



The London Borough of Merton

Sport England

Children & Young People Active Lives

Snapshot: Merton 2023-25

Author Janna Scott

Department Sport and Leisure

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Children and Young People's Physical Activity in Merton: An Overview

The Sport England Children and Young People Active Lives Survey is a digital survey conducted in schools to measure children's physical activity levels and attitudes towards being active. Merton has taken a proactive approach by opting all eligible state-funded schools in the borough into the survey for the past three years. Data for the 2025/26 academic year will be published in early 2027.

For the 2024/25 academic year, the results have been reported separately for primary and secondary school pupils. This change follows findings from the 2023/24 survey, which showed no difference between girls' and boys' activity levels in Merton, contrary to national trends where boys are typically more active than girls especially in the teenager age groups. Interestingly, by separating the data by age has highlighted that girls in East Merton are 5% less active and have a lower swimming ability than their male counterparts.

Special Educational Needs (SEN) settings are not included in the Active Lives Survey due to the complexity of delivering the survey across a wide range of needs. As a result, the activity levels and attitudes of many disabled young people are not captured within the national dataset. To address this gap, Merton has worked directly with local SEN schools to better understand pupils' needs, preferences, and barriers to participation in physical activity.

This report focuses on the proportion of children and young people meeting the Chief Medical Officer's recommendation of at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day, ideally comprising 30 minutes during the school day and 30 minutes outside of school.

Key Takeaways

Borough-wide averages hide significant local disparities, particularly in relation to gender. Looking at Merton as a whole suggests that gender equality in physical activity is broadly balanced; however, this masks important inequalities within individual areas of the borough.

Gender inequality is concentrated in East Merton, where girls experience notably poorer outcomes than boys, particularly in swimming ability and confidence. In contrast, West Merton demonstrates much more gender-equal outcomes, with boys and girls showing similar levels of physical activity participation and swimming competency.

Physical Activity Levels Are Improving: The data shows a positive trend in overall activity levels, with participation increasing both during and outside of school hours. The most significant improvement has been in activity outside school, indicating stronger engagement in community, club and informal physical activity beyond the curriculum.

Participation Is Rising, But Enjoyment Is Not: Despite improvements in physical activity levels, there has been a slight decline in several measures relating to attitudes towards sport and physical activity. This indicates that while more young people are taking part, they are not necessarily enjoying or valuing physical activity to the same extent as before.

Widening Gender Gaps in School Swimming: Swimming is a statutory National Curriculum requirement, and schools are responsible for ensuring that pupils develop the skills and confidence needed to meet the requirement of swimming 25 metres unaided by the end of primary school. In

Merton, swimming remains a key focus activity, particularly in East Merton, where targeted interventions are needed to support schools in addressing participation gaps and ensuring all children can swim safely and confidently.

Key Activities

Activities children and young people like to participate in outside of school in Merton are:

- Walking and active travel
- Football
- Running games/tag
- Dancing
- Swimming
- Informal play (kicking a ball, playground activities)

Overall Comparison

Physical Activity Levels: percentage of young people classed as active.

	2023-2024	2024-25
England	48%	49%
London	47%	48%
Merton	49%	52%
East Merton	43%	48%
West Merton	52%	55%

	2023-24	2024-25
Girls Merton	49%	50%
Girls East Merton	44%	45%
Girls West Merton	51%	54%
Boys Merton	49%	50%
Boys East Merton	43%	50%
Boys West Merton	53%	54%

Primary and Secondary Aged Children and Young People

	2024-25
Secondary Age	54%
Girls Secondary Age	52%
Boys Secondary Age	54%
Primary	50%
Girls Primary Age	49%
Boys Primary Age	51%

Physical activity levels for primary aged children are stronger outside school than during the school day.

A gender gap exists during the school day, with 51% of boys achieving the recommended activity levels compared with 49% of girls. Encouragingly, active travel is a significant strength, with 81% of primary pupils travelling to school by walking, cycling or scooting, providing an important contribution to daily physical activity levels.

Among secondary-aged pupils, girls are more active than boys during the school day, with 57% of girls achieving 30+ minutes of activity compared with 53% of boys. However, this position reverses outside school hours. 62% of boys are active outside school compared with 56% of girls, indicating that girls are less likely to remain active beyond the school environment. Active travel remains an important contributor to activity levels, with 68% of secondary pupils walking, cycling or scooting to school.

Schools appear to be supporting girls' participation effectively during the school day, but there is a drop-off in activity outside school.

Swimming 25meters Unaided

	2023-2024	2024-25
England	60%	70%
London	53%	52%
Merton	53%	54%
Merton Girls	53%	51%
Merton Boys	52%	56%
East Merton	45%	50%
West Merton	58%	58%
Girls East Merton	38%	44%
Girls West Merton	61%	56%
Boys East Merton	49%	53%
Boys West Merton	54%	58%
Merton Secondary Age		72%
Merton Secondary Age Girls		69%
Merton Secondary Age Boys		74%
Merton Primary Age		39%
Merton Primary Age Girls		39%
Merton Primary Age Boys		38%

In all swimming measurements (Swimming 25m unaided, self-rescue and treading water) girls' ability is significantly behind boys. Swimming 25m unaided in East Merton is lower than the national average.