

A photograph of a man and three children laughing together outdoors. The man is in the center, wearing a black t-shirt and black pants, laughing heartily with his hands clasped. To his left are two young girls, one in a white t-shirt with 'SCHOOLS' and 'DIA 10:30' logos, and another in a white hoodie with a NASA logo. To his right is a boy in a blue hoodie. They are standing in front of a black metal fence and a white car. The background is slightly blurred, showing trees and a building.

# Sport England School Games Evaluation

February 2021

## Research Objectives

To understand how the School Games is contributing to Sport England's strategic priority:

1. More children and young people having a positive attitude to sport and physical activity.
2. To understand the impact that the School Games has on physical literacy, physical well-being, mental well-being and individual development.
3. To generate insights and key messages to support and challenge stakeholders (Youth Sport Trust, Active Partnerships, School Games Organisers) to implement the Vision and Mission of the School Games and deliver maximum impact.
4. To evaluate how stakeholders have implemented the vision and mission of the School Games.

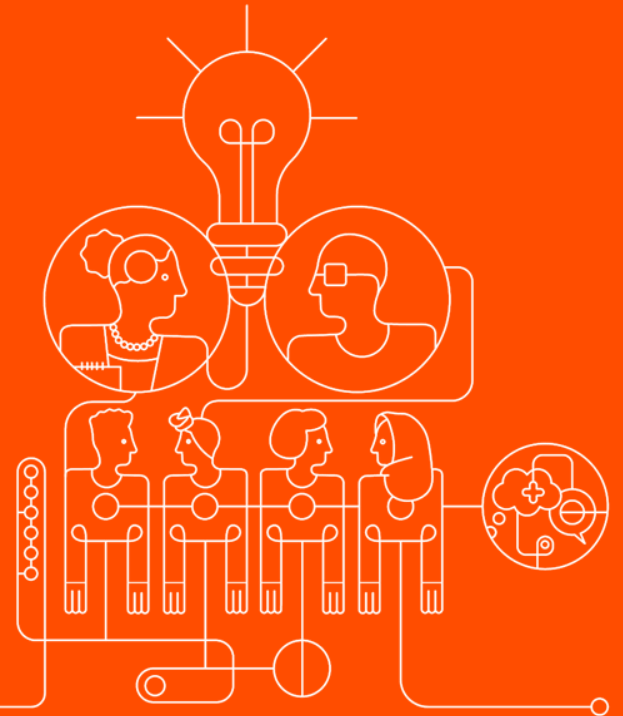
### The Vision:

*By 2020 the School Games will be continuing to make a clear and meaningful difference to the lives of even more children and young people.*

### The Mission:

*Keeping competitive sport at the heart of schools and providing more young people with the opportunity to compete and achieve their personal best.*

# The Impact of The School Games on Physical Literacy



# Most students agree that the School Games has a positive impact on their attitudes towards physical activity

% of students who agree that the School Games is helping them to....



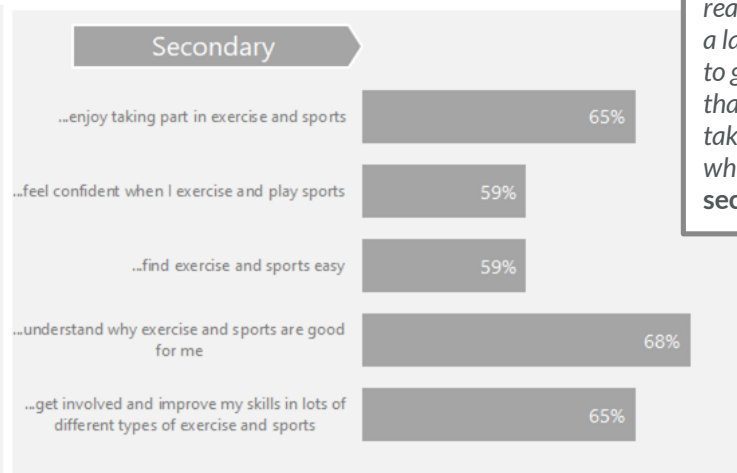
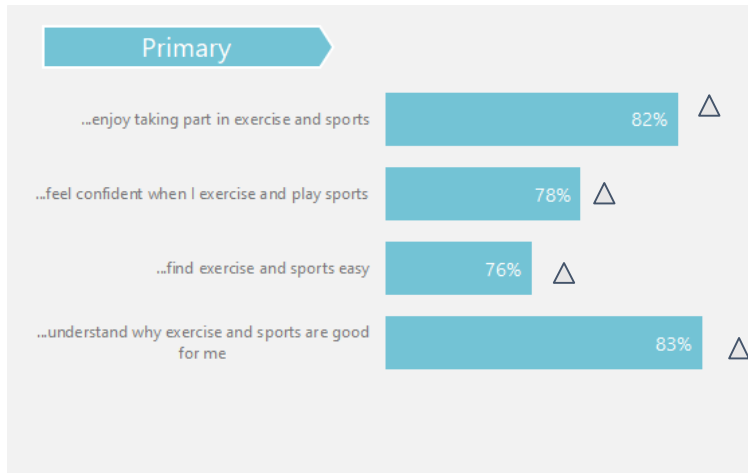
There was no significant differences in perceived impact on physical literacy across those taking part in intra, inter or county events.



Across all physical literacy attitudes, pupils and students are more likely to think the School Games impacts positively if they have taken part in virtual activity.

# This positive impact is seen across all ages, but most noticeably at a primary level

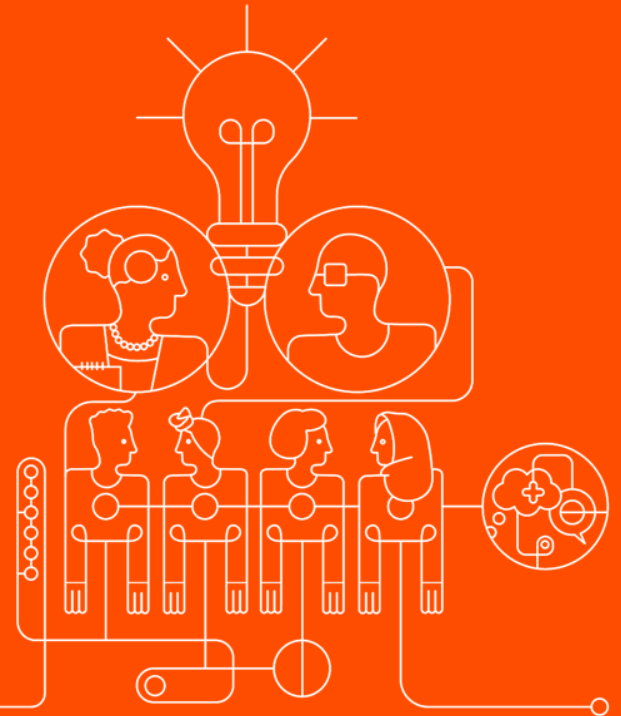
The School Games helps me to...



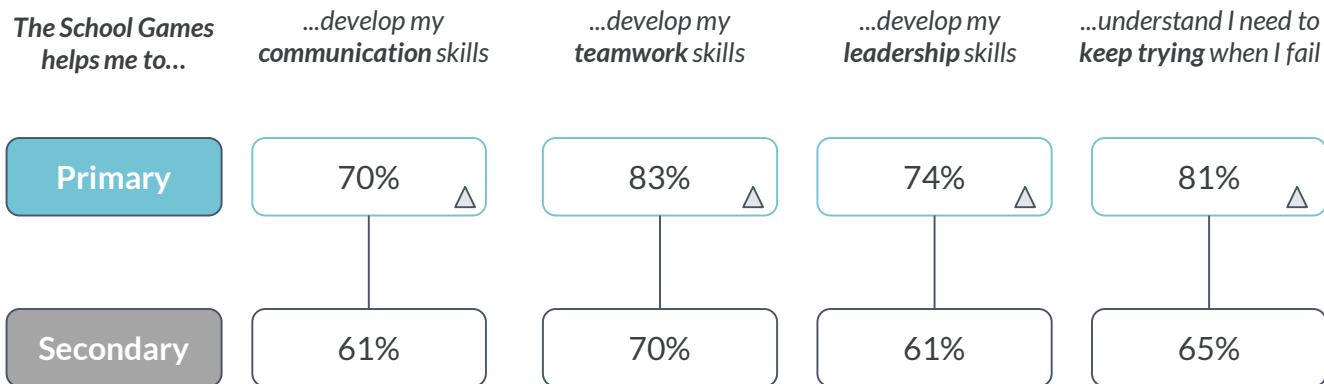
*"The good things about taking part in School Games is that it is really easy to take part. There are a large variety of possible ways to get involved and that means that people who don't normally take part in sports can do so whilst making friends." Year 9, secondary, boy*



# The Impact of the School Games on Outcomes for Children and Young People



# Individual development is positively impacted by the School Games



*"I think students enjoy taking part in the school games because it's a good opportunity for them to show their skills away from the classroom. It could help relieve pressure when not in an academic environment and some children may enjoy doing physical activities more than academic ones."*  
**Year 9, student, boy**

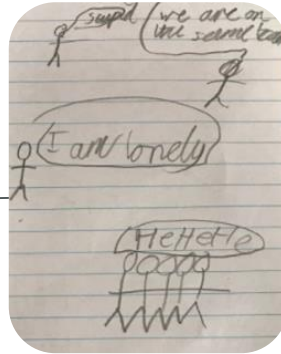
The School Games values are well known across stakeholders, teachers and pupils/students and play a significant part in developing sportsmanship and individual development.

# Qualitative findings show that the School Games can have a positive impact on mental wellbeing

The School Games events can have a positive impact on pupils and students wellbeing, however in some instances the competitive element can cause anxiety and embarrassment for those pupils and students typically less active.

## Positive impact on mental wellbeing

- For many, **sports and physical activity can act as an escape**. The School Games supports this by enabling more sporting events to happen and engaging more young people in them.
- Pupils/students can lose themselves in an event, focussing on pushing themselves or having fun and socialising.
- The **values support this** narrative and ensure pupils and students take part in competition in a respectful and inclusive way.



## Negative impact on mental wellbeing

- In some cases the competition element of the School Games can still be **daunting**. For those typically more active, the pressure can be too much, particularly at County level events. Whereas for those typically less active, the idea of performing against others can make them feel uncomfortable.
- A focus on integrating the same School Games values and branding across all events may help alleviate these feelings.

Overall, qualitative findings suggest that when delivered with the values in mind and when meaningful competition is evident, **the School Games is more likely to have a positive impact** on mental wellbeing than a negative impact. **Across the pandemic in particular, teachers have seen the benefits** to pupils and students mental wellbeing, but can lack the evidence to convince senior leaders of its importance.



# Across primary and secondary schools, there has been a good uptake in SEND provision within the School Games

Within the sample, 10% of pupils and students that had taken part in the School Games had a disability or special educational need.

Inclusion and SEND provision is high on schools' priority list and the School Games has been a great way to support this.

**SEND specific events** or festivals are working very well. Schools welcome the opportunity, as it is a great way to include a range of pupils and also build on teacher knowledge of facilitating events for different needs.

In some schools it can be **challenging to manage** SEND specific events. They don't want pupils and students to feel pigeonholed into a '**disadvantaged**' group.

Primary schools are particularly keen to drive inclusion in all sports as they know the positive impact this can have on **pupils attitudes** towards those with those with SEND or disabilities.

Whilst some schools are managing this themselves (e.g. one school ensures SEND students are given first choice of sports to take part in and work to a 30% SEND student uptake), **more training and support** is needed for schools and teachers.

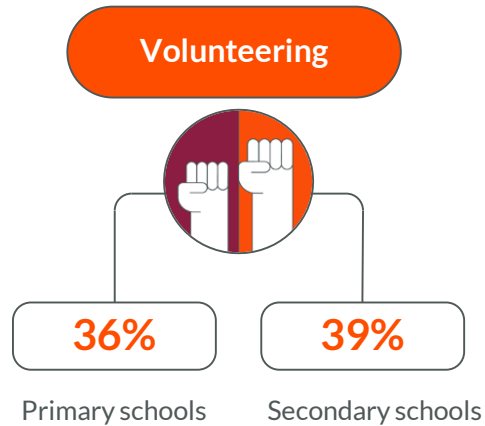
*"We ran a SEN event for 10 schools. We were the leaders for that event, so we came in, led the event for all the students and carried out 4 different inclusion sports."*

**Year 10, student, girl**

## STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholders suggest that where a **specialist inclusion role** is within an area, this provides the time and focus to enable real change to be made.

# A similar proportion of primary and secondary schools are taking part in volunteering and leadership



**49%** have a disability or SEN

Schools are motivated to put forward pupils and students for volunteering roles because of the broader benefits this provides: leadership qualities, life skills, organisational skills, provides real responsibility.

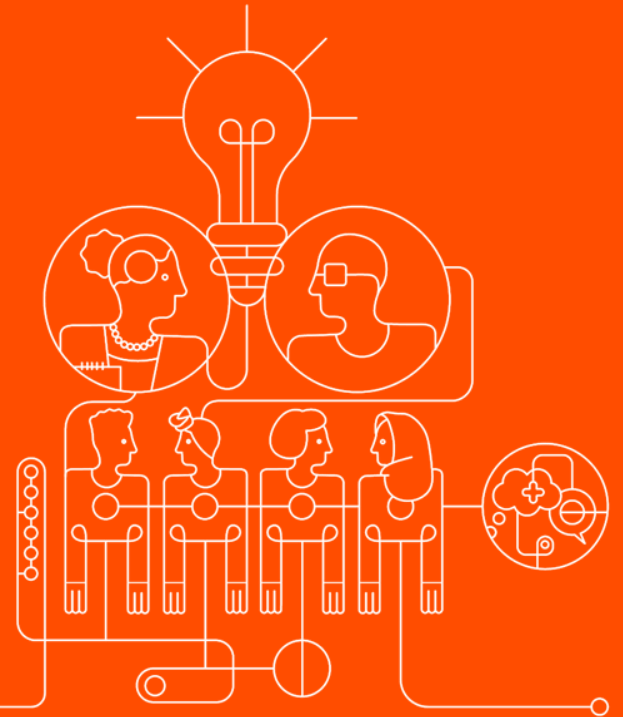
**Primary**

From a teacher perspective, volunteering / leadership roles are particularly effective at improving behavioural issues and building on the life skills of pupils. There are no significant differences in participation between the literacy levels of the pupils involved.

**Secondary**

Students are more likely to be a volunteer in secondary school if they have two or more positive attitudes to sport and physical activity than those with one or zero. Qualitative findings from teachers suggest that at a secondary level, volunteer or leadership positions can be rewarded to captains of teams or those typically more active, rather than as a means to get different students involved.

# Insights for Stakeholders



# Despite high participation and positive perceptions of the School Games, awareness within participating schools is low

## Awareness

- **56%** of pupils and students surveyed had heard of the School Games - whilst **82%** pupils and students have either taken part in or watched the School Games.
- This suggests low levels of awareness and understanding of the events they are taking part in.
- Qualitative interviews with teachers suggest that School Games branding is not always used and / or clear - particularly in intra competitions.

## Participation

- Primary pupils are more likely to take part in intra events whilst secondary students are more likely to take part in county events.
- Within the sample, **10%** of students that had taken part in the School Games had a disability or special educational need.
- **38%** of pupils or students took part in a volunteering opportunity.

## Perceptions

- Over **7 in 10** pupils/students agree the School Games is fun to take part in.
- **8 in 10** pupils/students believe everyone can take part, no matter their ability.
- **46%** pupils/students enjoy taking part in the virtual School Games events.
- **58%** pupils/students would like the virtual School Games events to continue in the future.

## Awareness is high amongst lead teachers, but less so throughout the whole school

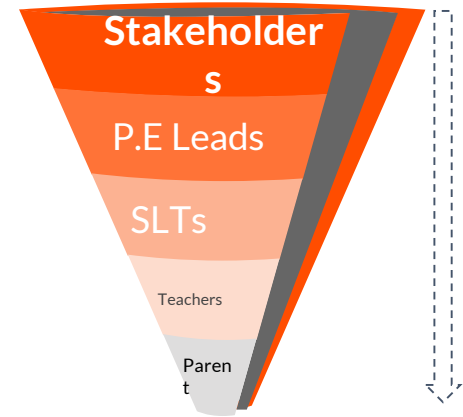
It is unsurprising that P.E leads hold the highest level of awareness in schools, given they work so closely with stakeholders and facilitate delivery.

This awareness funnels through to headteachers and SLT, often because of budget allocation and school development plans.

Outside of this, classroom teachers can have low awareness of the School Games and may not have a full understanding of the benefits it can have. In some cases, they may hold negative perceptions of it, e.g. only hearing about it when their pupil/student needs to be excused from class time.

COVID-19 has meant some schools hold more virtual meetings with senior leaders and SGOs, and felt the benefits from this, as senior leaders became more involved and this can help with buy-in.

Increasing awareness of the positive benefits of School Games across the whole school could help ensure overall buy-in.



*"I think the teachers at this level are aware that they do games and tournaments against the local schools and the district, and then they can get through to county level but I don't think they know that the next step after that is the School Games."* P.E. Lead, Secondary

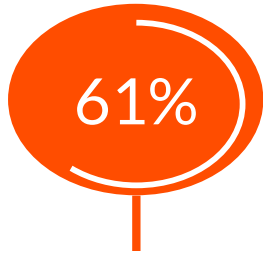
# Pupil and student awareness of the School Games could be improved

**56%** of pupils and students surveyed had heard of the School Games.\*

However, 82% of pupils and students had either taken part in, volunteered or watched the School Games, suggesting low levels of awareness and understanding of the events they are taking part in.

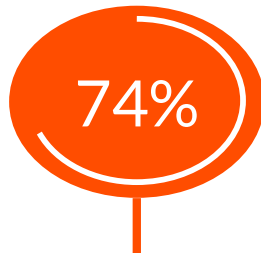
They are significantly more likely to have heard of the School Games....

...at Primary school level



vs. **52%** at secondary level

...if taken part in virtual offer



vs. **47%** not taken part in virtual offer

...if has a disability or SEN



vs. **57%** no disability or SEN

...from schools below the average PP%



vs. **53%** above the average PP%

## Striking a balance between competition and inclusion is still a work in progress for primary and secondary schools



# Physical literacy levels can impact on student motivations to take part in the School Games

## Socialise & Discover

Pupils/students with lower levels of physical literacy are motivated by the:

- chance to try new things out with their friends
- opportunity to be social and have fun
- welcomed break from core subjects / classrooms
- feelings of support and inclusion.

## Represent & Encourage

Pupils/ students are motivated by the chance to represent their team/school because it instills:

- a sense of belonging to something bigger and more important
- team morale to boost and encourage one another
- achievements through reward and recognition moments.

## Learn & Showcase

Pupils/students are motivated to try new things and showcase their skills as this can:

- increase feelings of pride in their abilities
- build on their foundation of skills in sports
- encourage learning through one another
- improve their overall engagement with sports and physical activity.

## Challenge & Improve

Pupils/students with higher levels of physical literacy are motivated by:

- new challenges e.g. competitions outside of school with new people
- the chance to improve on their skills / abilities
- 'bigger' sporting events and competitions
- the chance to win and gain reward and recognition.

*Lower levels of physical literacy*

*Higher levels of physical literacy*





# Whilst there are many functional barriers for schools, pupils and students can experience emotional barriers

## Primary pupils

*"I don't think it's about competing. I think it's about having fun. You get too competitive, you could argue."*

**Year 5, pupil, boy**

*"You can feel nervous in competitions. There are people watching and if you make a mistake it's embarrassing."*

**Year 6, pupil, girl**

- The inclusive nature of sports at a primary level can leave the more competitive pupils feeling frustrated or bored
- Equally, pupils who are less likely to take part in sports can feel anxious about the thought of competing outside school, in an unfamiliar setting with new people and different abilities
- Younger pupils still developing some of the key skills needed in sports and physical activity (e.g. fairplay, teamwork, communication). As a result, they can view competitiveness as 'unfriendly' and off putting

Primary pupil drawing how they'd feel taking part in the School Games



# Whilst there are many functional barriers for schools, pupils and students can experience emotional barriers

A drawing by a secondary student of a 'typical' School Games participant



## Secondary students

- More of a focus on competition can leave students thinking sports are exclusive
- Inter/county sports can mean a full team is needed to take part. There may not be enough students to create teams for a wide selection of sports, leaving some students feeling as though there isn't a sport for them
- 'Try-outs' for teams feel competitive by nature and can be scary or daunting for some
- Fewer intra competitions mean bigger gaps between level 1 and level 2, causing feeling of intimidating

*"Competitions in school would be better because you know the people you're versus so there's not much to be embarrassed about if you go wrong."*

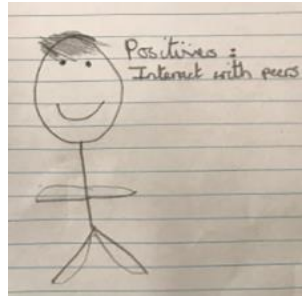
**Year 10, student, boy**

*"There's a team selection... you can't pick the whole class, you have to pick a group with 2 or 3 subs, so you'll pick the best."*

**Year 7, student, girl**

# Qualitative findings suggest that some secondary students can be nervous about taking part in the School Games

Secondary student positives and negatives of taking part



"People who don't play it as much, they won't have a go at it as much, they won't try and get involved too much, but at the other end of the scale, somebody who's good at it, they'll want to do everything they can to show everybody else, 'I'm good at this. I'm really good at this sport. Come, look at me.'"

**Year 7, student, boy**

"[what motivates you to take part?] The P.E teachers, you want to make them proud. In P.E lessons, they say, 'You're good at that sport, you should come.'" **Year 10, student, girl**

"[if you lose] they they will take it very seriously sometimes." **Year 9, student, girl**

Given teachers perceptions of the School Games can focus more on progression, competition and winning, it may be unsurprising that more students could find the School Games intimidating. When paired with participation data that highlights more of a focus on county competitions, students may be more likely to associate the School Games with a level of competition which may seem unattainable to them if they are typically less likely to take part in physical activity or sports.

"The people we normally take are very sporty anyway. I would say it improved their confidence in their ability, but they're the ones who are participating or coming to clubs anyway. It's a pathway for us. We have to qualify to go there. The ones we have in the school that are better at that discipline, they're the ones who are sporty in the first place, otherwise they wouldn't be representing the school." **P.E lead, secondary**

# Case study: how a range of sports can include those typically less likely to take part in sports and activity

At a **primary school** in an area of high deprivation in England, there are many pupils who lack confidence, suffer with their mental wellbeing or have behavioural difficulties. The School Games supports all pupils to be involved and develop their physical literacy and individual development by:

## **Embedding the School Games values throughout the school - not just within P.E**

Pupils are aware events such as sports day are School Games events where School Games values should be used. The school rewards pupils when they demonstrate the values, which in turn builds positive associations with sports and activity.

## **Offers a range of activities and sports to take part in**

The SGO supports P.E leads to incorporate a range of sports and activities as part of the School Games, opening up the opportunities for pupils to take part in more inclusive sports such as Dodgeball, Boccia or Tennis. Pupils can then take part in competitions that would not otherwise be available to them, and grow their confidence levels in a safe and inclusive space.

## **Caters to specific groups of inactive children**

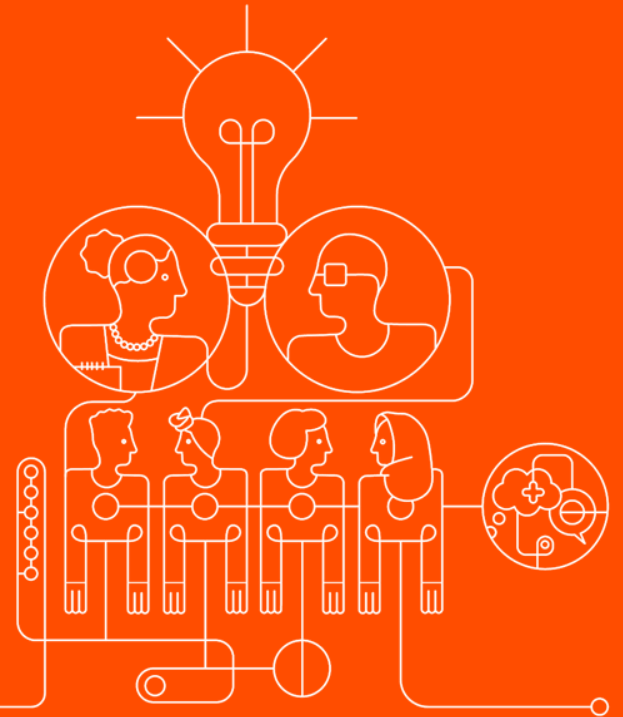
The school targets groups of pupils that are typically less active. In some cases they've incorporated sports and activities they know these children may like and offered one-to-one training on them to build their confidence. Where necessary they may split pupils into groups of friendships to help them to have fun and enjoy taking part or they may split by gender to make them feel more comfortable.

*We use the 6 school games values as part of our reward system. So, so during lessons we reward those children who are demonstrating the School Games values. P.E Lead*

*We're engaged in a variety of different activities, so it's not just the best children that are going to competitions, because we involve a range of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and children with special needs or disabilities. P.E Lead*

*It's providing opportunities to children who wouldn't ordinarily get them. It's raising their own confidence and their self esteem, it's giving them the opportunity to be involved in team sports and build relationships with other children, not just from our own school, but against other schools. It's opening their eyes and raising their aspirations to opportunities that are out there. P.E Lead*

# The School Games Vision and Mission



# Understanding of the vision and mission is less consistent in secondary schools

Whilst the quantitative data highlights a positive impact to pupils and students from a range of backgrounds and physical literacy levels, the qualitative findings from teachers and senior leaders highlights the extent this can vary across schools.

## Some schools are successful at implementing the vision and mission.

This is more evident in primary where they are more likely to take part in inclusive activities such as intra, multi-skills or virtual games. Schools successful at delivery:

- Use intra, virtual or multi-skills events to **engage the whole school** and develop positive associations with sport and physical activity. This in turn leads to higher participation in inter or county events which can consolidate positive perceptions.
- Offer **opportunities** to pupils/students who are less likely to attend a competitive event generally - i.e. pupils/students who are not taking part in competitions as part of extra curricular activity or pupils/students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.
- Select events, sports and activities which would engage a **range** of students.
- **Embed** the School Games into the wider school strategy.

## Some schools focus more on competition than other elements of the vision and mission.

This is more evident at a secondary stage where time and resources are often more limited. Schools that focus on competition:

- Have **fewer intra events**, which limits the amount of positive interactions with competition for students / pupils who are less likely to try out for inter or county events may have.
- Offer opportunities to pupils/students that are more likely to enjoy the challenge of competition. Encouraging those with **higher levels of physical literacy** to try something new. Running **selection events** to choose participation, which can be intimidating to the typically less active.
- Select events and activities they have **experience in** as a school and have pupils/students they know would take part.
- Use the School Games **sporadically** throughout the year, focussing largely on competition and less on wider individual benefits.

# The vision and mission has been successfully delivered when stakeholders and teachers work together

When the following is considered, they can work towards more young people being involved and produce more meaningful and positive moments:

## Having variation

Schools value the different types of events and roles involved - leadership, volunteering, SEND events. Stakeholders should **support schools to deliver these inclusion tools and techniques into their day-to-day** teaching, to ensure new and exciting opportunities for all pupils/students.

## Ensuring clear goals

Stakeholders and schools can work together to set goals which align with school sport strategies. By focussing on the school sport and activity goals and working towards being involved in the 'bigger events' it gives pupils a sense of purpose and belonging - this can make a **meaningful difference** to their lives.

## Building into curriculum

When built into the school offer, it keeps sport and competition at the **heart of the school**. Links with the curriculum can help pupils understand the **positive impact** it can have. E.g. primary - mental health and wellbeing, secondary - individual development and social skills.

## Rewarding & recognising

Achieving **personal best** is different for everyone. Schools appreciate the R&R moments that the School Games has invested in. It creates **positive meaningful moments** - e.g. primary, certificates/trophies for all, secondary - showcasing elite events. Stakeholders should support more of these moments, particularly where schools may not have the talent to be entered into County events

# The vision and mission could be updated across three key areas



Create more **clarity** on what the vision and mission means

Clarifying how **participation** and **competition** should work together.

For some, the vision focuses on participation whilst the mission focuses on competition. Some schools fear by focussing more on participation, they will lose elements of meaningful competition.

More support and training would benefit schools to take a **balanced approach**.

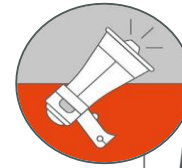


Support better **consistency** across schools of the delivery of the vision and mission

Ensuring opportunity to deliver the vision and mission across regions is **consistent and fair**.

Across schools, SGO and AP involvement can vary greatly, meaning support, understanding and delivery of the vision and mission also varies.

Ensuring stakeholders have the support, funding and network required to spend time with schools is important.



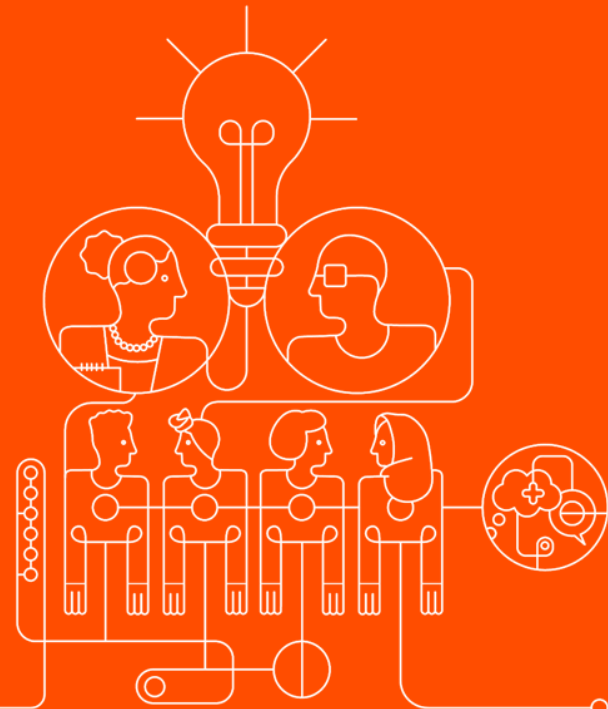
Drive **communication** of the vision and mission across all aspects

At present different aspects of the vision and mission are seen across different strands of School Games delivery such as the values, reframing competition, inclusion events, county events.

The vision and mission should be seen in all aspects of the School Games, including intra events such as sports days. This would mean communicating and embedded at a broader more overarching level by SGOs and Active Partnerships.



# Learning and Adapting to Change



## Evolving and adapting to change

COVID-19 has served as a great opportunity to reflect on prior processes, including methods of communication. The COVID-19 response has been praised for the levels of speed and support.

### Key learnings

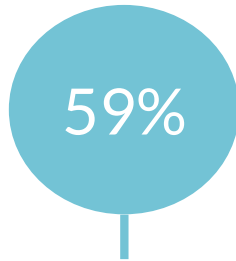
- Virtual communication as an effective way to share information more regularly and removes barrier of distance needed to travel for face-to-face meetings.
- Though some have found less uptake on virtual School Games, there have been success stories and evidence of this reaching different audiences than usual.
- Communication through social media, newsletters and emails has allowed more parental engagement.
- Change can be slow to implement across the vast network of the School Games due to: time constraints, processes or KPIs or a lack of clarity on the meaning of the vision and mission.

### Evolution

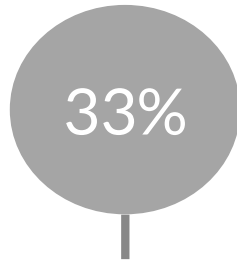
- Continue to build on the relationships and community feel that lockdown has generated.
- Assess and learn from the speed of change and response during covid-19 and how that was achieved.
- Support schools to use virtual delivery going forwards in a blended approach to encourage participation.
- Continue to monitor the changes in physical literacy as a result of changes or virtual delivery.
- Ensure strategies are long-term and provide clear progression over time.

# Pupils and students enjoy the virtual events and would like to see this continue in the future

**46%\*** enjoy taking part in the virtual School Games events.



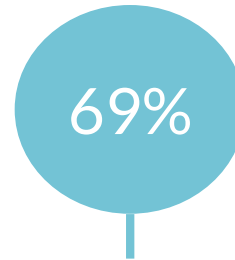
Primary pupils



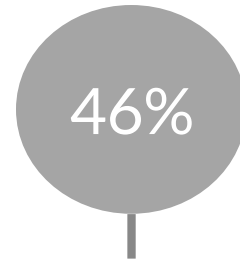
Secondary students

\*This was asked to all respondents. There was a high percentage (43%) who answered 'can't say'. Only 11% disagreed to this statement.

**58%\*** would like the virtual School Games events to continue in the future.



Primary pupils



Secondary students

\*This was asked to all respondents. There was a high percentage (32%) who answered 'can't say'. Only 11% disagreed to this statement.

# Virtual activity has the potential to encourage even more students to take part in competitive sport

**34%** of pupils and students took part in the School Games virtual offer. When delivered effectively, there were many positive attributes:

## Team focus

During a time when contact with others is limited, **working as a team** and having fun collectively is a welcome and enjoyable aspect of the school day. With extracurricular activity limited too, **students across all levels of activity enjoy** taking part.

## Inclusion

Teachers and stakeholders found virtual activity could engage a range of pupils and students. They are significantly **more likely to have taken part** in virtual activity if they **have a disability or SEN**, than those that do not. Teachers report **some pupils and students can't attend after school events** due to home commitments, but virtual activity helps to reduce this barrier.

## Positive competition

Competition is an important part of engaging students in virtual activity, to provide more purpose and drive to take part. Schools incorporated **points based systems** which fed into **leagues** rather than leader boards which could feel more inclusive.

## Enjoyment based

Encouraging participation, **having fun** and forgetting about the pandemic were key goals of taking part. With less focus on getting to the next stage of a competition students could **explore sport and physical activity** in a different way than usual.

# Future recommendations focus on sharing knowledge, defining the School Games and driving consistency

