

Safe Practice



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The following advice is largely informed by Safe Practice in PE, School Sport and Physical Activity (afPE 2020). This seminal text should be in every school and accessible to all staff and stakeholders involved in the delivery of PE.

Safe Practice: in Physical Education, School Sport and Physical Activity' is the essential reference for everyone involved in physical education, school sport and physical activity!

The book offers advice across the complete physical education curriculum to help you protect your students and yourself from potential risks. The resource contains

extensive information about what is considered best practice and can provide the basis for your health and safety policy.

Frequently Asked Questions

What footwear is most appropriate for taking part in physical education?

Pupils should preferably be in bare feet if it is safe to do so when participating in dance or gymnastics though there are many forms of dance and some styles may require footwear. If the dance style is high impact, the footwear should have support to prevent injury. Some floor surfaces may not be conducive to barefoot work. Any footwear worn should be appropriate for the activity, in good repair, close fitting and provide secure footing. Pupils and staff should check the floor prior to the activity to ensure it is safe and suitable.

Is it appropriate to have pupils wearing mixed footwear in games activities, e.g. some with boots and others in trainers?

When working inside or out, the footwear should be appropriate for the activity being undertaken and the condition and nature of the playing surface.

If a variety of footwear is worn by pupils the activity or groupings may need to be adjusted after assessing the risk. For example, where some pupils wear studded boots then it may be necessary to condition the game to eliminate tackling or preferably ensure that the groups wearing studs are separated from non-boot groups. Where studded boots are worn it is advisable that pupils wear shin pads.

Can the reception and KS1 children use the large apparatus in the hall?

Yes. The use of equipment should be appropriate for the age, developmental needs and physical size of the pupils. If using large apparatus the risk assessment, planning and organisation should be well communicated and clearly understood by staff and, at their own level, by pupils. Staff should have clear aims about how the apparatus is to be used and for what purpose.

Who has the responsibility for monitoring the use of coaches?

Officially the governors, usually through the head teacher. This task, but not the responsibility, for ensuring competence, may be delegated to the subject leader or class teacher.

The recognised minimum standards for coaches employed to work in school sport:

- Minimum age — 18 years old for all paid coaches working in schools
- Appropriate qualifications — the minimum qualification, recommended by the National Partners, for a coach or professional working in a primary school context is considered to be a UKCC ***level 2 coaching qualification in the activity being delivered****
- Appropriate insurance cover that covers them for the duties you have asked them to carry out at the school

- Policies and procedures. As a minimum, your school should have in place, and require a coach to sign up to, the following policies: code of practice, equality, participant welfare, health and safety, which should be part of a thorough school induction
- Safeguarding children and vulnerable groups — must have a DBS check completed where necessary

The additional recommendations (best practice) of coaches working in support of PE:

- Coaches should have a sound understanding of what safe practice in PE and sport looks like. Therefore coaches can develop pupils' understanding of being safe, and feeling safe in physical activity.
- The coach has been through an appropriate induction process by the school, so is thoroughly prepared and comfortable in the environment
- Schools must ensure that they have a system in place to regularly monitor and evaluate the coaches provision or equivalent, to comply with the forthcoming afPE Safe Practice

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Are goggles appropriate for school swimming lessons?

Goggles are not normally recommended for normal swimming lessons, or where swimmers have poor control in the water. The adult's attention can be distracted by constantly having to help children adjust goggles etc, and limbs that are not controlled can often knock faces and goggles in crowded swimming conditions. Equally, the pupil's attention can be compromised by the need to adjust and replace goggles.

However assuming that water balance is correct, it is reasonable to expect that when delivering a lesson where children spend a considerable amount of time under the water, or with their face in the water, such as when training for competitive swimming, that they may wear goggles if approved by the adult in charge. The adult

with the group is responsible for determining whether any pupil wearing goggles is using them safely and for a positive purpose. If they are not then the goggles should be removed.

Pupils with special eye conditions may also need to be allowed to wear goggles. There may be particular situations, such as in hydrotherapy pools where the higher temperature may affect chemical balance and cause more eye irritation but this should be managed through water treatment strategies rather than recourse to goggles.

Take an informed sensible approach, acknowledge that you are aware of the guidelines, and ensure that your children enjoy the experience.

Can qualified teachers who are also participants in high risk activities (in their own time) – is this sufficient qualification?

No. A national governing body (NGB) coaching qualification is also required.

Leadership in higher risk activities, such as trampolining, contact sports, adventure activities, swimming and martial arts should only be undertaken by suitably accredited personnel.

Can pupils participate in PE if they wear Jewellery?

The National guidance has always been that no jewellery should be worn in PE and that includes swimming and physical activity. It is also not safe to cover ear-rings / studs / sleepers with tape. The reason is both because of the potential tearing of the

ear lobe, but also the very slim chance that the post of the ear-ring could damage the neck which is where the brachial nerve is running directly to the brain. There are anecdotal cases of children wearing ear-rings / studs with plasters over being hit by a ball or coming off worse in a collision and having nasty injuries as a consequence.

Where an item of Jewellery cannot be removed then it is the adult teaching the group's responsibility to try to establish a safe situation to enable participation by considering how, or if, the context can be made safe by amending the task, conditioning the activity or creating some other management strategy to make participation safe. Where safe participation cannot be assured then the pupil cannot take part in that element of the lesson.

Low risk is where children can work and be secure in their own personal space

This could be warming up, skills practices, observing and analysing, officiating, coaching.

Higher risk is where that personal space could be compromised ... this could be by other participants or by equipment

This could be games activities where there are elements of 'scrimmage', gymnastics where children are close to each other or where the floor / equipment could come close to the ears, swimming, dodgeball ..etc.

Parents should be reminded that the school has the higher level duty of care and cannot be put in the situation of looking after their child without exercising that duty of care. It is dictated by national guidance and they need to comply. There have been awful cases involving jewellery in PE and physical activity and we are

protecting against that happening. It is not just making the wearer of the ear-ring safe, so a parental disclaimer is rather inconsequential (it would not stand up in law either). We have anecdotal cases of ear-rings falling out and children needing tetanus injections because they then get a puncture wound having trodden on them in Gym. Similarly, we have had damaged swimming pool filters and children swallowing plasters when gasping for breath in the pool!

Can pupils wear 'Fit-bits' during physical Education lessons?

The line we have taken is that these bands are designed to be motivational to encourage people to be active. We don't want to discourage that. The teacher as with all personal effects and jewellery has the final say on safety, but covering the band with a wide soft sweatband (as with medical bracelets) should be sufficient to make the situation safe and allow the wearing of these bands to continue.

What qualifications are required for working in the fitness room for both teachers and learning assistants?

Specialist PE teachers with QTS are qualified to teach students in the fitness room, however further professional learning in this area of PE is strongly recommended.

Staff should have received an induction regarding how to use the equipment from the manufacturers who have installed it. In addition they should be able to provide progressive learning appropriate to individual students' abilities, needs and interests. This should include using student-centred interactive teaching methods that are meaningful to their lifestyle contexts.

What types of large equipment should (or should not) be available in primary schools?

All equipment should be appropriate for the developmental stage of pupils, including their ability to lift, carry and place it safely.

Trampolines and trampettes are usually not recommended for use in primary schools. Exceptions to this could be where a qualified BG coach is used to run an after school club. In these cases however care must be taken to ensure that the equipment is not available for use in curriculum lessons by teachers who do not have the required qualifications.

What is the role of mats and their effective use?

Mats are designed for very specific purposes.

Gymnastic mats, for example, are designed to cushion landings from a height and provide a comfortable work surface for rolling and other gymnastic skills. Should someone fall, mats may reduce the likelihood of injury rather than preventing it.

Teaching the technique of safe landings is essential.

In gymnastic lessons mats are part of the apparatus and strategically placed at points of landing, exit or dismount.

Each mat should be placed with a specific purpose in mind. Examples of safe use of mats would be where they are used to:

- provide a comfortable, cushioned area for aspects of floor work (eg developing rolling activities)

- identify suitable landing areas to students as they work around equipment
- promote students' confidence in feet-first landings from apparatus such as beams and equipment used for vaulting and balancing (though it is the efficiency of technique in landing from a height that minimises injury, not dependence on a mat absorbing the momentum; for example, placing mats under wall bars will not prevent injury and is no substitute for the teaching of correct and safe dismounts)
- extend sequence work by providing choices for changes of direction, level and mode of travel.

General-purpose mats (approximately 25mm thick) are generally suitable for curriculum work in gymnastics. Thinner mats are often so lightweight that they slide around when in use. Thicker mats(eg 200mm) may be necessary for more specialised, advanced gymnastic activities in which the performer generates high levels of momentum.

Safety mattresses (high impact absorbing surfaces, sometimes referred to 'crash mats') are designed for gymnasts working on high momentum landings experienced in advanced vaulting, or high jump. They should only be used by appropriately experienced and qualified staff.

Safety mattresses may be used in combination for high jump practice only when effectively attached together, have sufficient depth to avoid bottoming out and under a coverall sheet.

Under no circumstances should mats be used for activities for which they were not intended. An example of such poor practice would be long jumping onto gymnastics mats!

Is it necessary to cover a verruca in PE?

Verrucas are caused by a viral infection. Many young people get a verruca at some point in their lives and are more likely to get them than adults. They are often caught from public changing rooms and swimming pools. Getting verrucas has nothing to do with poor hygiene. Children with immune system problems may have an increased risk. The virus is found throughout the environment and is infectious. Most disappear without treatment after a few months or years - 20 per cent of growths disappear within three months.

By the time the verruca appears the infectious period has passed so it is too late to seek protection, though one can still benefit from treatment if it is painful. However covering the verruca with a waterproof plaster or rubber sock for swimming can help alleviate parental complaint or concern.

Who is responsible for safe practice when a school takes a group of pupils to the local golf club or swimming pool for lessons?

This is a shared responsibility the parameters of which should be agreed before hand. The school cannot delegate its duty of care for its pupils in any off-site context and would need to confirm with the club that the proposed coach (es) meets both technical and suitability criteria. The adult accompanying the group off-site, must be assessed as being competent to do so.

Where a coaching provider is leading an activity on the school site, a simple question can help to establish whether the school holds a responsibility:

'Who invited the students to participate in the activity?'

If the school has played **any part** in that invitation being expressed and accepted, then the school carries some responsibility for the outcomes.

I have heard that school staff should not assist students in applying suncream. Some younger students struggle to manage this on their own. Should they be helped?

School policy on the use of suncream often specifies that students must apply their own suncream, or that the parents do so before the child arrives at school.

The HSE says that **there is no legal obstacle to school staff helping children to apply sunscreen**. Schools are able to make their own decisions about this, and where they do decide to assist students, they should do so observing correct procedures regarding physical contact.

It would be clearly be a breach of duty of care to knowingly fail to intervene when a child is getting sun-burnt.

Whichever route a school decides to take, as with all policy, it should be clearly communicated to all staff, students and parents.

I've been teaching trampolining for twenty years. The Local Authority now tell me I have to complete an update course – do I need to do this?

Trampolining is a highly specialised activity and requires appropriately qualified and experienced supervision. British Gymnastics advise that their teacher's qualification is re-freshed every 3 to 5 years. Regular and sustained teaching of any activity should require less periodic 'topping up' than spasmodic involvement but safe practice does change over time and all staff need to be familiar with current procedures.

The essential aspect of CPD is that it should be recent and relevant.

Do participants have to wear mouth-guards for hockey and shin pads for football?

The most comprehensive guidance for the use of personal, protective equipment is produced by afPE.

Can an HLTA or cover supervisor teach a practical physical education lesson?

If an HT makes this decision, they must be satisfied that the HLTA or cover supervisor is competent to do so. A competency assessment needs to be undertaken to ascertain whether the HLTA or cover supervisor is sufficiently competent to teach the **specific PESSPA activity** required. The assessment will consider aspects such as qualifications, experience, reputation, knowledge of the children, and should include observing this member of staff.

If an accident occurred during a PESSPA lesson that the HLTA or cover supervisor was leading, the HT must be satisfied that they could justify their decision that allowed this to happen. The HT would do this by presenting evidence that a thorough and accurate positive competence assessment had been carried out that reported the HLTA or cover supervisor as a competent deliverer, and that the students in their sessions are achieving and making progress. This type of evidence would then be considered. If they cannot justify their decision, then the situation should not continue.

The National Agreement of 2003 covering England and Wales, and related to regulations made under Section 133 of the Education Act 2002, places a duty on HTs to ensure that each class or group timetabled for core and foundation subjects, and each class or group in the foundation stage has a qualified teacher assigned to teach it. Provided this requirement is met, an HLTA or cover supervisor performing the role of a teacher can be a long-term arrangement.

If the class being covered is accommodating the class teacher's PPA time, the responsibility for the class must be transferred to another qualified teacher or to the HT.