



SWIMMING IN KEY STAGE 2

A report from Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools

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SWIMMING IN KEY STAGE 2

An Inspection Report on Standards and Provision

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Office for Standards in Education

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INTRODUCTION

1. This inspection of swimming in Key Stage 2 reports, in particular, on the standards of pupils' attainment and progress, and the quality of teaching and provision. It draws on evidence based on the inspection of 301 schools in November 1999 by independent inspectors as an additional part of the Section 10 inspections of these schools. As well as inspectors' qualitative judgement, data from these inspections were analysed by OFSTED in order to provide a clearly focused statistical evidence base for the production of this report. The statistical procedures analysed evidence in terms of the total sample, but also in relation to the location of the schools and their free school meal (FSM) banding*.
2. At the time of the inspection the statutory curriculum requirements were that all schools providing for Key Stage 2, as well as Key Stage 1, should teach a broad and balanced curriculum including the ten National Curriculum subjects and religious education. Although, from September 1998 to September 2000, the Government introduced a temporary suspension of the full National Curriculum requirements in primary schools in order that they might focus their attention on the development of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, swimming remained a compulsory element of the curriculum.
3. The National Curriculum programme of study in November 1999 for Key Stage 2 swimming required that pupils should be taught:
 - to swim unaided, competently and safely, for at least 25 metres (25m);
 - to develop confidence in water and how to rest, float and adopt support positions;
 - a variety of means of propulsion using either arms or legs or both, and how to develop effective and efficient swimming strokes on front and back;
 - the principles and skills of water safety and survival.
1. In addition to normal Section 10 inspection requirements, registered inspectors who led the sample inspections were asked to evaluate and report on:
 - the standards of swimming achieved by pupils by the end of KS2;
 - the quality and effectiveness of the teaching or instruction through the observation of swimming lessons, and any related activity such as classroom-based work;
 - the steps taken by schools to give particular support to non-swimmers or poor swimmers;
 - the curriculum and assessment arrangements made in respect of swimming, in particular within the PE curriculum, and in general as part of the whole school curriculum, making particular reference to quality of planning, time allocation and organisational arrangements.
5. Where provision had taken place prior to the inspection, or was planned for but no swimming was taking place during the inspection visits, inspectors' judgements were made on the basis of evidence from discussions with headteachers and scrutiny of their records. Where a school did not make

provision for swimming this was clearly stated in the Section 10 inspection report. Each school's inspection report contained a specific section on swimming within the PE subject section.

MAIN FINDINGS

6.

- Attainment of pupils is satisfactory or better in most lessons. Over four out of five pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 can swim 25m. However, this overall figure conceals a significant variation depending on the location and FSM banding of schools. It ranges from 91 per cent of pupils in rural schools to only 67 per cent of pupils in schools in FSM Band 5. This variation is a cause for concern.
- Pupils make good progress in three-quarters of lessons, and progress is at least satisfactory in the overwhelming majority.
- The teaching of swimming is good or better in four out of five lessons.
- In a worrying minority of schools water safety and survival is not covered sufficiently well.
- Although most swimming takes place in Year 5, an increasing number of schools are introducing swimming in Years 3 and 4.
- Half of schools have no specific policy or provision for pupils who are non-swimmers or reluctant swimmers.
- Over half of schools have reduced the time allocated to swimming over the past three years.

KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

7. In order to improve the standards and quality of swimming, schools should:

- formulate a clear policy and devise effective planning and teaching strategies, including giving priority to teaching the non-swimmers to ensure that all pupils are able to swim 25m competently by the end of Key Stage 2;
- introduce swimming into the curriculum as early as possible in Key Stage 2 in order to make the most effective and efficient use of the limited time available and to provide pupils with the greatest opportunity to learn to swim;
- ensure that the National Curriculum programme of study relating to the knowledge and understanding of water safety and survival is fully implemented;
- ensure that records of pupils' attainment in swimming are passed on to secondary schools;
- target funding at provision for children who cannot swim.

STANDARDS OF ACHIEVEMENT

Attainment and progress

8. Attainment of pupils was satisfactory or better in almost nine out of ten lessons, and in over half it was good or very good.

9. In the best lessons pupils displayed a good arm action, rhythmical leg kick and an effective breathing technique for the front crawl. Non-swimmers demonstrated their confidence in the water through a variety of activities using resources such as floats, arm bands, balls and sponge pipes. Competent swimmers who could swim 25m were able to use a variety of strokes on the front and back. In one lesson it was noted that:

"The most advanced swimmers are developing an increasingly fluent style. They are equally at ease with front and back crawl and demonstrate a good breaststroke. They are able to enter and exit the water safely and to throw an aid to rescue someone in difficulty. They know and understand the dangers of entering the water themselves in such a situation."

10. In the poorest lessons, pupils did not know about and understand water safety and survival, such as how to rescue people from water without endangering their personal safety.

11. In 1999, 83 per cent of pupils were able to swim 25m by the end of Key Stage 2. This represents a small reduction compared with 1998, as reported by the schools visited. The percentage of pupils who achieved this standard varied from 91 per cent to 67 per cent. As shown in Table 1, a greater proportion of pupils in rural schools was found to be able to swim 25m as compared to pupils in urban and, in particular, inner city schools. Similarly, a greater proportion of pupils in FSM Band 1 schools could swim 25m as compared to those in other bands.

	All Schools	Inner City	Urban	Rural	FSM Band 1	FSM Band 3	FSM Band 5
1998	83	77	86	91	89	77	64
1999	83	77	84	91	88	76	67

12. This variability in standards among different groups of schools is a cause for concern. Swimming is a vital personal and social skill, and an essential part of the PE National Curriculum programme of study. Pupils who cannot swim are therefore denied access to other activities in the PE curriculum, for example canoeing and sailing in outdoor and adventurous activities. Similarly, on transfer to secondary schools non-swimmers may not be taught to learn to swim as swimming is not a compulsory part of the Key Stage 3 PE

curriculum. For these reasons swimming deserves its place as a key priority in Key Stage 2 for all categories of school.

13. In the overwhelming majority of lessons pupils made satisfactory progress; in over three-quarters progress was good or very good.
14. Generally, pupils of all abilities made clear gains in developing confidence in the water. The progress made by non-swimmers, even those who were initially timid and insecure, was particularly good where a safe, secure and encouraging environment helped them to gain in confidence when trying a new task. The large majority of pupils made progress in refining and improving stroke technique: for example by swimming in the style of backstroke, improving their body position in the water, and developing a more effective leg kick.
15. Most pupils also made progress in endurance: in the case of non-swimmers by swimming for longer periods without stopping, and in the case of competent swimmers, swimming greater distances without stopping. In addition, the more-competent swimmers improved their survival skills by making good progress in treading water and completing surface dives as they located and picked up a brick from a depth of three metres.

Pupils' response

16. Pupils' response in swimming lessons was good or better in well over nine out of ten lessons; in over half it was very good. The overwhelming majority of pupils looked forward to their lessons, and behaved well on the journey to and from the pool. Most changed quickly and sensibly and were well behaved while at the poolside.
17. During lessons almost all pupils were enthusiastic and well motivated. They listened carefully to instructions and responded to them quickly. They worked hard, concentrating and persevering on the tasks set, including those that were difficult and physically challenging. Generally, pupils were keen to help and give support and encouragement to each other, especially to those who were less confident in the water. They were proud of their success in the development of new skills. In one lesson it was noted that, '*Good progress by all pupils is closely linked with their willingness to apply what they have been taught and shown*'. In view of their obvious willingness to learn and enthusiasm shown for the task, it is most surprising that so many pupils in particular schools cannot swim 25m by the end of their primary schooling.

FACTORS INFLUENCING STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF SWIMMING

Quality of teaching

18. The quality of teaching was good or better in four out of five lessons. In one-third of lessons teaching was very good. Overall, the best teaching contained some or many of the following features:
 - teachers and instructors had good subject knowledge and understanding of swimming and emphasised the importance of developing skills, which they effectively conveyed to their pupils; they were informed by very good

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knowledge of pupils' level of attainment gained through ongoing assessment, and ensured that pupils progressed quickly to making their first attempts at swimming unaided;

- helpful teaching points by teachers and instructors were made to the whole group as well as to individual pupils resulting in improvements in the efficiency of swimming strokes;
- lessons were well planned and met the needs of pupils, from non-swimmers to competent swimmers and those with special educational needs. These included warm-up and cool-down periods together with a good balance and range of activities, ensuring that pupils consolidated what they had learned. For example, skilled teachers encouraged pupils to practise the relevant arm action or leg kicks before trying a complete stroke. They then ensured that pupils concentrated on developing their breathing technique. Non-swimmers were taught a good selection of games activities to build their confidence in order to encourage them to put their head under water;
- lessons were conducted at a brisk pace making the best use of time available, and with high expectations that pupils should make good progress; instructions were given clearly and firmly;
- pupils were challenged physically and kept active continually throughout lessons, ensuring that time was used well both to build stamina and improve the effectiveness of strokes, but with recovery periods at appropriate intervals;
- lessons were well organised with clear routines and high levels of supervision while the pupils were at the poolside or in the water, and full attention was given to health and safety and hygiene protocols;
- the grouping of pupils by ability was effective in ensuring that the targeting of the activities given to them appropriately extended their differing levels of swimming skills. Where pupils were failing to meet the required standard, teachers tried to get them as near to it as possible by boosting their confidence, concentrating on the teaching of one or two strokes or by asking adult helpers to concentrate their attention on supporting particular pupils.

18. Unsatisfactory teaching was characterised by the deployment of instructors, teachers and adult helpers in a way that was not always targeted appropriately. For example, the priority was not given to non-swimmers in order that they could make greatest progress. Teachers and instructors need to determine the most effective way of addressing this issue given the limited amount of time available. Unsatisfactory teaching was also characterised by insufficient use of ongoing assessment leading to an inappropriate match of activities to the particular needs of the pupils. In the poorest lessons the planning of activities did not follow a clear purpose or structure and the pace of progress was slow.

Curriculum

19. The large majority of schools made adequate curricular provision for swimming. However, a small minority did not cover the full programme of study, particularly the element related to water safety and survival. This is a worrying omission.
20. Giving pupils opportunities to practice for and take part in inter-school swimming galas were the main features of extra curricular provision in swimming. These events were well supported by schools.

21. In a small number of schools pupils began swimming lessons in Key Stage 1, though most began in Key Stage 2. In the past, schools usually did not introduce swimming lessons until Years 5 and 6. But, headteachers of the schools visited reported that this proved to be increasingly problematic, not least because of the perceived pressures created by the administration of the Key Stage 2 tests in the summer term of Year 6. More and more schools have therefore introduced swimming earlier in the Key Stage.
22. Well over four out of five schools provided adequate time for swimming. The average yearly time allocated to swimming lessons for pupils in all schools was four hours and 40 minutes, usually concentrated in one or two terms.
23. Rural schools and those in FSM band 1 provided more time for swimming than other schools, as highlighted in Table 2 below. Pupils in these categories of school demonstrated the highest standards of attainment. There is, therefore, a clear correlation between the amount of time allocated to swimming in the curriculum and standards achieved by pupils.

Table 2. Percentage of AVERAGE YEARLY SWIMMING TIME (hours)						
All schools	Inner city	Urban	Rural	FSM Band 1	FSM Band 3	FSM Band 5
4.68	3.95	4.78	5.18	5.29	3.9	3.49

25. Generally, the amount of time allocated to swimming in the year groups of each Key Stage is consistently higher in the same categories of schools, as highlighted in Table 3.

Table 3. Percentage of AVERAGE YEARLY SWIMMING TIME FOR EACH YEAR GROUP (hours)							
	All schools	Inner city	Urban	Rural	FSM Band 1	FSM Band 3	FSM Band 5
Y1	1.4	0.1	1.4	3.3	2.1	0.5	0.1
Y2	1.8	0.5	1.7	3.5	2.75	1.25	0.25
Y3	4.75	3.1	4.9	6.4	6.75	4.3	3.1
Y4	6.8	7.25	5.9	6.5	6.9	6.4	3.75
Y5	5.5	5.75	6.25	5.9	6.8	4.6	5.25
Y6	5.25	5.0	5.75	5.2	4.9	4.7	7.75

26. A large majority of schools reported a reduction in the time allocated to swimming over the last three years, sometimes by as much as one-half. Headteachers provided three main reasons to account for this reduction. First,

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the closure of local pools, particularly learner pools, and the replacement of these by leisure pools which are often not conducive to formal teaching of swimming because there are insufficient clearly defined areas of deep water, lanes or widths. Secondly, greater time devoted to the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies; these have brought with them pressures on time devoted to the remaining curriculum, and the preference by schools to use swimming pools only for afternoon sessions, reducing the length or number of sessions available to them. Thirdly, increasing costs, particularly transport.

27. Nearly half of schools made no special provision for pupils who do not develop sufficient competence in swimming and are unlikely to be able to swim by the end of Key Stage 2. Many schools that did make such provision employed a range of effective strategies. For example, schools that began swimming in Years 3 and 4 enabled non-swimmers to continue into Years 5 and 6 until they achieved 25m unaided. Other schools provided additional lessons, such as after Whitsun half-term of Year 6. In one school additional instructors were employed. In others, non-swimmers and their parents were encouraged to join a swimming club or go swimming together at the local pool. More schools need to develop similar strategies to target the needs of those who cannot swim and ensure that pupils leave primary school as competent swimmers.

Liaison with secondary schools

28. Records of pupil attainment in swimming, particularly the ability to swim 25m competently and safely, were not always passed on from primary schools to the secondary receiver schools as a matter of routine. Clearly, this makes it more difficult for the secondary schools to target non-swimmers and make appropriate provision for them.
29. Primary schools reported that a minority of pupils who cannot swim by the end of Year 6 continue to receive swimming tuition as part of the physical education programme in their secondary school. A small number of secondary schools have swimming sessions for a targeted group of Year 7 non-swimmers, but this provision depends very much on local access to a pool at a time that coincides with the Year 7 PE timetable.

Staffing

30. Nearly half of swimming lessons were taught by swimming instructors, the large majority of whom are experienced and hold nationally recognised qualifications. For example, the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) Lifeguard qualification and the Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS) National Pool Lifeguard qualification, as well as a variety of ASA Teaching, Instructing and Coaching Certificates.
31. A similar proportion of lessons were taught by teachers from the school, usually a member of staff who has a qualification in the performance or teaching of swimming such as an ASA Teacher's Certificate. Many of these teachers also have Life Saving and Water Safety qualifications awarded by their local authority.
32. A small number of lessons were taught by adults other than teachers (AOTTs) who have a personal interest in swimming and usually hold at least a water

safety qualification. Such adult helpers are well known to the school, usually parents or friends of the school with particular expertise or interest in swimming.

33. Often, these adults also supervised changing, the journey to and from the swimming pool, and had a general supervisory role when lessons were taking place. Information about the roles and responsibilities of AOTTs is available from the National Coaching Foundation to guide schools in implementing a policy for their deployment in the support of the teaching of swimming.
34. Many instructors, teachers and adult helpers had attended in-service training courses leading to qualifications awarded by the RLSS or the ASA, or courses organised and accredited by the local authority. This in-service training is predominantly associated with the gaining or up-dating of such awards.

Accommodation

37. Nearly one school in five had a swimming pool on-site. The greatest percentage of on-site pools was found in inner-city schools and the least in urban schools. Well over nine out of ten schools used indoor pools. Most outdoor pools were situated and used in rural schools. Almost all pools used were heated. The overwhelming majority of schools had exclusive use of the pool during swimming lesson time. One in four inner-city and urban schools shared pool time with members of the public. The large majority of pools used by schools were owned by the LEA. A small number of schools owned and therefore used their own pools. Most pools have clearly defined areas of deep and shallow water, but some schools had access to learner-only pools that were usually of a shallow uniform depth. Inner-city schools had the greatest access to learner-only pools.
38. In view of this relatively positive picture, it is most disappointing to report that the greatest number of non-swimmers is located in areas where the greatest availability of and access to appropriate swimming pools exist. This is especially so in regard to inner-city areas.

Resources

39. The annual cost of the teaching of swimming varied considerably. Most schools paid between £1,000-£3,000 a year for pool hire, entrance fees and instructor fees. A very small number of schools paid more, as much as £7,000-£9,000 per year. This variation in cost to schools depended on a range of factors including location of pool, number of pupils and, in particular, charges levied by LEAs.
40. The financial resources allocated to the teaching of swimming came from a variety of sources. Nearly six in ten schools funded swimming entirely from their own budgets. A small proportion of schools received their funding entirely from the LEA. A few LEAs targeted funding specifically through 'learn to swim' grants for one group of pupils in each school for a limited period of time, with schools having the option of extending this period for part or remainder of the year. In a few cases transport costs were included within the service provided by the LEA, but transport was usually funded separately. One in ten schools were funded by a combination of school and LEA budgets.

41. The remainder, one-quarter, of schools provided swimming with the help of voluntary contributions from parents that were usually used to meet the costs of transport. These costs were heaviest for the parents of children in rural schools. About one-half of parents with children in rural schools are asked for contributions, as compared to one in ten of parents with children in inner-city schools. A small number of schools received sponsorship for the teaching of swimming from local businesses, charitable trusts and their own fund-raising events.
42. Several schools made cuts in their budgets for swimming, and hence in the amount of time available for swimming provision. Many headteachers blamed their local authority for this situation, arguing that by devolving all the funding for swimming directly to them, schools had to be responsible for funding transport costs, and entrance and tuition fees. While recognising the pressures some schools face in having to grapple with prioritising their spending decisions, too many are failing to ensure that sufficient funds are targeted at the area of most need; that is, at pupils who cannot swim.

Foot note

* Schools are allocated to one of five bands depending on the number of pupils who receive free school meals, three of which were used to analyse data for this report: Band 1: 0-8 per cent, Band 3: 21-35 per cent, and Band 5: 50+ per cent. Schools in Band 1 are therefore those in the most socio-economically advantaged areas.