gain their views. The questions were more aligned with the Active Lives survey (Sport England Children and Young People's Survey is not available to Special Educational Needs Schools) and considered community provision as well as PE and school-based activities. The sessions included questions around PE and physical activity, competitions, sports clubs, students' access and activity preferences, the barriers around PE, sport and PA and how things could be improved for them.

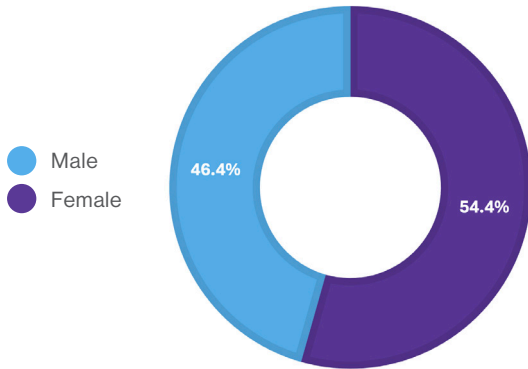
Each school engaged children with differing needs and so the design of the session and key outcomes differed for each school. Key takeaways overall suggested that most students are happy to exercise and be active at school, and racket sports were popular. Places they like to be active include online, swimming pools, outdoors, sports halls and MUGAs, but not at libraries or youth centres. Time, transport and feeling tired or needing time to rest after school were barriers especially for some children. Children like participating with other children of their own age as this feels safer.

A separate report will be available to highlight the findings from this interactive and practical based session.

The Data

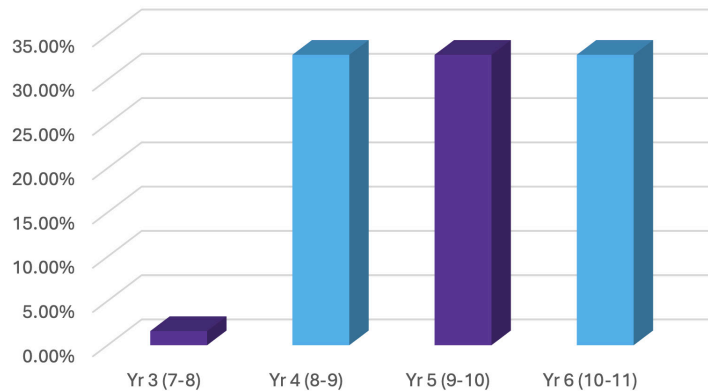
Our Demographic Profile (250 children from 43 Merton state primary schools)

1.1 – Gender of Participants

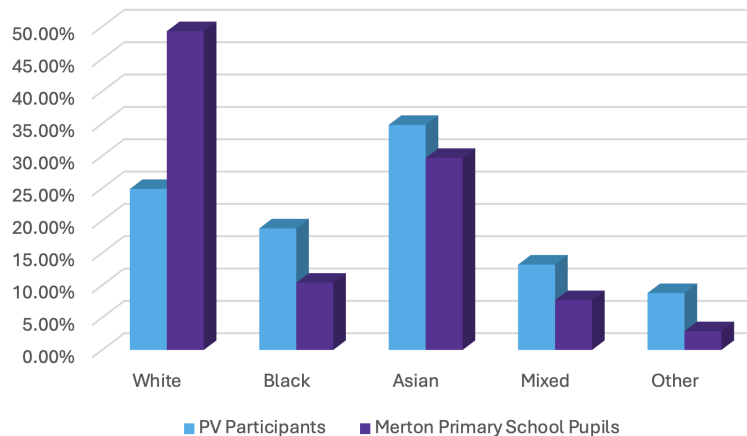


1.2 – Age Ranges of Participants

Schools were asked to select children from years 4–6. Two schools provided children from year 3.

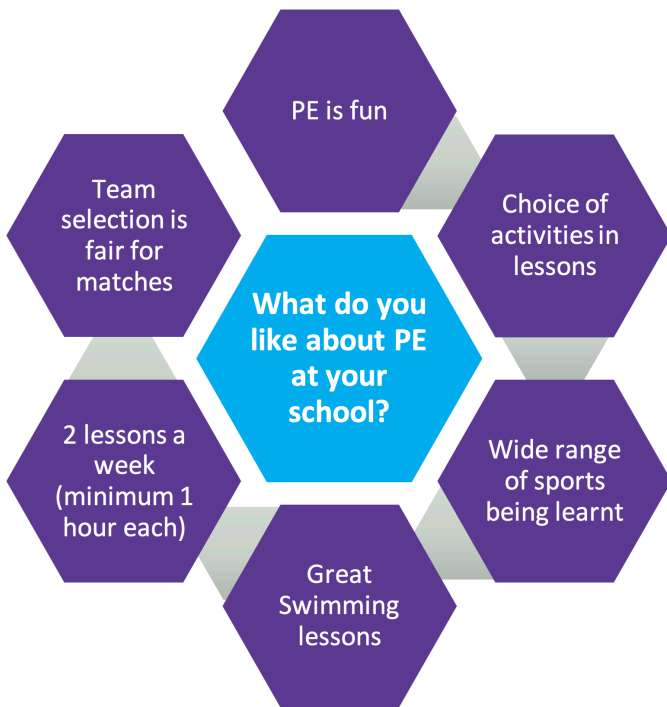


1.3 – Ethnicity of Pupil Voice Participants and London Borough of Merton Primary School Pupils (2024 Census)



Pupil Responses

Across all 250 participants there were some common themes (see diagrams below) alongside some specific feedback for the individual school to reflect upon.



Supporting Quotes

"P.E. is exhilarating"

"The curriculum is balanced with sports that typically both girls and boys will enjoy."

"The teachers make PE really fun"

"Lessons make me feel energetic and strong"

"We learn sports that I didn't even know existed!"

"PE is exciting. It makes me feel free"

"I like the way the PE curriculum is made. A few weeks where we get to learn the skills and rules needed to play the game, practise skills, then put them into tournaments and matches"

"My coach is supportive and fun"

"I learn lots of skills, so if I wanted to play a sport outside of school, I already have enough knowledge"

"I like learning other life skills in PE like team building and strategy"

Supporting Quotes

"The boys can be rough and aggressive during matches, which makes me not want to get involved"

"Boys can take sports too seriously and be aggressive during lessons"

"The boys are sometimes rude to me if I make a mistake"

"Because we don't have much equipment, I sometimes have to wait a long time for my turn"

"Since year 3, we have been doing the same sports in PE every year. I would like to try some new sports"

"I feel like as it is our last year, we should have a say in which sports we learn in PE"





Supporting Quotes

“I like it when the lessons are varied, so we don’t do the same thing every week”

“I love playing tag games like ultimate tag for our warm-up”

“Friendship, kindness and respect from everyone”

“I would like to play matches against players of a similar level, so that there is not so much pressure if a mistake is made”

“Sometimes we have tournaments in houses, and we all know at the start who is going to win. I would like our coach to pick fairer teams for tournaments”

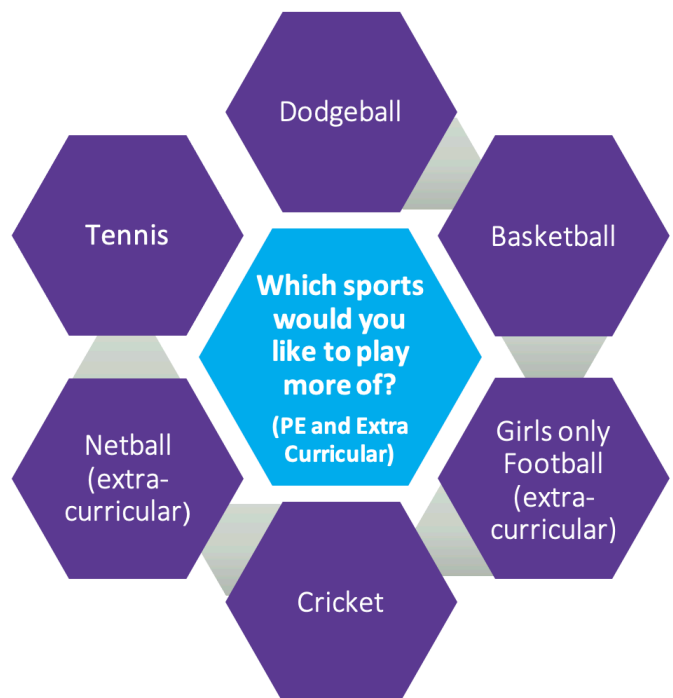
Supporting Quotes

“I would like some clubs for children of a lower ability “beginners clubs”. So that I can learn skills and play without the pressure of children who are much better than me”

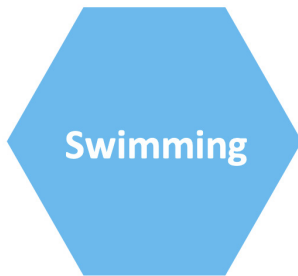
“Are we able to have a choice of which sports we are going to learn?”

“I would like a martial arts after school club”

“I love Dodgeball! I would love it if we could do it in PE more often”



Tell us about the swimming lessons you have received. Discussion around safety (in and out of the water), quality of instruction, enjoyment levels and barriers to participate if any.



Supporting Quotes

"I like that we are split into top, middle and bottom groups, and each group has their own coach. It means that everyone can learn what they are ready for"

"There are lots of lifeguards around the pool, so I felt safe"

"I loved swimming. I wish we could go more often"

"We were tested in our first lesson, then split into groups. So that everyone was learning with people of the same ability"

Representing your School at a Sports Festival / Competition

Supporting Quotes

"It is important to me that the level of competition is fair"

"Everyone should be respectful and kind to each other"

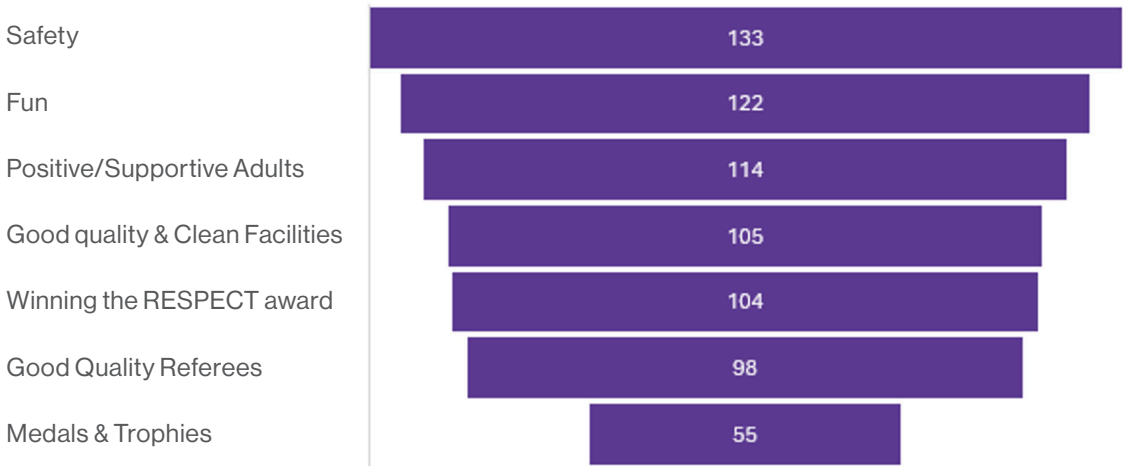
"A good event means that you are not boastful if you win, and if you lose, you can still congratulate the other team"



Event Pyramid Final Table

Using a Christmas tree shape, children were asked to place the statement relating to the most important aspect of a sports event at the top (awarded 4 points), the two second most important factors awarded 3 points, the three third most important awarded 2, and the least important factor for the children at a sporting event was awarded 1 point.

Through repeating this task at all 43 schools, we hoped that clear themes would emerge of the most important aspects of a sports event for relatively inactive children.



Safety – Safe activities. Fair/respectful play from opponents. Hygienic facilities.

Fun – Less focus on competitive sport. Games where you can just play.

Adults – Encouraging them, supporting them and reassuring them if they make a mistake. Involved by offering encouragement from the side of the pitch, not sitting down watching.

Facilities – Heavily linked to safety. Clean bathrooms and facilities due to not wanting to pick up germs and get ill.

Respect – Important to all for teammates and opponents to demonstrate sportsmanship values when playing sport. Several children gave it low priority though, as they felt that you shouldn't need an award to demonstrate fair play and kindness.

Referees – Ensuring fair outcomes and safety (making sure everyone knows and is following the rules).

Medals & Trophies – Least important to the children. If the event is safe, fun and other children are friendly, that is more valuable than a medal or trophy.



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SPORTS LEADERS

MSSP delivers and promotes sports leadership opportunities across all Merton Primary, Special and Secondary schools. In 2024–25 MSSP used around 500 leaders at 40 sports events.

We are committed to providing these opportunities to children at both primary and secondary school. This year we have utilised leaders from schools including Cranmer, Malmesbury, Poplar and St. John Fisher Primary Schools as well as Raynes Park, St. Mark's Academy and Rutlish Secondary Schools.

During our events, sport leaders are surveyed around their experience to help us improve the overall experience for children who assist in the future. To date this year, we have surveyed 89 leaders.

Below is a summary of their responses:

- **98% of sport leaders** enjoyed assisting at an MSSP event.
- **93% of sports leaders** felt fully supported by MSSP staff.
- The most popular emotions related to how the participating children made the leaders feel were **confident, excited and proud**.
- The most popular emotions related to how the MSSP staff and attending adults made the leaders feel were **confident, relaxed and responsible**.
- **98% of sports leaders** felt the experience had a positive effect on their self-confidence.
- **99% of the sports leaders** would like to assist at an MSSP event again.
- **100% of the leaders** said they felt safe while supporting at our events.
- **23 leaders out of the 89** gave the overall experience 4 stars out of 5.
- **66 leaders out of the 89** gave the overall experience 5 stars out of 5.

Supporting Quotes

"Thank you for picking me as a leader. I would be very pleased to get another chance to help the children at another sports tournament"

(Year 10 sports leader – Rutlish School)

"I enjoyed leading the MSSP Rugby. I hope to be a leader at more events like this"

(Year 5 sports leader – Cranmer Primary School)

We also delivered a 1.5hr year 5 sports leaders training session at every Merton School with some schools, based in the more disadvantaged areas of the Borough, funded to receive our Sports Leaders Physical Activity Champions Inspiration Days. These Inspiration Days involved a full day of training and activities for the whole year 5 cohort. They support the 'Co-production' strand of our Pupil Voice which encourage a team of pupils to design and deliver activities projects or services. Throughout the day they learn the key components of sports leadership and then get to practise their skills on the KS1 children through Multi Skills festivals. We then leave the leaders with a bag of equipment to help them set up their own lunch time physical activity sessions. These sessions are delivered by the leaders (on rotation) and are supported by lunchtime staff, targeting less active KS1 children at lunchtime to get them having fun and being active in the playground.

MSSP conducted surveys as part of a case study for the Liberty Primary School Inspiration Day which was followed by them delivering a multi skill festival for the KS1 children as well as lunch time leaders PA sessions.

The leaders were surveyed before the MSSP training, and then again 12 weeks later, after delivering the lunch time sessions and multi skills events. Below is a summary of their responses:

- **100% of the sports leaders** believe that the project has had a positive effect on their self-confidence.
- **56%** feel they have improved their communication skills.
- **50%** said they have improved their ability to work as part of a team and their understanding of how crucial teamwork is in sport.
- **37%** feel they are more patient because of their experience at the MSSP festival.
- **32%** are more confident teaching sports activities to younger children. **68%** said that their ability to teach sporting activities has remained the same.
- **12.5%** reported an improvement in their resilience levels as a result of this sports leaders project. **87.5%** said that their resilience levels have remained the same.
- **12.5%** believe that they are able to show more empathy towards younger children and to children with lower sporting abilities than themselves.

The leaders were first asked to reflect on what went well at the festival. The key themes that arose from their feedback were:

- The event participants understood the activities due to the leaders clear and concise explanations, as well as each activity being demonstrated.
- The children who took part seemed like they were having fun. The leaders showed good enthusiasm throughout, which they were able to transmit to the children they were leading.
- Some of the leaders have gained a greater sense of the importance of being organised. This was shown as they had practised their explanations and demonstrations beforehand, as well as knowing how they were going to adapt the games for different abilities. This meant that they were fully prepared when children were finding the activity too easy or too difficult.
- Some leaders were surprised at the respect shown to them and listening skills of the participants. They were expecting the children to misbehave, but the leaders were able to command the groups well, leading to good behaviour from most of the children in attendance.



The second part of the evaluation process asked the children to reflect on what they may change about their game, their delivery style, or the event if they were to run it again. The main areas noted for development were:

- The year 5s were not aware of the ability levels of the children attending, so as a result felt that they planned activities that were too simple. Quite a few of the leaders would like to design a more difficult activity and then modify it if necessary.
- The leaders had to deliver their games to up to 20 children at a time. Some leaders found it quite time consuming to have to split them into lanes or groups for their activities and required the help from supporting teaching staff. The children asked that if they had to deliver another festival, to deliver to smaller groups.



Finally, the children were asked to reflect upon what they had learnt about themselves during this process:

“I learnt that I am good at leading and teaching”

“I was good at communicating. I have to improve being calmer”

“I like that I am not scared to speak in front of people”

“I want to improve my patience, because I kept stopping when the kids were talking and ruining the fun for the rest of the kids”

“I think that we communicated great! Maybe we could explain a bit quicker and easier”

“I would like to improve on my teamwork”

“I found out that I’m really confident with talking to people and explaining things clearly”

“I learnt that I do have some patience”

Key Findings

What's going well for our students?

- Children across the Borough are enjoying their PE lessons and are happy with the sport/physical activity provision at their school.
- Children are generally happy with the structure of their PE curriculum and the sports on offer at school.
- The most popular themes for a high-quality PE lesson were fair teams for competitions and matches, plenty of equipment leading to high levels of activity and a fun warm up to make sure children are prepared physically and mentally for the lesson.
- The feedback about Swimming from the children at all 43 schools was very encouraging. All topics from the quality of the lessons, enjoyment, support from coaches and the intensive course structure were spoken about extremely positively.

What do we need to address and improve for them?

- The topic raised at almost every school was the concern around the negative behaviour of boys towards girls in PE lessons.
- Children would like to have their say more often. In terms of which sports are on the PE curriculum and a choice of activity in lessons
- Tennis, Dodgeball and Basketball are the sports that children want to play more of (curricular and extra-curricular)
- The idea of more specific extra-curricular clubs was mentioned several times (KS2 only, Girls only, beginner only)
- The most popular themes for a high-quality sports event were a fair level of competition, supportive/respectful teammates and opponents, and wanting to feel safe.
- Safety was linked to several areas including having adequate first aid on hand at an event, referees able to explain and enforce clear rules, event staffed by a sufficient number of adults and hygienic facilities (due to not wanting to get ill).

Challenges and Solutions

When we embarked on this project, we originally felt that being able to carry out the focus groups at all 43 primary and 3 special schools within our network may be unrealistic. However, due to the strong relationships we have formed with PE coordinators and senior leaders, all schools were receptive to welcoming us in to speak to their pupils. Many schools also commented on how this project was useful for them, as it helped them to review their own PE curriculum and would shape their plans for the coming years.

When booking in the Pupil Voice visits with the schools, we stressed that they were welcome to provide a member of staff to sit in on the focus group. This helped build a level of trust around the project. Some schools chose to send a member of staff to make notes for their own purposes, and some schools decided that having a member of their own staff in the room may have an influence on the children and their thoughts. We felt it was vital that schools were given this option during the planning process.

Some groups of children were not very forthcoming with their thoughts and opinions at the start of the focus group. Eventually, due to the relaxed and supportive nature of the adults leading the group, the majority of children eventually felt comfortable to share their views. The key to this was ensuring that they realised that this was not a test of their PE knowledge; it was simply an opportunity to reflect and offer their views on the PE provision at their school.



What's next?

Outcomes and Impact

After the discussion group, full written feedback was given to the PE Coordinator and Head Teacher so they could consider the changes that might be required to address inequalities, help their students to enjoy PE and sport more within school, and to get more children active every day.

MSSP have collated the general themes and plan to use workshops and CPD opportunities to address these. We shall look at ways as a whole Partnership that we can better understand the needs of our least active students and change the landscape to be more inclusive and engaging for all children. We will pay particular attention to how girls can be made to feel in PE and how to ensure they are included and treated with respect.

MSSP Will...

- Provide training around the impact boys can have on girls in PE and find a way to develop a better model and environment for Girls in sport and PE – working with Play Their Way and our school network.
- Develop resources to support both curricular and extracurricular delivery of a wider range of sports and training for staff. Adding a broader range of sports to our events calendar where needed.
- Review our Competition and Festival calendar for 2025–26 in line with the EDI needs for our demographic and ensuring safety, fun and supportive school adults are at the top of our list for every event.

A very worthwhile project!

We believe this project has been very effective and worthwhile for all involved. PE leads have been very receptive to the feedback from their children and have been open to making changes to help engage all children moving forwards. It has been a useful exercise for those delivering PE to get feedback and to reflect on how their lessons are planned and delivered so that all children can enjoy taking part and grow in confidence.

Many of the children that were spoken to as a part of this project felt a sense of pride at having been selected to talk about PE and sport at their school. These are children who are perhaps not regularly chosen to represent the school at sports events and competitions, so to be asked to potentially shape the future of PE at their school felt like an honour, and they were excited to have their voices heard.

There were a handful of children who clearly had strong opinions on some of the negative aspects of PE and sport at their school. They offered their opinions on specific issues in a passionate and articulate way. Hopefully their feedback will be taken on board by PE leads in those schools.

The overriding theme for these relatively inactive children was that they wanted to feel safe if they were leaving their school to attend a sports event. The importance of safety was spoken about from several different angles; from ensuring that the facilities were safe, that they wouldn't get hurt whilst taking part, and that they felt emotionally safe in the potentially competitive environment.

For us at the Partnership, it was important to gain an understanding on how we can continue to provide a positive experience for those attending our events. Also, how we can support the training and development of school staff to enhance their provision and meet the needs of the least active students.



Testimonials

"I felt like my opinions were heard"

(Wimbledon Chase Primary School – focus group participant)

"I liked being interviewed because it means we get to improve P.E in the future. It was good to express our opinions and feelings"

(Gorringle Park Primary School – focus group participant)



"I really enjoyed having my voice heard because we can improve our P.E lessons. I enjoyed speaking to our visitor because hopefully it means we can have different varieties of sport at school"

(William Morris Primary School – focus group participant)

"I absolutely love these responses. Thanks so much – I have to agree with them entirely. Great things for me to change, work on and solve"

(St. Matthew's Primary School – P.E Lead)

"Thank you for coming in. These responses are really helpful"

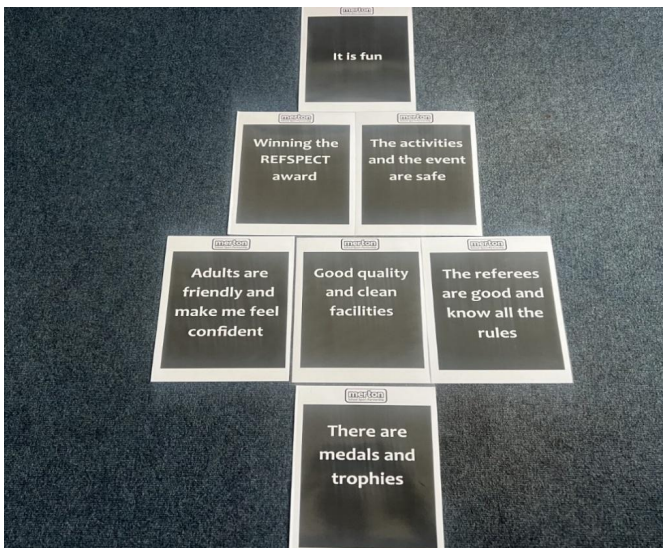
(Gorringle Park Primary School – Assistant Headteacher)

Appendix

1.1 – A Pupil Voice session taking place at a school in Wimbledon



1.2 – Example pyramid of event priorities



1.3 Focus group questions*

PE

- 1 – What do you like about PE at your school?
- 2 – If you had the opportunity, what would you change about PE at your school?
- 3 – How do the boys make you feel in PE (asked at girls only sessions and some of the mixed sessions)
- 4 – Which sports would you like to see more of as part of the PE curriculum.

Discussion points: range of sports taught in the PE curriculum, preference of teacher led lessons vs coach led lessons? Selection of teams in lessons (houses/ gender/ability?) Choice of activity in lessons?

EXTRA CURRICULAR

- 5 – Do you go to after school clubs at your school?
- 6 – Which after school clubs would you like to see at your school?

Discussion points: girls only clubs? KS2 only clubs? Beginner level clubs?

SWIMMING

- 7 – Ask for views on GLL swimming lessons. Quality of teaching/Facilities/Safety in and out of the pool.

*N. B: The questions above were used as a starting point to facilitate discussion. The answers given to these questions led to discussion points on a wide range of topics, some of which are summarised below the questions.



"I like helping children do more sports. Sport can make children more confident and help them forget if they are not happy or hurt"

Malmesbury year 5 sports leader



mertonssp.org.uk

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Merton School Sport Partnership would like to thank all the schools and their students for taking part. We would also like to extend a special thanks to our Sports Coordinator, Fraser Addo for leading on this project and writing this report.