



## **Active Lives Children and Young People Survey**

**Academic year 2020-21**

Published December 2021

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## Key information

This report presents data from the Active Lives Children and Young People Survey for the academic year 2020-21. Data is presented for children and young people in school Years 1-11 (ages 5-16) in England.

This report contains a full year of coronavirus (Covid-19) restrictions, including comparisons back to summer term 2020, when school sites were closed to most pupils for much of the period.

## Release dates

This release: 9 December 2021

Next release: 8 December 2022

## Find out more

For more information on the data presented in this report, please visit the [Active Lives section](#) of our website or refer to the [technical note](#).

# Welcome



Welcome to the fourth annual Active Lives Children and Young People Survey report, summarising the activity levels of 5 to 16-year-olds in England during the academic year 2020-21.

Covering September 2020 to July 2021, this year's report contains the continued disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic. This included increasing restrictions impacting indoor activity and organised outdoor activities during the autumn term, and then national lockdown during the spring term.

Once again, the results demonstrate the positive impact of the collective efforts to help children and young people meet the Chief Medical Officer activity guidelines, during unprecedented disruption, including from children and young people themselves. The proportion of children and young people in England who are active remains unchanged compared to 12 months ago, although they are down 2.2%, or 94,000, compared to pre-pandemic levels (2018-19). However, while inequalities have increased, for some groups of children and young people and in particular teenage girls, the opportunity to access alternative or adapted activities has led to increased activity levels compared to pre-pandemic.

Not surprisingly, rates of volunteering have fallen and there are signs of a worrying impact upon physical literacy (especially confidence and enjoyment), which suggests the recovery of activity levels to pre-pandemic levels may take some time and certainly a collective and concerted effort.

As ever, it is only possible to provide a summary within this report. Readers should use the links within the report to access the detailed data tables. Alternatively, check out the [Active Lives Online tool](#), which is updated shortly after each release, where you can explore trends over time, audiences not covered in this report and more specific activities.

Finally, I'd like to thank the schools, children, parents and teachers who took the time to complete the survey, and the network of Active Partnerships, who've once again played a key role in working with the schools.

# The coronavirus timeline and fieldwork

This report covers the academic year 2020–21. The summer term provides a comparison with the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic that were covered in last year's report.

## Mid-March to late-July 2020

Data forms part of last year's release.

### 2019–20 Academic Year

Mid-March to July:  
Full lockdown/easing restrictions

## Early-September 2020 to end-July 2021

### Autumn term 2020

Sept to Dec:  
Increasing restrictions

### Spring term 2021

Jan to March:  
National lockdown/  
significant restrictions

### Summer term 2021

Mid-April to July:  
Easing restrictions

## Early-September to end-December 2021

Data forms part of next year's release.

### 2021–22 Academic Year

Sept to Dec:  
Easing restrictions

2020

**Mid-Mar:**  
National lockdown.

**June:**  
Limited school reopening and outdoor meetings permitted.

**Mid-May:** Activity choice was extended to include outdoor activities.

**July:** Playgrounds reopened, organised sport returned, followed by gyms, pools and leisure centres at the end of the month.

2021

**Mid-Sept:**  
Restrictions to indoor team sports reintroduced, along with the rule of six. Schools reopened for all pupils.

**December:**  
New tiered system of restrictions based on location.

**November:** National restrictions returned. Restrictions applied to all indoor activity and organised outdoor activity.

**January:**  
Activity choice restricted – mainly to walking, cycling, running, local solo outdoor activity and informal activities.

**March:**  
Schools reopened (8<sup>th</sup>) and outdoor activity resumed with the rule of six in place (29<sup>th</sup>).

**12 April:**  
Gyms, pools, leisure centres and retail reopened.

**17 May:**  
Organised sport resumed and indoor gatherings reintroduced, with the rule of six applied.

**19 July:**  
All legal restrictions removed.

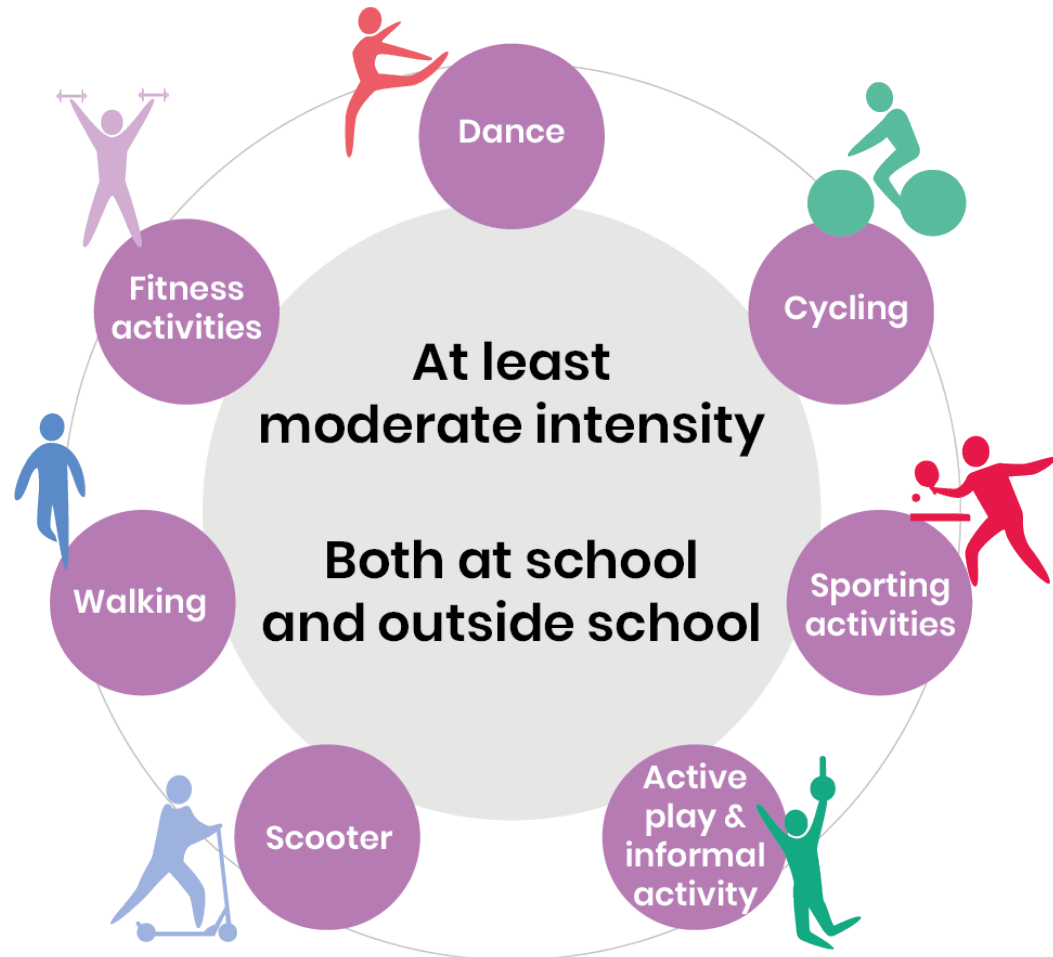
# Levels of activity

## Definition

This chapter presents information on three levels of activity:

- Active (an average of at least 60 minutes a day)
- Fairly active (an average of 30-59 minutes a day)
- Less active (less than an average of 30 minutes a day).

What do we mean by sport and physical activity?

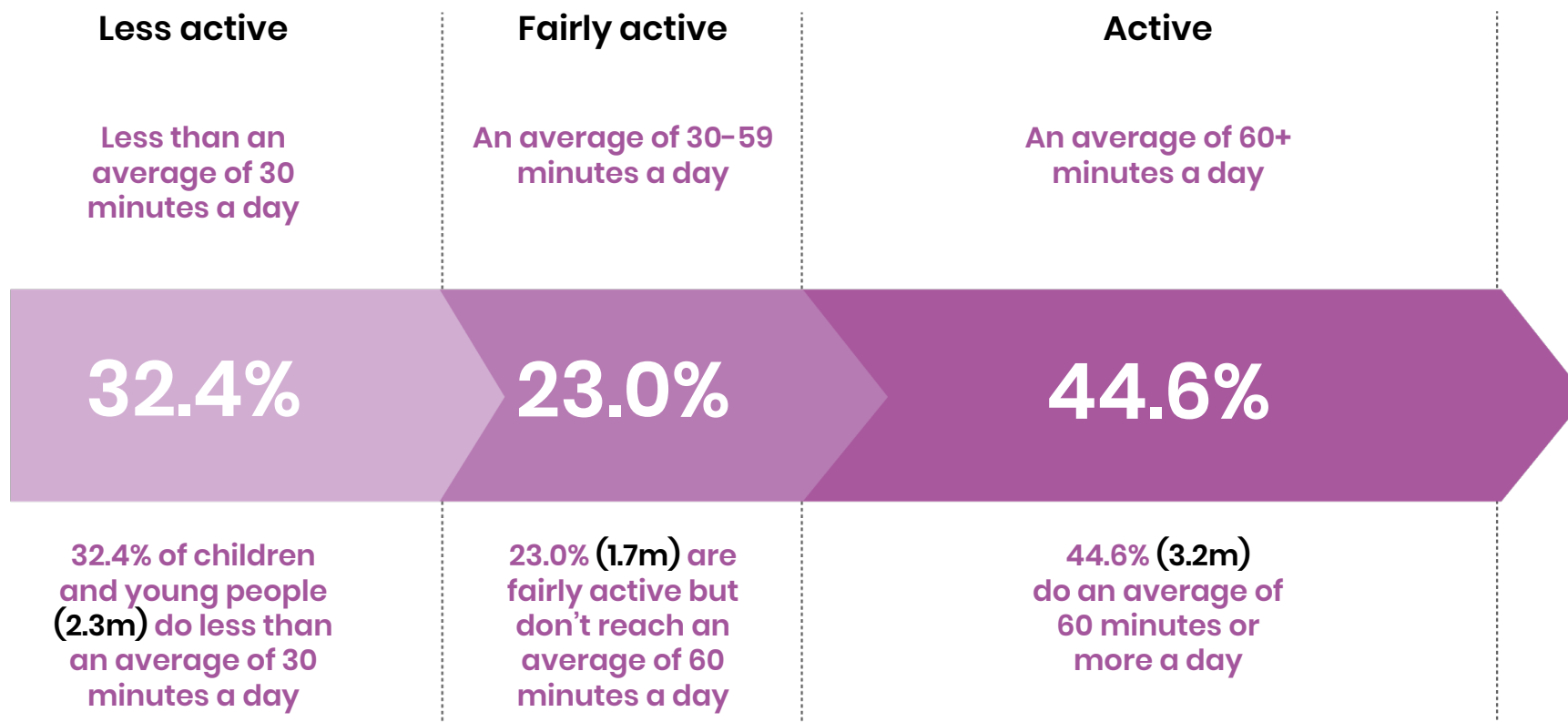


# Levels of activity



## Headlines


Our data shows that 44.6% of children and young people (3.2 million) are meeting the Chief Medical Officer guidelines of taking part in sport and physical activity for an average of 60 minutes or more every day. Meanwhile, 32.4% (2.3m) do less than an average of 30 minutes a day.



[Link to data tables](#)



# Levels of activity

 Arrows show the percentage point change on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change

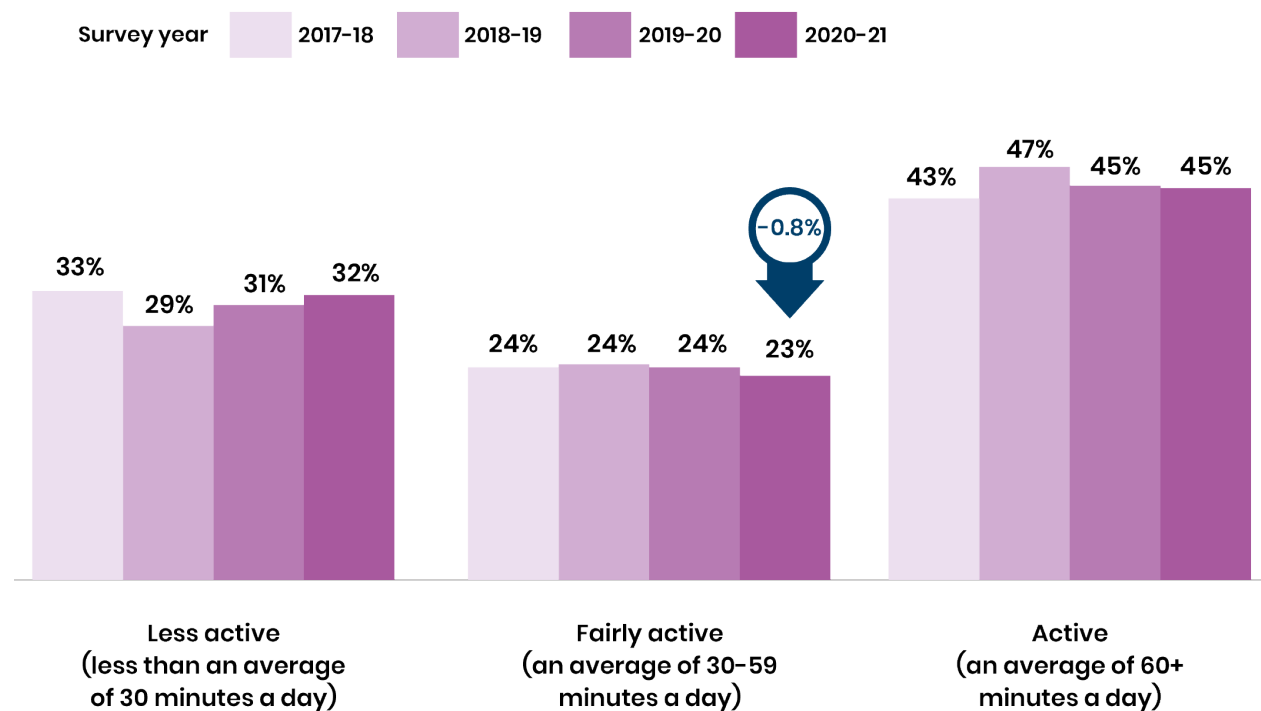


## Activity levels remain down compared to pre-pandemic but haven't fallen further

The proportion of children and young people in England who are active remains unchanged over the past 12 months. However, the proportion active remains 2.2% down compared to pre-pandemic (2018-19), meaning there were 94,000 fewer active children and young people.

Similarly, there's been no change in the proportion who are less active over the past 12 months but we continue to see more children and young people (3.4%, or 283,000) who are less active compared to pre-pandemic levels (2018-19).

Although unchanged compared to 12 months ago, activity levels have changed according to the level of restrictions in place at the time\*. For instance, we see significant drops during periods of tighter restrictions and evidence of children and young people switching into alternative or adapted activities throughout the year. A term-by-term breakdown is provided on the next page.




\*Activity can be either during or outside of school hours.

For details on how we measure change, see the [notes](#) pages.

[Link to data tables](#)



# Levels of activity

 Arrows show the percentage point change on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change



## Activity levels fell in both the autumn and spring terms

The autumn term saw school sites reopen to all pupils, however, disruption continued with bubbles and ad hoc closures commonplace. Additionally, this period saw restrictions start to be reimposed\*. These factors all impacted activity levels, with 212,000, or 3.1%, fewer children and young people meeting the active threshold compared to the equivalent period 12 months earlier (which was pre-pandemic).

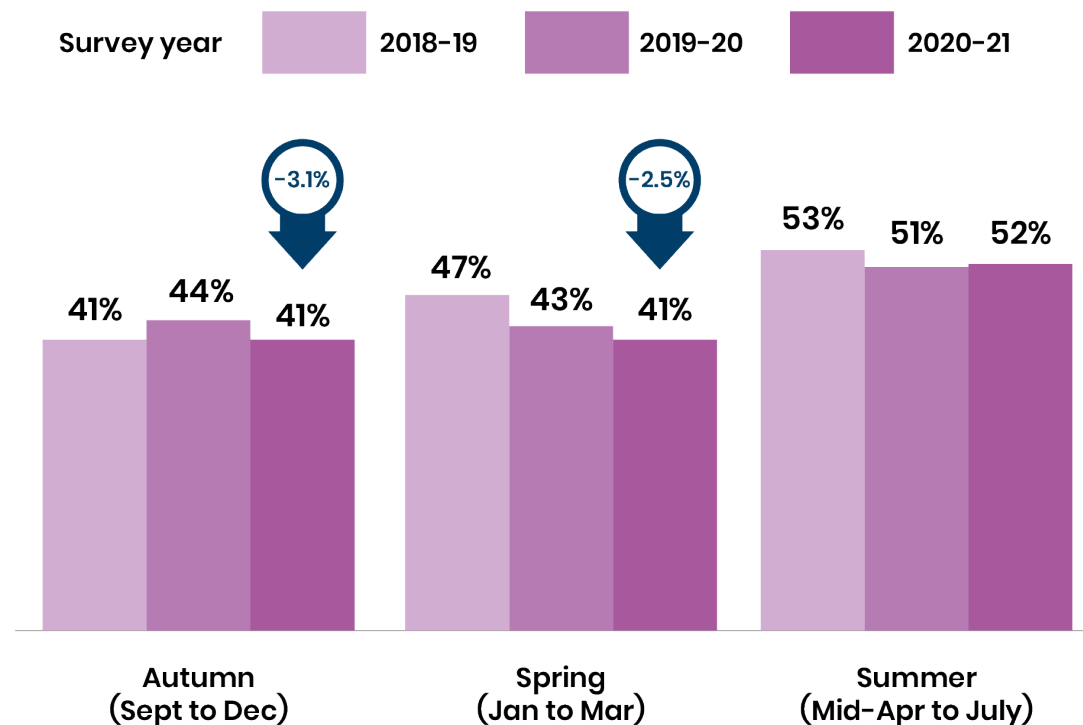
For much of the spring term school sites were again closed to most pupils as we entered a new national lockdown throughout January and February. While there was only a modest drop (168,000, or 2.5%) in the proportion of children and young people who were active compared to the spring term 2020, this was a period disrupted by the storms of early 2020. Overall, the proportion who were active is 6.5% (409,000) down on the spring term of 2019.

Similar to the autumn term, during the summer term school sites were mainly open to all pupils but there was continued disruption, the main difference being that restrictions were easing over the summer term rather than being tightened, as they were in the autumn term. Despite this, activity levels haven't fully recovered to summer term 2019 levels.

[Link to data tables](#)



## Active (an average of 60+ minutes a day)



\*Activity can be either during or outside of school hours.

For details on how we measure change, see the [notes](#) pages.



# Levels of activity

Note: All data relates to young people in Years 1-11 (ages 5-16)

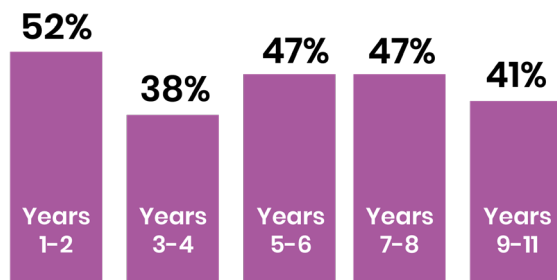


## Summary of demographic differences

### Active

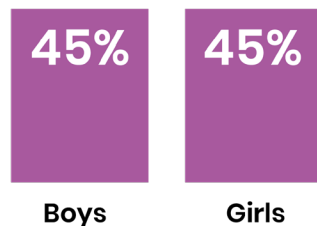
#### 1 Year group

Activity levels are lowest for school Years 3-4 (ages 7-9, 38%).



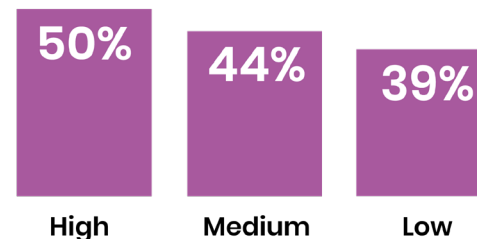
#### 2 Gender

Boys (45% or 1.6m) are equally as likely to be active as girls (45% or 1.6m).



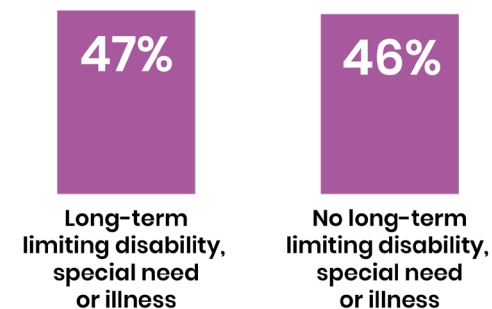
#### 3 Family affluence

Those from low affluence families are the least likely to be active (39%).



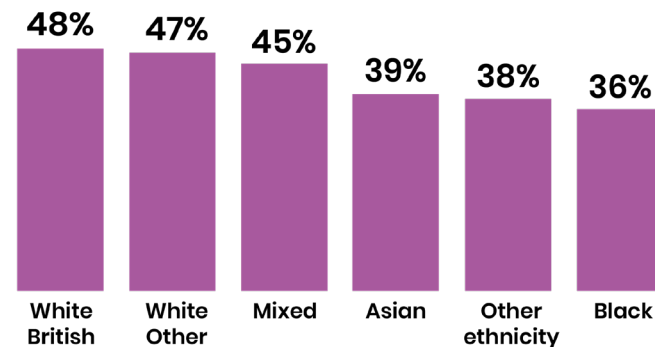
#### 4 Disability and long-term health conditions

Activity levels among children and young people with a disability or long-term health condition are the same as for those without one.



#### 5 Ethnicity

Black children and young people are the least likely to be active (36%).




[Link to data tables](#)

\* See our [definitions](#) page for the full definition of each demographic group.

# Levels of activity

## School year group

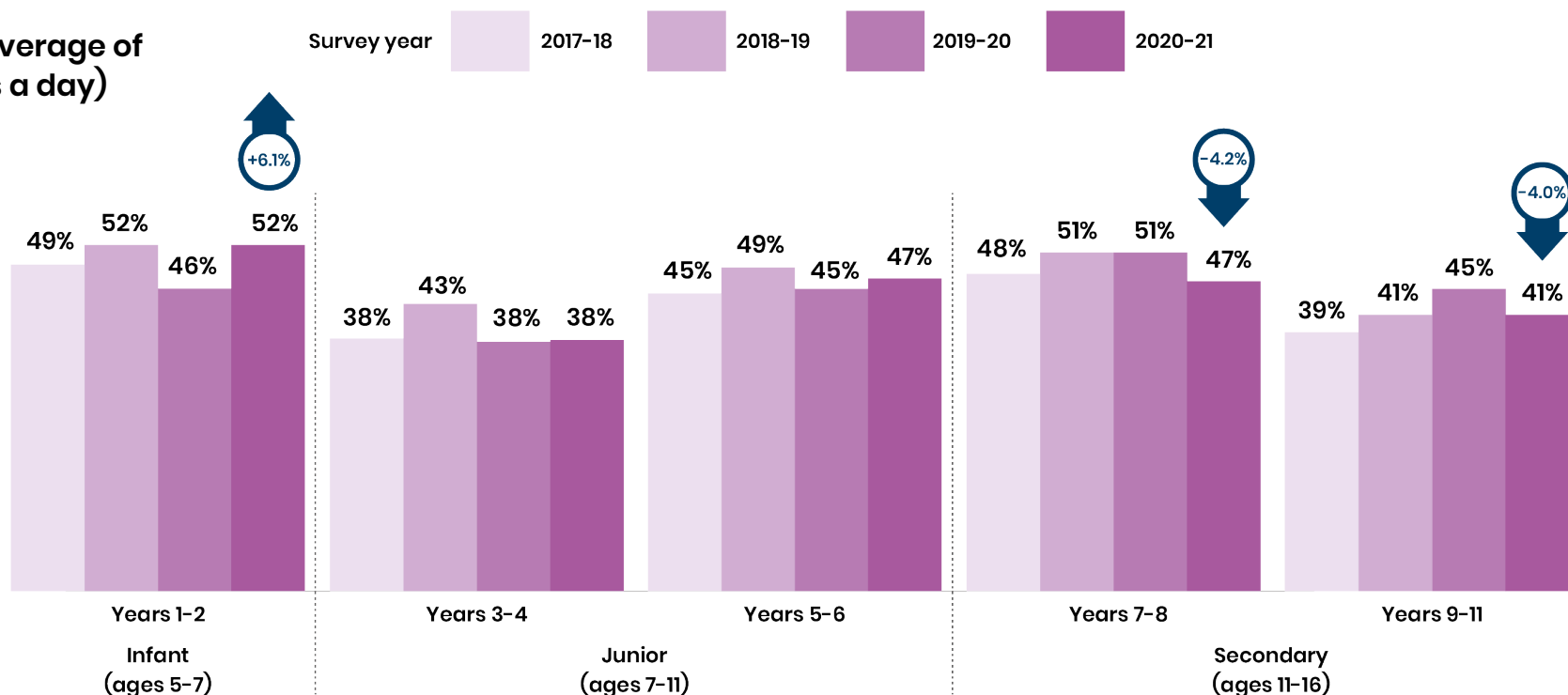
 Arrows show the percentage point change on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change



### Older children have now also seen drops in activity levels

Activity levels among infant age children (Years 1-2, ages 5-7) have recovered to levels seen two years ago. Levels remain down among junior age children (Years 3-6, ages 7-11) following drops at the start of the pandemic, while activity levels have fallen among secondary age young people (Years 7-11, ages 11-16) compared to 12 months ago.


Active (an average of 60+ minutes a day)



[Link to data tables](#)

# Levels of activity

## Gender

 Arrows show the percentage point change on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change

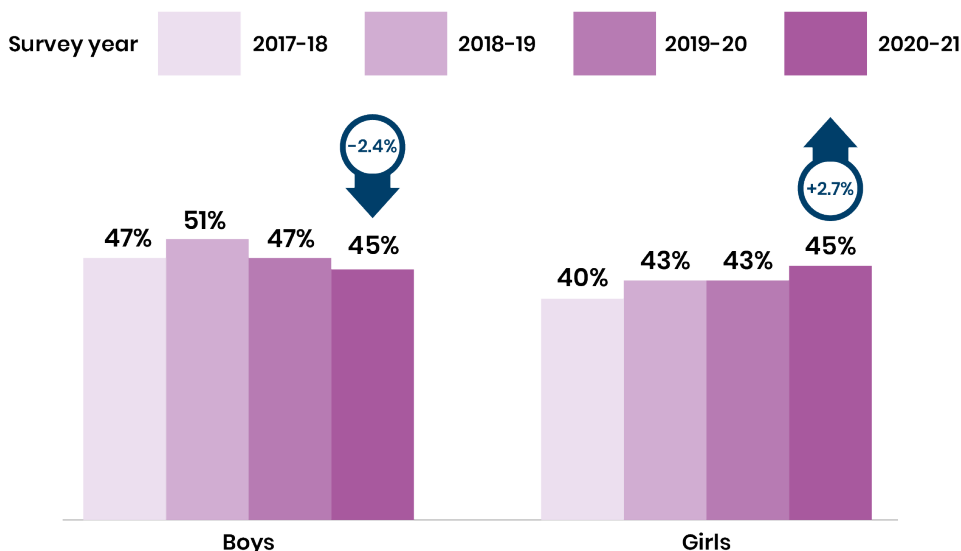


### Boys continue to see activity levels fall, while girls have seen an increase

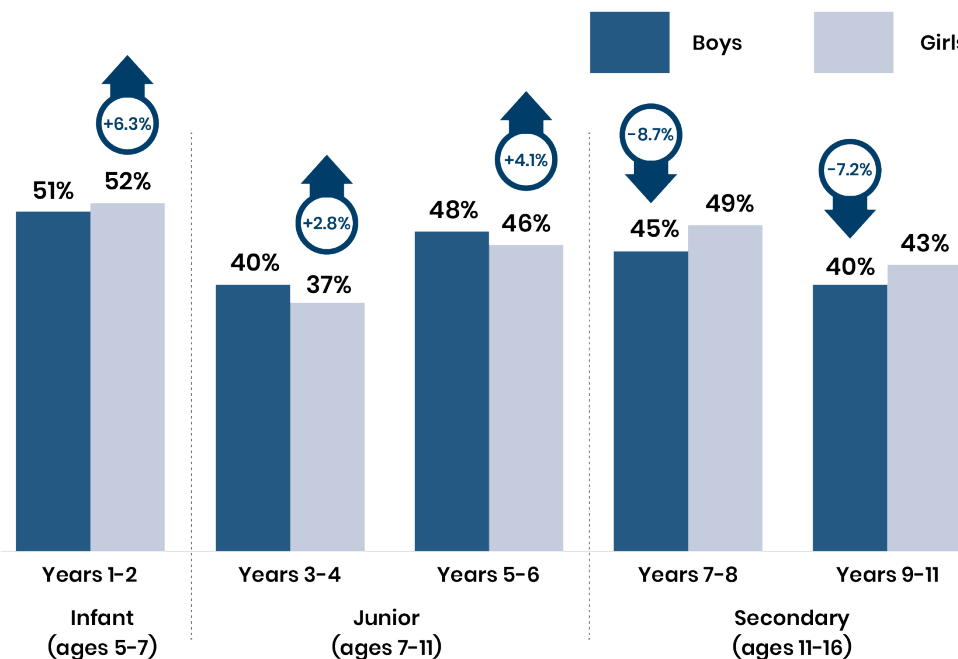
Activity levels have fallen among boys, with signs of an emerging downward trend. In contrast they've increased among girls, who have an emerging upward trend. As a result, boys and girls were equally likely to be active across the 2020-21 academic year.

The decreases over time in activity levels for boys were initially driven by the younger age groups but over the last 12 months have been among older boys. The recent increases for girls have come from the younger age groups, while rates remain flat among secondary age girls.

### Active (an average of 60+ minutes a day)



As a result of these changes, there's no reportable gender gap for any age group except Years 7-8 (ages 11-13), where girls were slightly more active than boys.




[Link to data tables](#)



# Levels of activity

## Secondary boys: Years 7-11 (ages 11-16)

 Arrows show the percentage point change on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change



### Secondary age boys have seen severe disruption to their activity levels

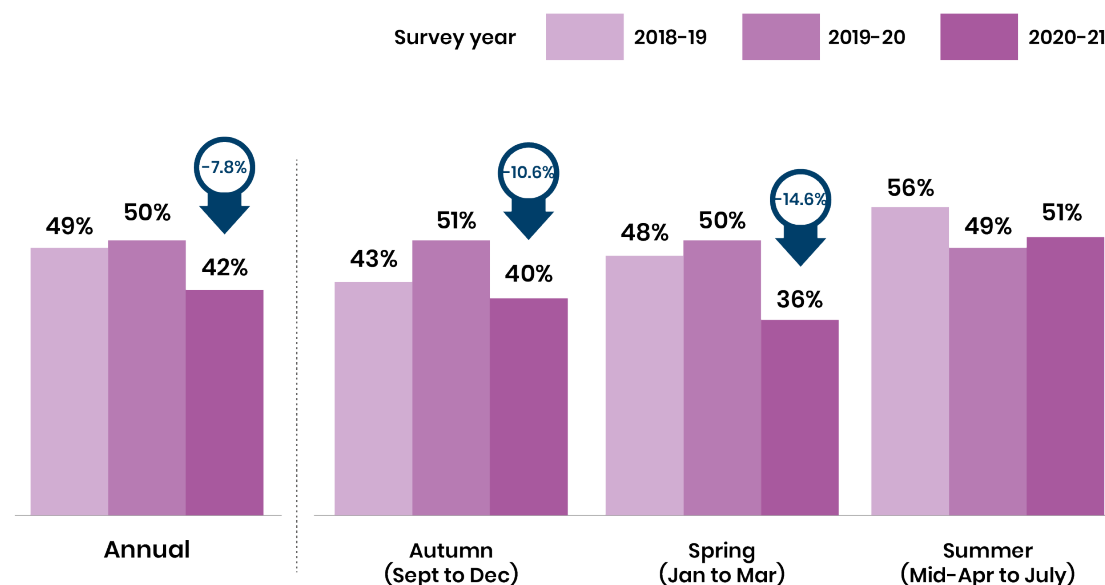
Despite schools returning and fewer restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic, large drops were seen in activity levels among secondary age boys (Years 7-11, ages 11-16) during the autumn term\*. Drops, however, peaked during the spring term when restrictions were again at their height and school sites were predominantly closed to most pupils.

The summer term saw no reportable recovery from the drops seen during the early restricted period in 2020 (down 5.4% compared to 2019).

This is consistent across both Years 7-8 (ages 11-13) and Years 9-11 (ages 13-16).

Organised sport is a key contributor to activity levels among secondary age boys. The continued disruption has impacted habits, which are taking time to recover.

### Active (an average of 60+ minutes a day)



[Link to data tables](#)



\*Activity can be either during or outside of school hours.

# Levels of activity

## Secondary girls: Years 7-11 (ages 11-16)



Arrows show the percentage point change on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change

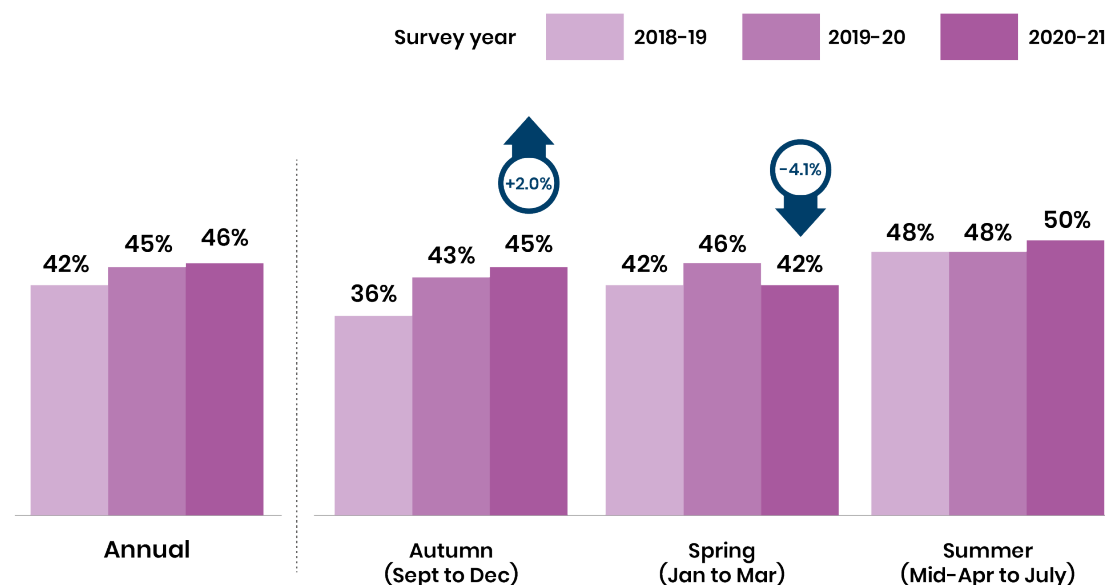


### Secondary age girls have retained increases in activity levels seen during the early stages of the pandemic

Secondary age girls (Years 7-11, ages 11-16) have seen a small increase in activity levels during the autumn term, when restrictions were less severe, and a decrease during the spring term as school sites were predominantly closed to most pupils\*. These changes have been driven by those in Years 7-8 (ages 11-13), with teenage girls (Years 9-11, ages 13-16) seeing no changes throughout the year.

Among teenage girls specifically, it's likely the choice of activities available suited them better. While some will have faced disruption to their organised activity, the data indicates many found more opportunities to go for a walk or do fitness activities, for example.

### Active (an average of 60+ minutes a day)




[Link to data tables](#)



\*Activity can be either during or outside of school hours.

# Levels of activity

## Family affluence

 Arrows show the percentage point change on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change



### Children and young people from the least affluent families remain the least active

Across the year as a whole, activity levels have fallen compared to pre-pandemic (2018-19) for children and young people from the least affluent families (down 3.4%), while remaining unchanged for those from the most affluent families – widening the gap between the two.

Within this, children and young people from the most affluent families have only seen drops when the restrictions have been most severe and school sites were predominantly closed to most pupils. A small recovery in the summer term reflects an easing of restrictions compared to summer 2020. Facility closures and fewer clubs/classes running during these most impacted periods are likely to have contributed to these findings.

Conversely, children from the least affluent families didn't see drops in activity levels until the autumn term, and the spring term remains 9.3% down compared to 2019 following the storm-disrupted 2020. This suggests their activity levels have been harder hit as the pandemic's progressed.

Note: Due to the coronavirus pandemic, one of the components used to generate the family affluence scale isn't currently applicable. As such, the data presented here is per an adjusted definition. See our [definitions](#) page for more details.

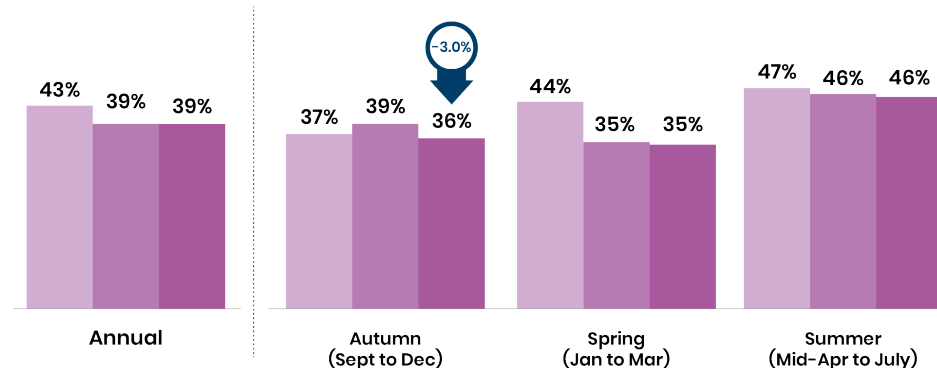
[Link to data tables](#)



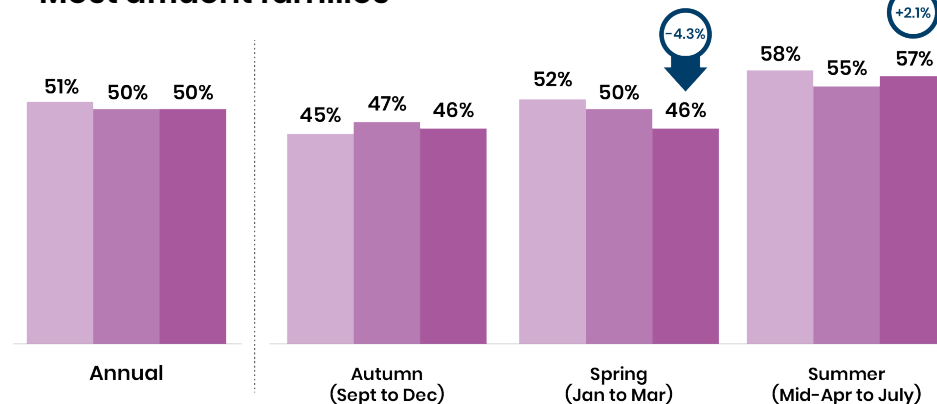
### Active (an average of 60+ minutes a day)

Survey year  2018-19  2019-20  2020-21

#### Least affluent families



#### Most affluent families



# Levels of activity

## Disability and long-term health conditions



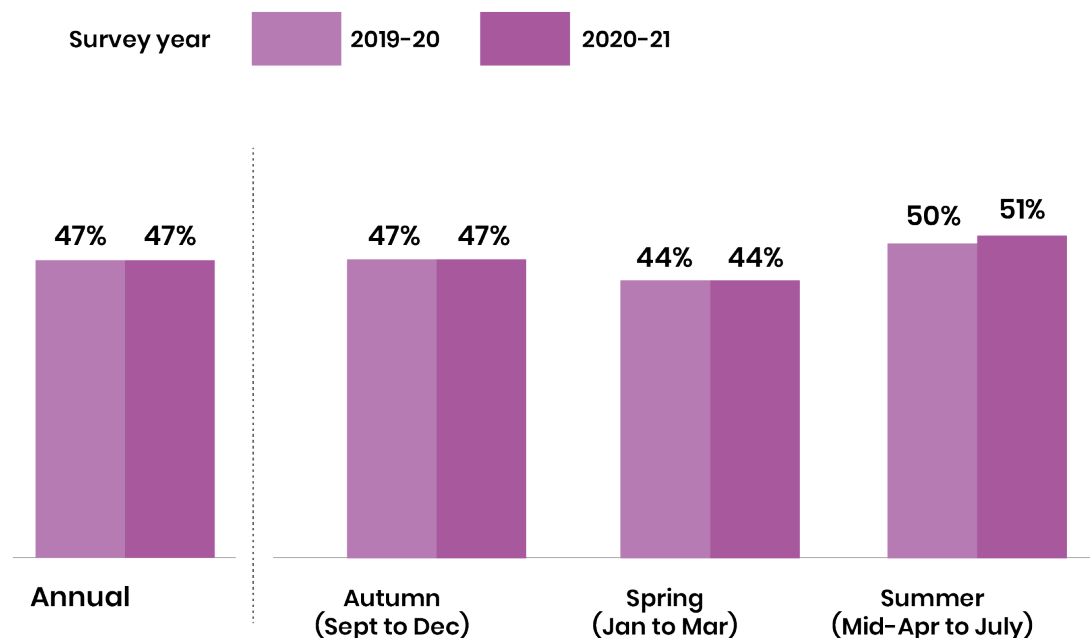
### Activity levels have remained resilient throughout the year

There's little difference in activity levels between those with and without a disability or long-term health condition.

Activity levels among children and young people with a disability or long-term health condition were unchanged across the year compared to 12 months earlier, this is in contrast to those without a disability or long-term health condition, who saw small drops during both the autumn and spring terms.


Note: A new question was introduced for 2019-20 to capture consistent disability and long-term health condition data across all year groups. As such, only one year of comparison data is available. See the [notes](#) page for more detail.

### Active (an average of 60+ minutes a day)



# Levels of activity

## Ethnicity

 Arrows show the percentage point change on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change

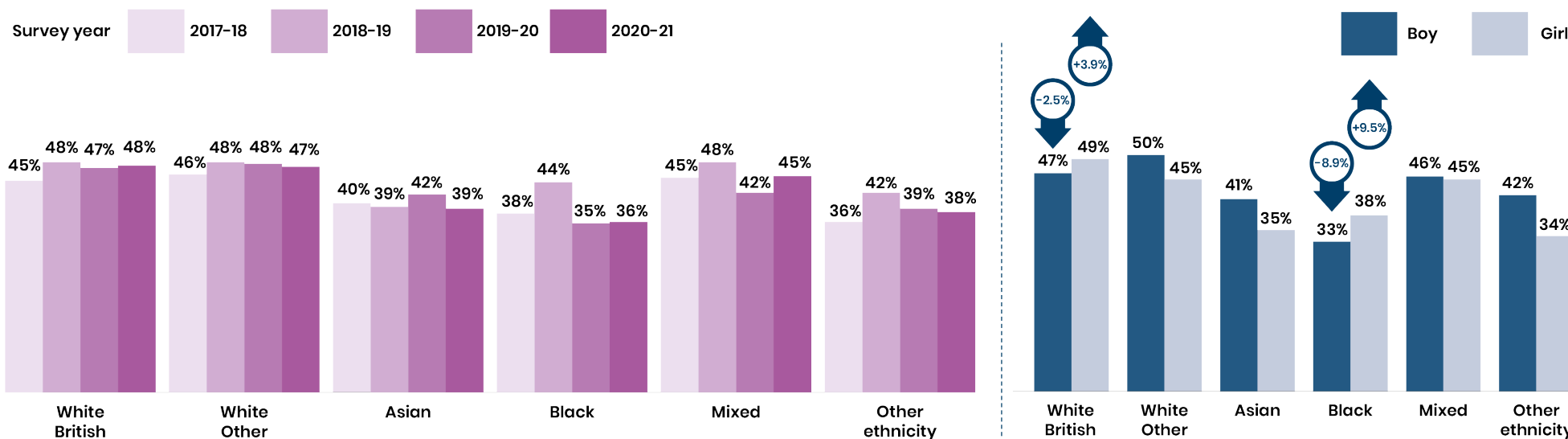


### Activity levels remain below pre-pandemic levels among Black boys

There have been no annual changes in activity levels compared to 12 months ago for any ethnic group, although within this we've seen a decrease for black boys countered by an increase for black girls. Additionally, black boys saw no recovery in activity levels in the summer term and remain down on pre-pandemic (2019) levels.

Within the overall picture of no annual change, children and young people from White British, White Other and Mixed backgrounds are more likely to be active than those from Asian, Black and Other ethnic backgrounds. In addition, Asian and White Other boys are currently more likely to be active than Asian and White Other girls respectively, while White British girls are more likely to be active than White British boys. There are no reportable differences between boys and girls of Black, Mixed and Other ethnicities.

### Active (an average of 60+ minutes a day)



[Link to data tables](#) 

Note: After White British, the largest ethnic groups within the child population are Asian (9%) and Mixed (7%) with White Other (5%), Black (5%) and other ethnic groups (4%) making up the remainder. As such, caution should be applied when looking at change for these groups due to smaller sample sizes and therefore wider confidence intervals.



# Types of activity

## Definition

This chapter presents data broken down by activity group and looks at those who've participated at least once in the last week.

Data is also provided for swimming confidence and capability within this section.

Looking at participation at least once in the last week provides:

- An entry level view of participation overall
- An understanding of which activities contribute to the make-up of an active day.



**We measure sport and physical activity if it's done...**

- in the last week
- at least moderate intensity
- either at school or outside school.

[Link to data tables](#)



# Types of activity

## Most activities have seen drops in those taking part

Some activities were limited across much of the year, either due to the majority of children not being in school, schools not running activities or because community facilities were closed.

This is reflected in the drops in swimming, team sports and gymnastics, trampolining and cheerleading compared to 12 months ago.

Active play also saw a decline in participation, while walking to school or other places fell back slightly following an increase the year before.

Conversely, more children and young people have been going for a walk, dancing and doing gym or fitness.

Running, athletics and multi-sports has seen an increase following a drop 12 months earlier.

Notes: When looking at individual or groups of activities, we use the measure of whether they took part in the last week, as we're looking to understand which activities contribute to the make-up of an active day.

Individual activities are reported in the data tables.

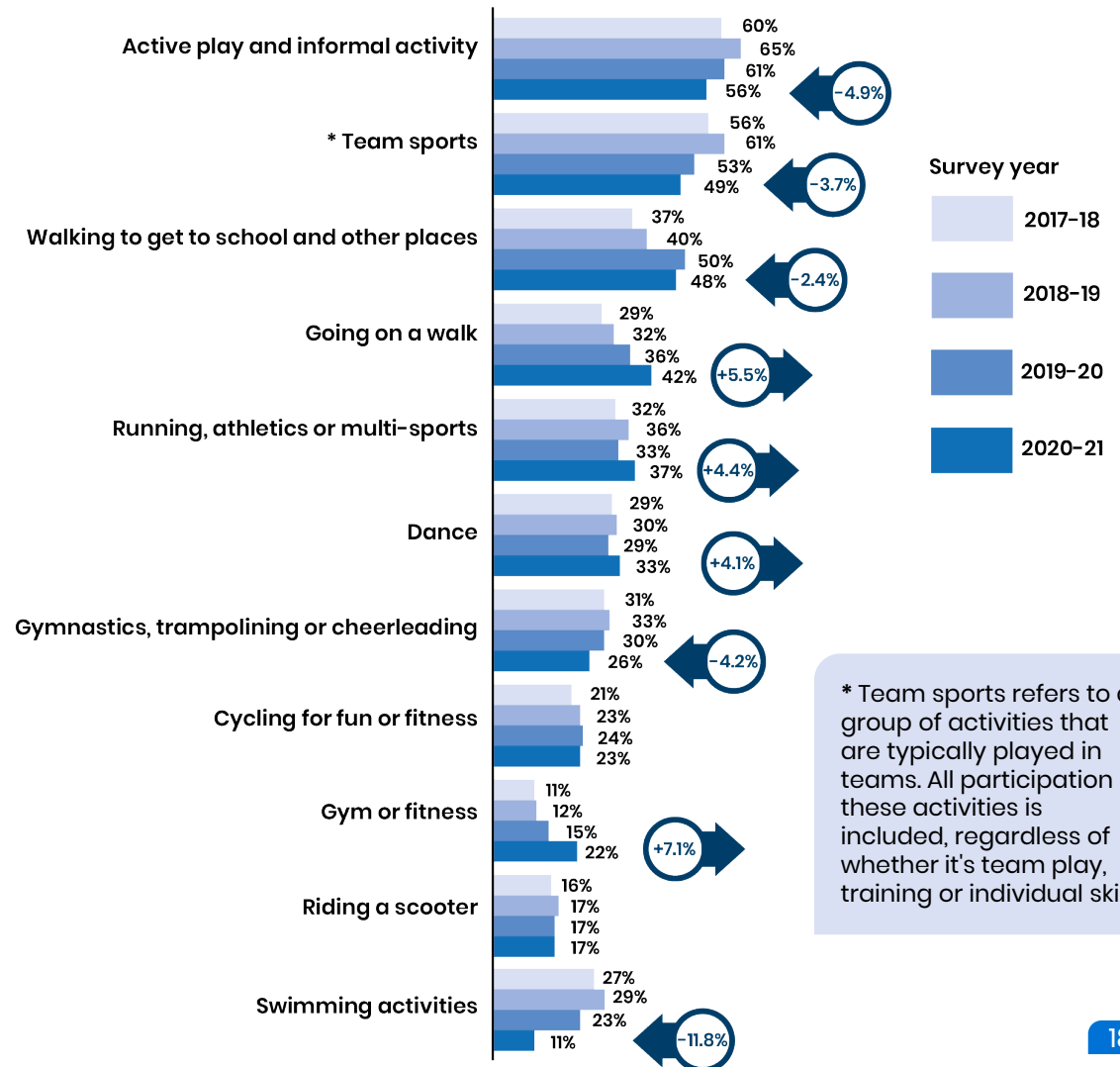
[Link to data tables](#)



Arrows show the percentage point change on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change



## Most prevalent activity groups for Years 1-11 (ages 5-16)



\* Team sports refers to a group of activities that are typically played in teams. All participation in these activities is included, regardless of whether it's team play, training or individual skills.

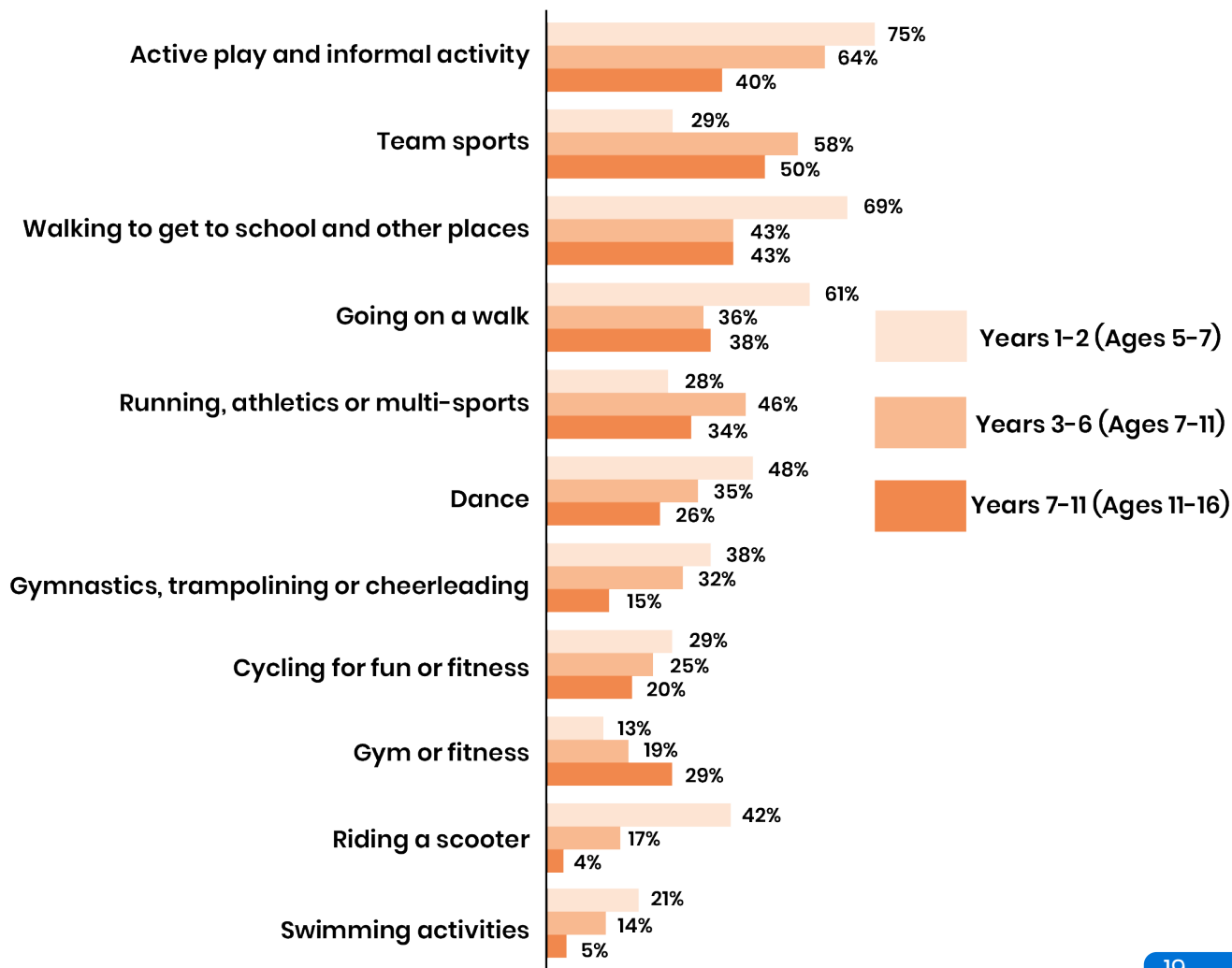
### As children and young people get older, their activity preferences change

Active play, walking, dance, riding a scooter and swimming are all more prevalent among the youngest children (Years 1-2, ages 5-7).

Team sports and running, athletics or multi-sports (including the active mile) are most prevalent among junior age children (Years 3-6, ages 7-11).

Gym or fitness is most prevalent among the oldest young people (Years 7-11, ages 11-16).

Most prevalent activity groups



# Types of activity

## Walking



**%**  
Arrows show the percentage point change on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change

### Walking to get to school and other places

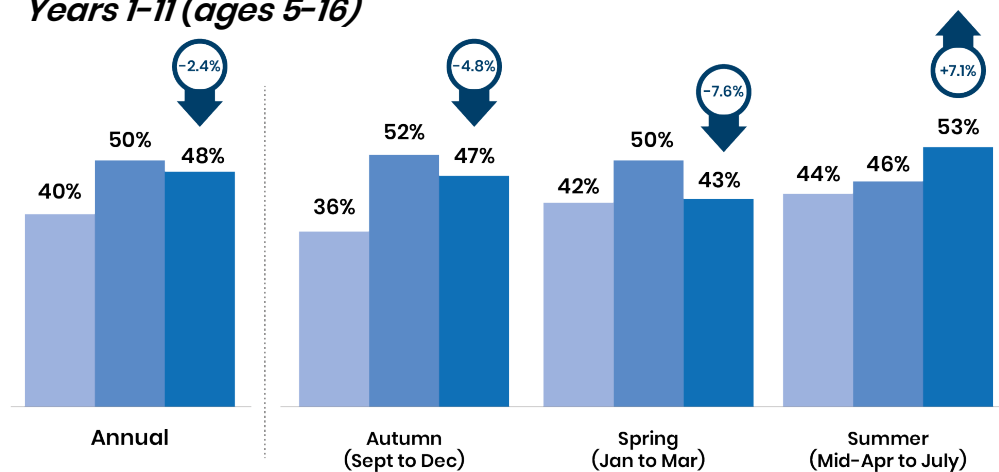
Walking to school and other places decreased in both the autumn and spring terms – in the spring term, restrictions were tighter and school sites were closed to most pupils.

The summer term saw an increase, as most pupils returned to school sites and children and young people were able to access more places.

All years groups saw a similar picture.

Survey year  2018-19  2019-20  2020-21

### Walking to get to school and other places Years 1-11 (ages 5-16)

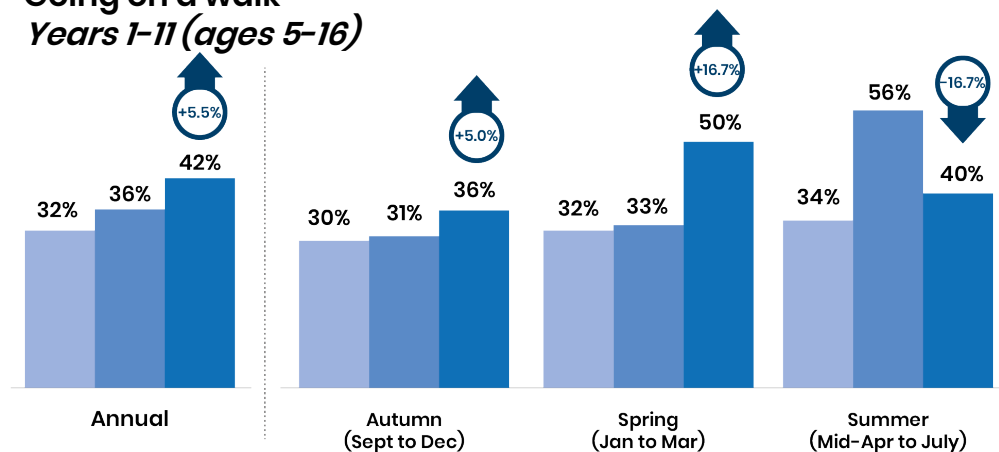


### Going on a walk

Just over 400,000 (5.5%) more children and young people went on a walk across the academic year 2020-21, compared to 12 months earlier. The increases were greatest among junior age children (Years 3-6/ages 7-11, up 6.9%)

All year groups have seen a similar pattern across the year, with smaller increases in the autumn term when there were fewer restrictions and larger increases during the spring term when there was the most disruption. Across the summer term, walking fell back but remains up on 2019 (5.6%) by a similar amount to the autumn term increase, reflecting similar restrictions in the autumn and spring terms.

### Going on a walk Years 1-11 (ages 5-16)



# Types of activity

## Active play and cycling



**%** Arrows show the percentage point change on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change

### Active play and informal activities

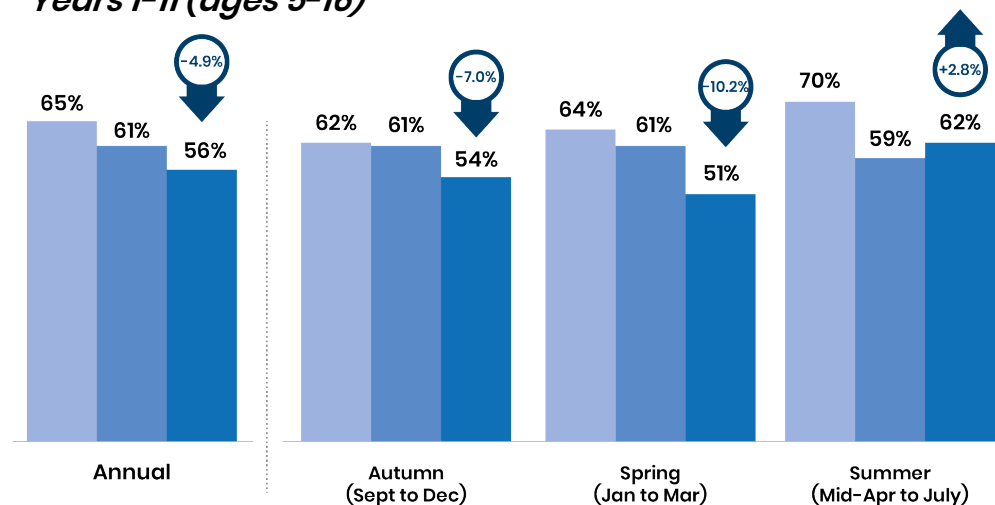
Around 338,000 (4.9%) fewer children and young people took part in active play and informal activities across the academic year 2020-21, compared to 12 months earlier. This includes kicking a ball about, skateboarding, playing it/tag and using playgrounds, for example.

Decreases were seen across both the autumn and spring terms as restrictions remained in place. Notably, when school sites were closed to most pupils they wouldn't have had access to break and lunch time informal activity.

During the summer term there was little recovery compared to 2020, when the majority of school sites were closed to most pupils.

Survey year 2018-19 2019-20 2020-21

### Active play and informal activities Years 1-11 (ages 5-16)

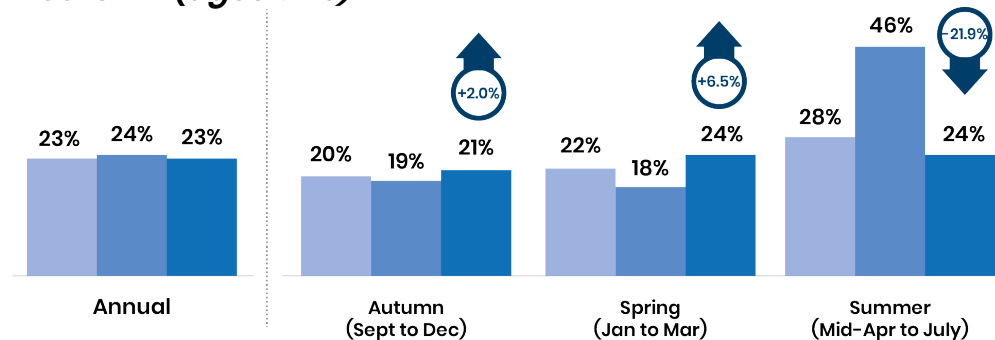


### Cycling for fun or fitness

Overall there's been no change in the numbers cycling.

For all year groups, we've seen a small increase in those cycling for fun or fitness during periods of restrictions (autumn and spring terms), while during the summer term it dropped back to below pre-pandemic (2019) levels.

### Cycling for fun or fitness Years 1-11 (ages 5-16)



[Link to data tables](#)



# Types of activity

## Running and gym/fitness



Arrows show the percentage point change on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change

Survey year 2018-19 2019-20 2020-21

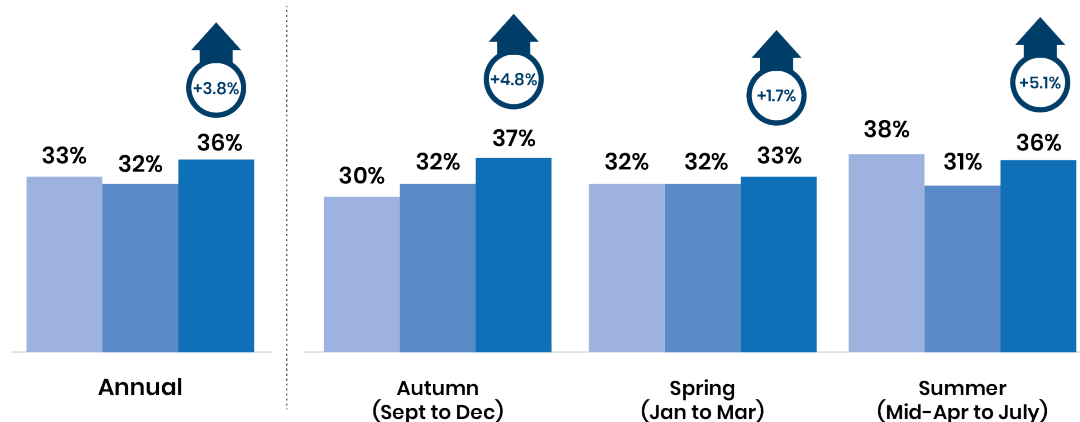
### Running (including active miles)

Just over 280,000 (3.8%) more children and young people took part in running (including active miles) across the academic year 2020-21, compared to 12 months earlier.

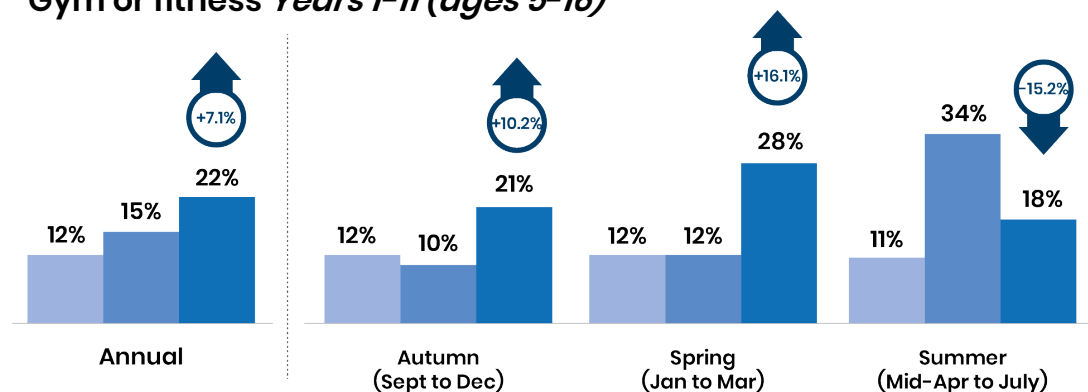
Junior age children (Years 3-6, ages 7-11) drove a lot of the changes, with active miles being a key component of their running activity. When school sites were closed to most pupils in both the summer term 2020 and spring term 2021, running (including active miles) fell among this age group. It recovered across the summer term 2021, as school sites reopened.

In contrast, it's most likely that secondary age young people (Years 7-11, ages 11-16) turned to running while other activities were limited and, as such, we saw increases across the autumn and spring terms for this age group.

### Running (including active miles) Years 1-11 (ages 5-16)



### Gym or fitness Years 1-11 (ages 5-16)



### Gym or fitness

Just over 500,000 (7.1%) more children and young people took part in gym or fitness across the academic year 2020-21, compared to 12 months earlier.

This increase has been driven by the younger age groups (Years 1-6, ages 5-11), where fitness activity seems to have become a feature of their activity mix, where previously less than 2% of children took part.



# Types of activity

## Team sports and swimming



**%** Arrows show the percentage point change on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change

### Team sports

Around 250,000 (3.7%) fewer children and young people took part in team sports across the academic year 2020-21, compared to 12 months earlier.

The spring term saw drops of a similar magnitude to summer 2020, when school sites were also predominantly closed to most pupils and restrictions were in place for community sport.

The summer term saw recovery for all year groups, although it remains that overall 5.8% fewer played team sports compared to pre-pandemic (2019).

### Swimming

Around 850,000 (11.8%) fewer children and young people swam during the academic year 2020-21, compared to 12 months earlier, with children in Years 1-2 (ages 5-7) seeing the largest annual drop (-20.7%).

Across all year groups, far fewer children and young people swam in the autumn term than the same term in 2019 and only 2% swam in the spring term, which contained the January/February 2021 national lockdown when facilities were closed.

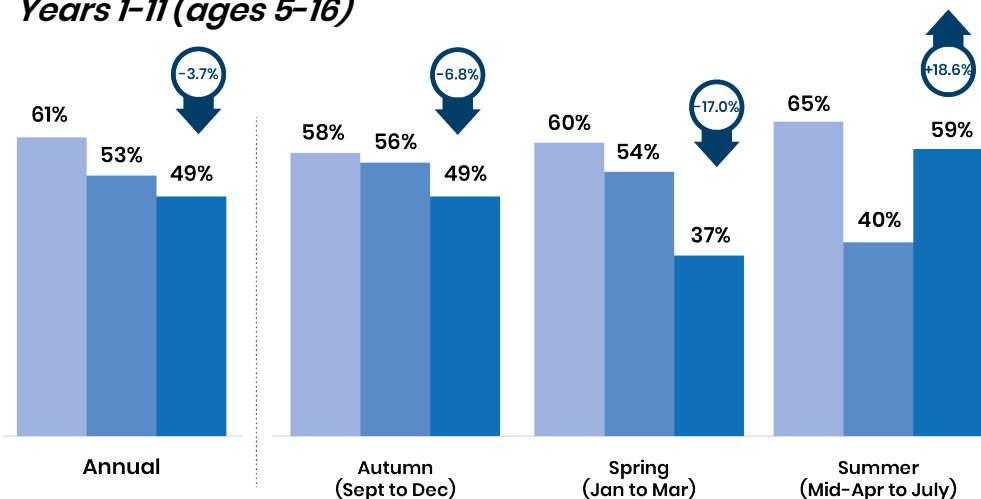
The summer term saw significant recovery, although rates remain 8.8% below pre-pandemic (2019) levels.

[Link to data tables](#)

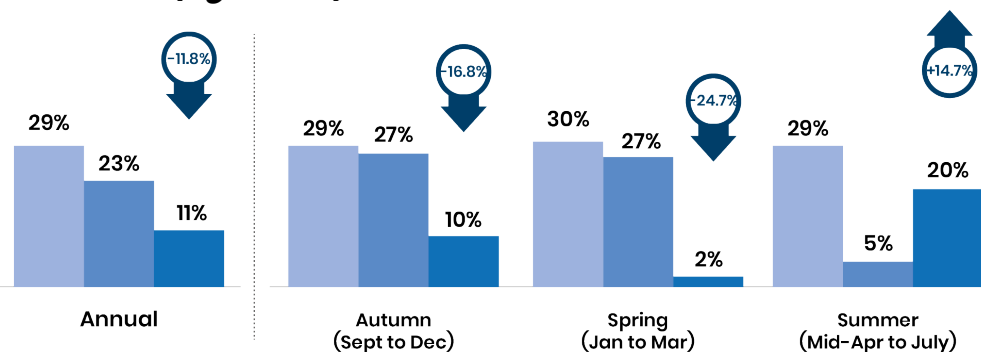


Survey year  2018-19  2019-20  2020-21

### Team sports Years 1-11 (ages 5-16)



### Swimming Years 1-11 (ages 5-16)



# Swimming confidence and capability

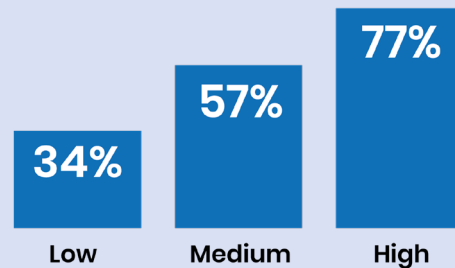
## Among Year 7 children, 76% can swim 25 metres unaided

Guidelines indicate children should be able to swim competently, confidently and proficiently over a distance of at least 25m by the time they leave primary school. The data shows that 76% of children in Year 7 (first year of secondary school, ages 11-12) can do this. There's been no reportable change in this compared to 12 months ago.

Generally, swimming proficiency increases with age and an average of 58% of all children and young people in Years 1-11 (ages 5-16) can swim 25m unaided. This is significantly down (-5.7%) on 12 months ago, driven by large drops among primary age children indicating a potential proficiency gap in the years to come.

### Impact of family affluence

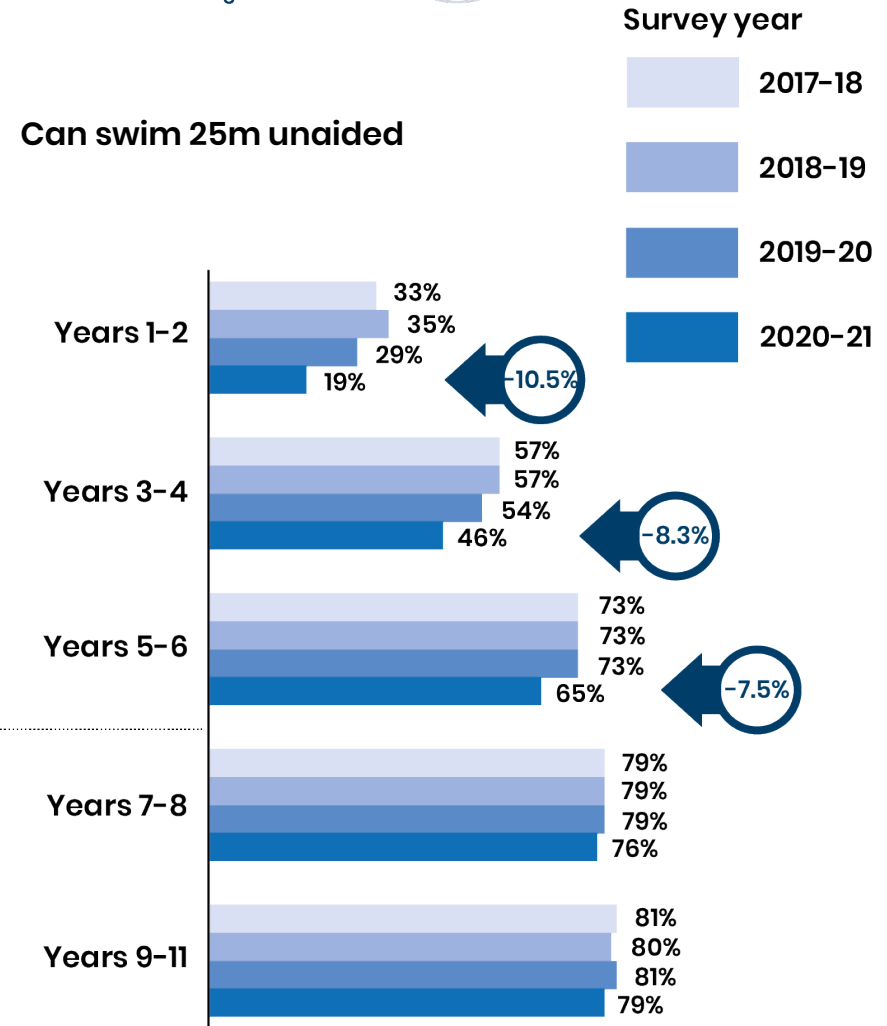
Ability to swim 25m unaided differs greatly depending on affluence. The drops have been greater for those from the least affluent families, widening the gap.



[Link to data tables](#)



Arrows show the percentage point change on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change





# Volunteering

## At least twice in the last 12 months

### Definition

Giving your time helping others to be active is amazing, no matter what age you are. Not only are they benefitting, but you benefit too; gaining experience, making friends and learning new skills.

And evidence suggests those who give their time when they're young are more likely to continue to volunteer in later life.

**We count a child or young person as having volunteered if:**

**They've taken part in a volunteering role to support sport/physical activity**

(A full list of roles can be found in our [definitions](#) at the end of this report.)



**A person has volunteered at least twice in the last 12 months**



# Volunteering

Arrows show the percentage point change on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change



## 1.1 million (24%) children and young people volunteered to support sport and physical activity

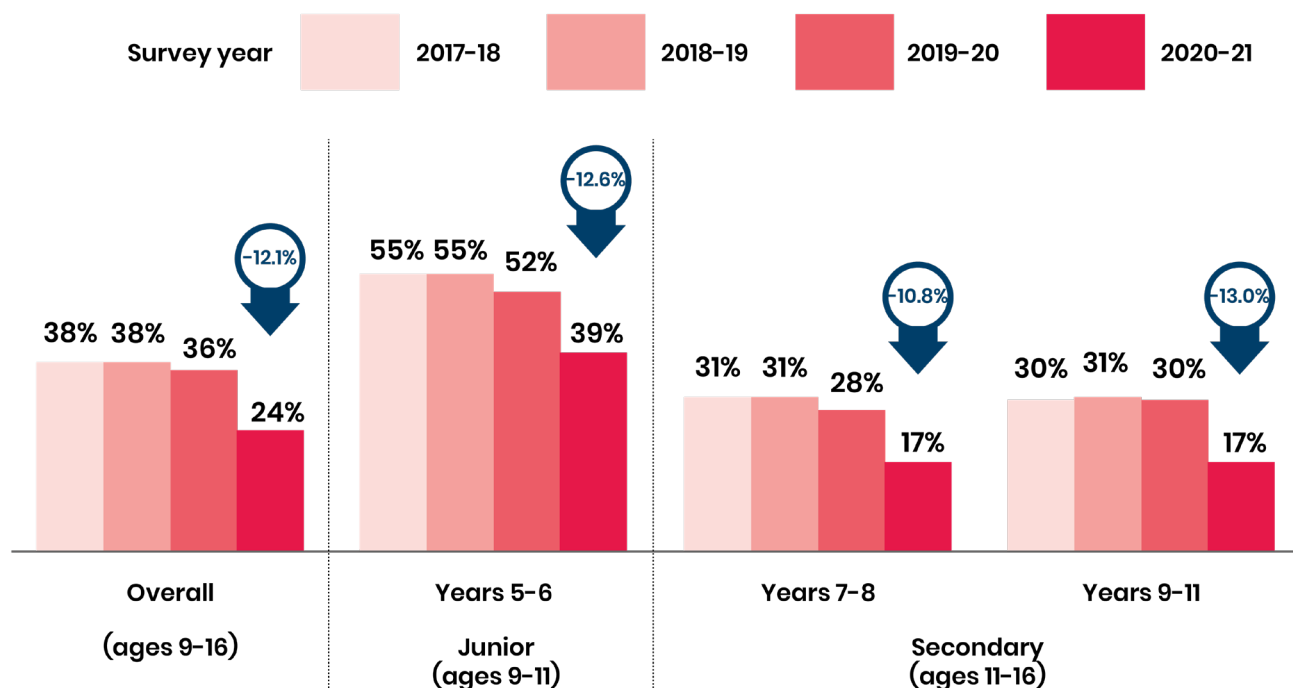
Volunteering levels have decreased by 12.1%, or just over half a million children and young people, during the last 12 months. With school sites closed for large parts of the year and restrictions in place for the remainder, it's likely that fewer opportunities to volunteer were available. Furthermore, we've seen disproportionately larger drops in the proportion of volunteers doing roles such as sports leader and ambassador (Years 5-6, ages 9-11), and refereeing, umpiring, stewarding and marshalling (Years 7-11, ages 13-16) – which are likely to be linked to the impact the pandemic has had, particularly on organised sport.

Decreases in volunteering levels have been seen across all year groups and all demographics.

### Volunteered at least twice in the last year

Volunteering is only asked of children and young people in Years 5-11 (ages 9-16), with Years 5-6 (ages 9-11) having a slightly different question to Years 7-11 (ages 11-16), to ensure the volunteering roles asked about are relevant.

A breakdown of roles undertaken can be found in the data tables.



[Link to data tables](#)



# Volunteering



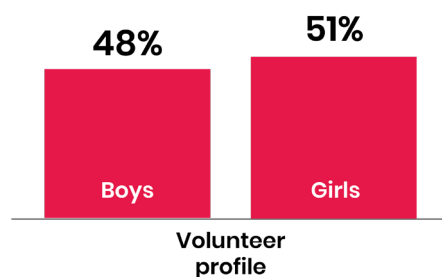
Note: All data relates to young people in Years 5-11 (ages 9-16).

## Summary of demographic profile

1

### Gender

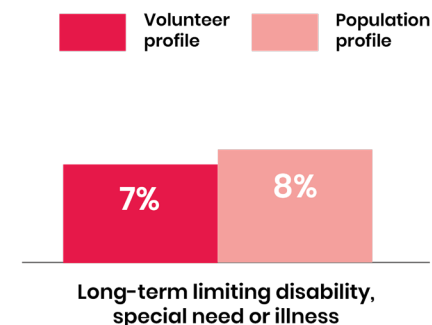
Boys and girls are fairly equally represented among volunteers.



3

### Disability and long-term health conditions

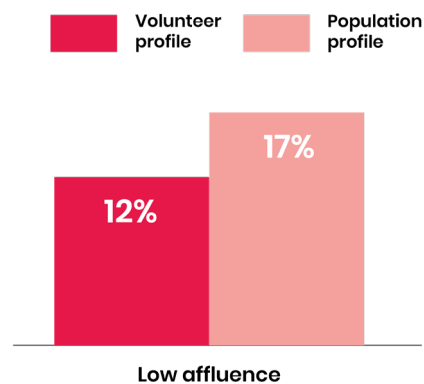
The profile of children and young people with a limiting disability, or long-term health condition, who volunteer is roughly representative of the population.



2

### Family affluence

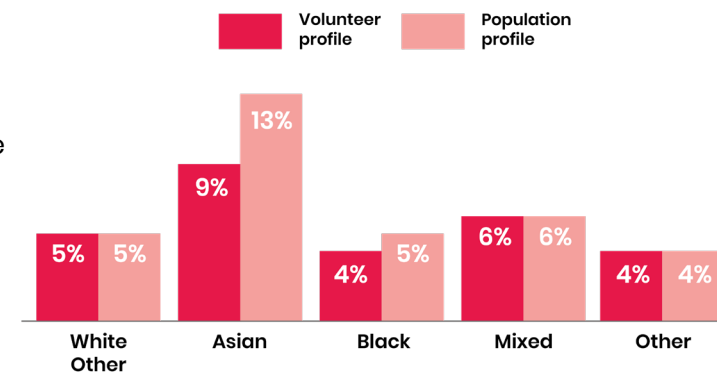
Children and young people from the least affluent families are under-represented. They make up 17% of those in Years 5-11 (ages 9 to 16), but only 12% of volunteers.



4

### Ethnicity

The volunteer profile generally reflects the ethnicity of the population, with the exception that Asian children are under-represented as they make up 13% of the population but only 9% of volunteers.



[Link to data tables](#)

\* See our [definitions](#) page for the full definition of each demographic group.



**Physical wellbeing**



**Mental wellbeing**



**Individual development**



**Social & community development**



**Economic development**

This section presents data looking at the wider outcomes for children and young people, both overall and linked to their levels of engagement in sport and physical activity.

Measures covered are:

- Mental wellbeing
- Individual development
- Social and community development.

### Sport and physical activity can...

- Help improve and maintain fitness, strength and balance
- Help prevent and manage medical conditions.

- Contribute to happiness and improved self-esteem
- Reduce stress, anxiety and depression.

- Help develop soft/social skills and increase persistence and perseverance
- Impact positively on employment opportunities.

- Bring people together
- Build trust and reduce isolation.

- Promote economic growth
- Create jobs.

### Measured by...

Proportion of children and young people who:

- Undertake an average of **60+ minutes** a day of sport and physical activity.

See the first section for more details.

On a selection of 'happy', 'neutral', or 'sad':

- How do you **feel today**? (Years 1-2)

Score out of 10 for:

- How **happy** did you feel yesterday? (Years 3-11)
- How **satisfied** are you with your life nowadays? (Years 7-11)
- Do you feel that the things you do in your life are **worthwhile**? (Years 7-11)

Strongly agree to:

- If I find something difficult, **I keep trying** until I can do it. (Years 3-11)

Agreement to:

- How much do you feel you can **trust people** who are a similar age to you? (Years 3-11)

The economic value of sport, as reported in:

- DCMS's [Sports Satellite Accounts](#)
- Further details can be found in Sheffield Hallam University's [report on the social and economic value of community sport and physical activity in England](#).



# Mental wellbeing

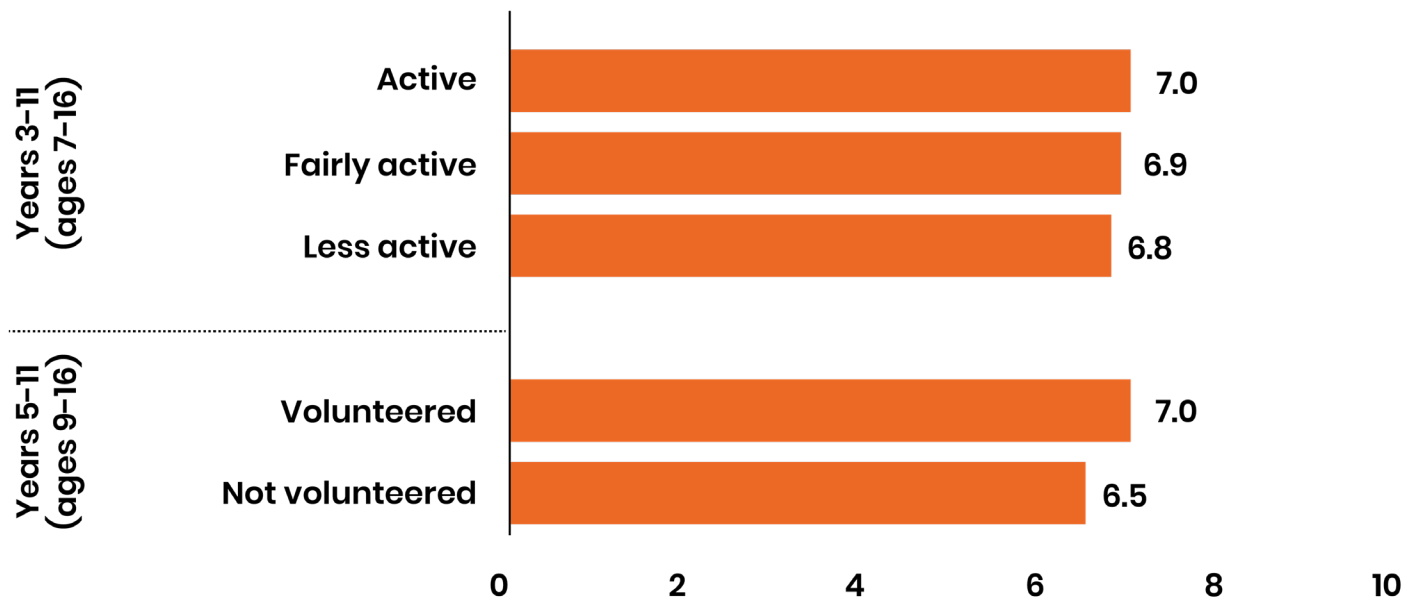


## There's a positive association between levels of engagement in sport and physical activity and levels of mental wellbeing

Mental wellbeing (shown here as happiness) scores are higher for those who are active than those who are less active.

There's also a positive association between all mental wellbeing measures and volunteering to support sport and physical activity.

**How happy did you feel yesterday?**  
(mean score out of 10, where 10 is very happy and 0 is not happy at all)



[Link to data tables](#)



# Individual development

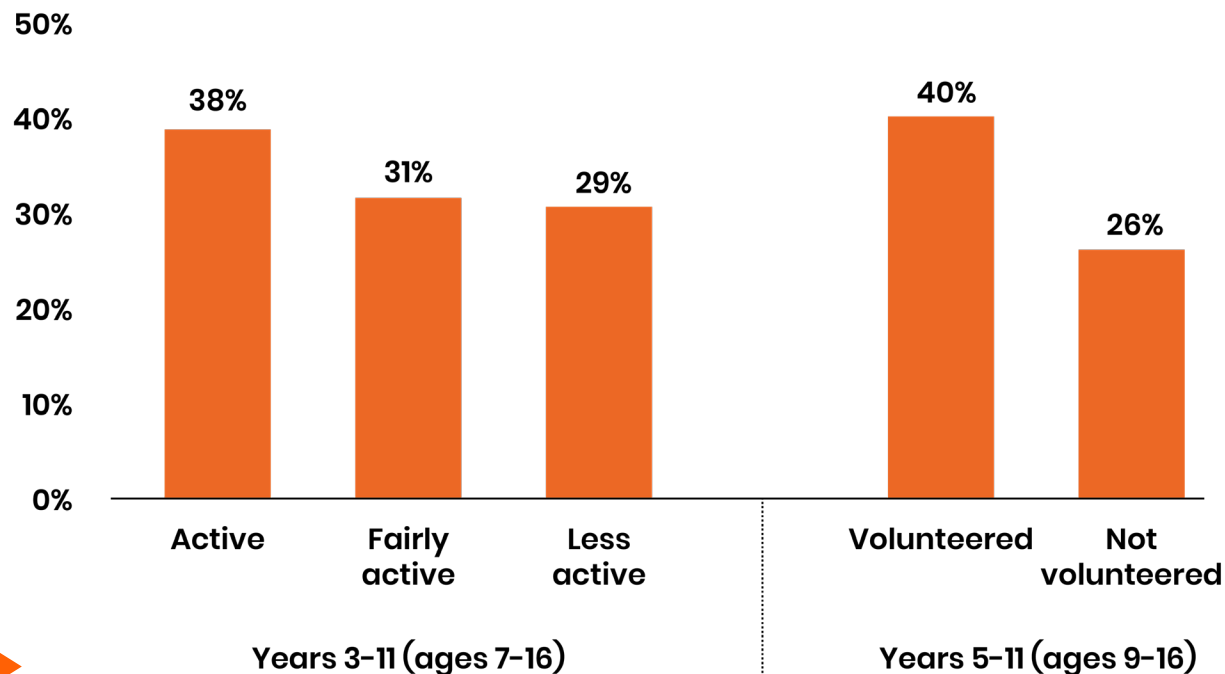


## There's a positive association between levels of sport and physical activity, and levels of individual development

The proportion strongly agreeing with the statement 'if I find something difficult I keep trying until I can do it' is higher for those who are active than those who are fairly active or less active.

There's also a positive association between individual development and volunteering to support sport and physical activity.

**If I find something difficult, I keep trying until I can do it**  
(proportion who strongly agree)



[Link to data tables](#)



# Individual development

## Individual development remains down for all age groups

The proportion strongly agreeing to the statement 'if I find something difficult I keep trying until I can do it' remains down following drops seen 12 months ago. Within this, we've seen drops in the autumn and spring terms and a partial recovery in the summer term – indicating the greater the severity of the restrictions, the greater the impact seen.

Active children and young people, and those who volunteer to support sport, are shown to have higher individual development scores, so while the drops in these are likely to be a factor in the lower individual development scores reported here, sport and physical activity has a key role to play in helping recover these levels.

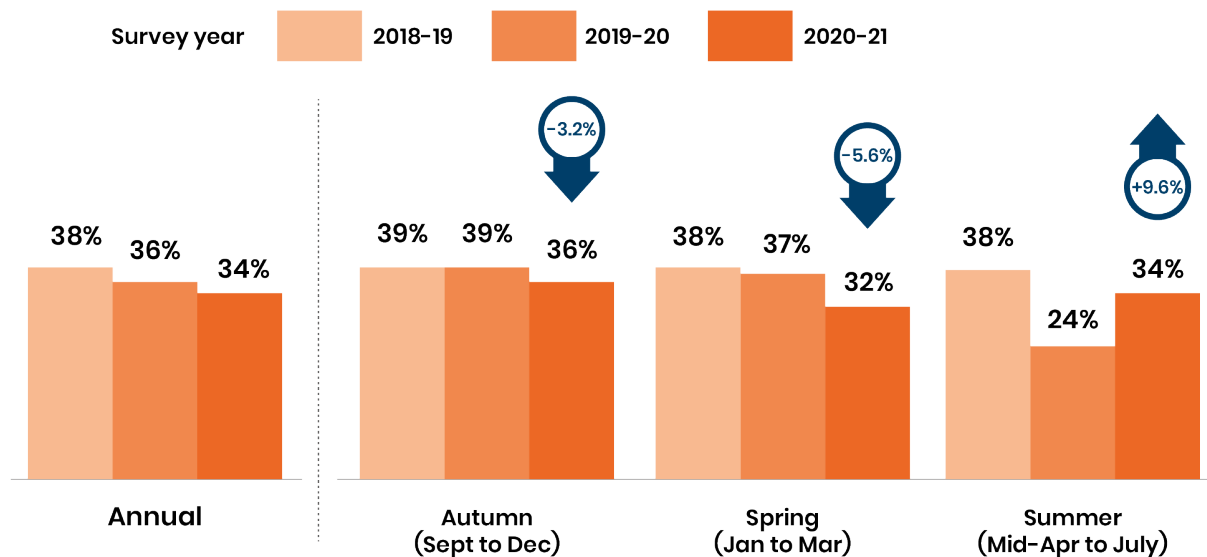
Years 3-6 (ages 7-11) continue to be the most impacted.



Arrows show the percentage point change on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change



### If I find something difficult, I keep trying until I can do it: Years 3-11 (ages 7-16) (proportion who strongly agree)

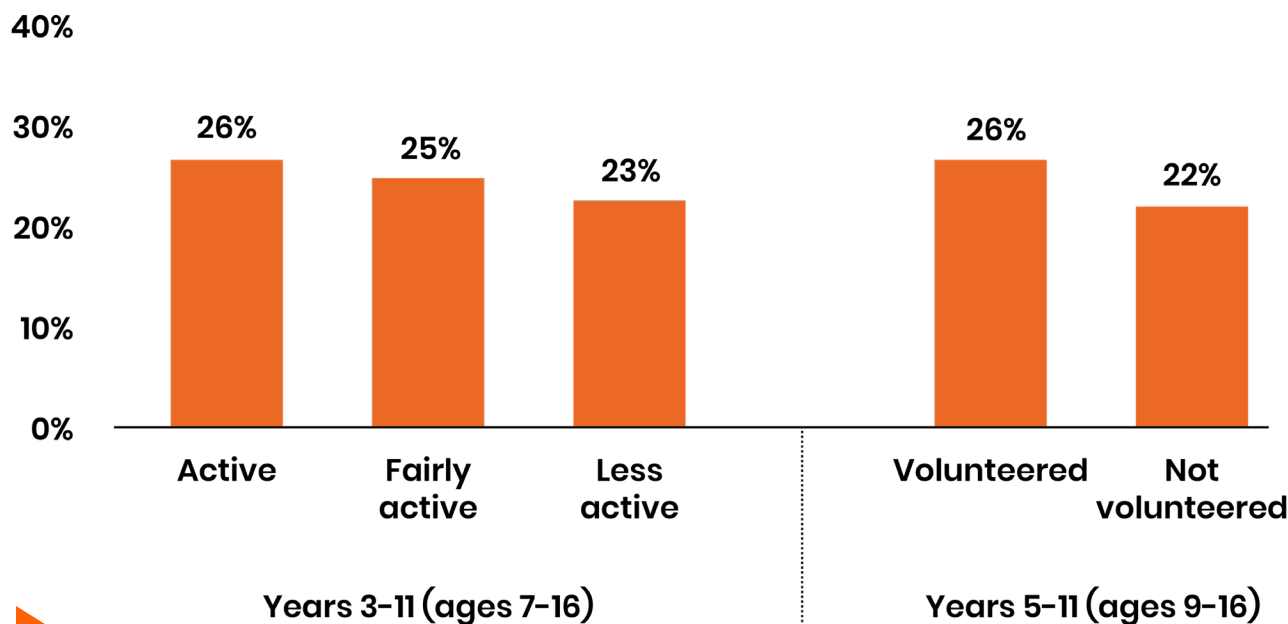


## There's a positive association between levels of sport and physical activity and levels of community development

Active children and young people are more likely to strongly agree they can trust people of a similar age to themselves than those who are less active.

There's a clear positive association between community development and volunteering to support sport and physical activity.

**How much do you feel you can trust people of a similar age to you?**  
(proportion who say 'a lot' when given the choice of 'a lot', 'a bit', 'not very much' or 'not at all')





# Loneliness

## Definition



Tackling loneliness is a key government objective.

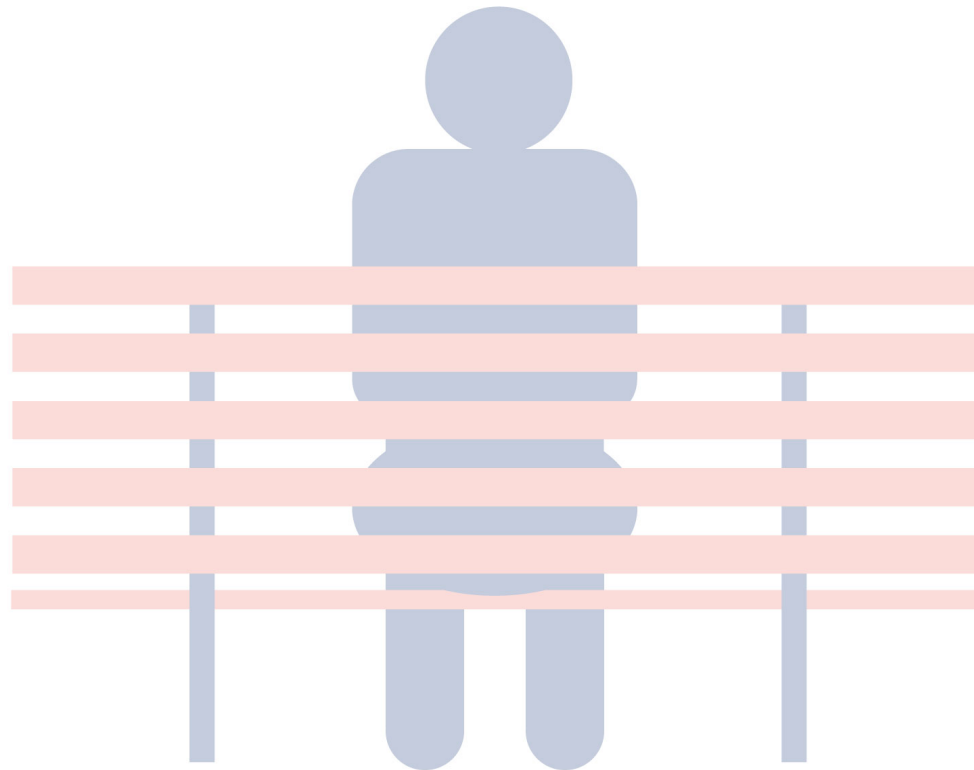
In October 2018, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport published '[A Connected Society](#)', its first strategy for tackling loneliness in England.

This chapter sets out the role sport and physical activity – and volunteering to support it – has in this.

Note, this question is only asked of children and young people in Years 7-11 (ages 11-16).

Supporting children and young people to have meaningful social relationships isn't just crucial to their physical and mental health. It also affects their engagement in their school and wider community cohesion.

We've focused on those who are often/always lonely, as policy is centred around this group.



# Loneliness

Arrows show the percentage point change on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change

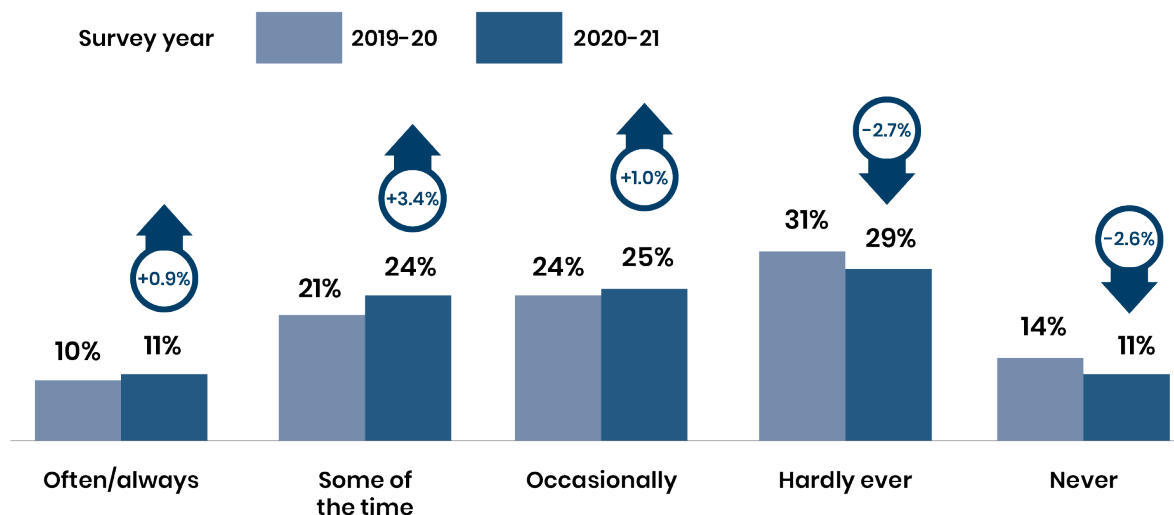


## Loneliness has increased

More than one in ten, or over 350,000, young people (Years 7-11, ages 11-16) report feeling lonely often or always.

While the largest increase in loneliness compared to 12 months ago has come in those feeling lonely some of the time, often/always has also seen a small increase. As restrictions were imposed, many children and young people were unable to engage with others in the way they were accustomed to – for example, playing sport with others wasn't permitted, so it's unsurprising to see these increases.

### How often do you feel lonely (all activity levels)



[Link to data tables](#)

### Young people who volunteer to support sport and physical activity are less likely to feel lonely

Giving your time helping others to be active provides benefit to the volunteer themselves – making new friends and interaction with others are likely to be key factors in the positive association seen here with loneliness.

#### Often/always feel lonely (Years 7-11, ages 11-16)



# Positive attitudes

## Definition

The International Physical Literacy Association’s definition of physical literacy has four elements: motivation, confidence, competence and knowledge, and understanding. The organisation says these help an individual “value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life”.

Source: [The International Physical Literacy Association](#)

We used this definition to develop statements covering each of the five attitudes we added to the survey.

When talking about individual attitude statements, we report where a child strongly agrees<sup>1</sup> with a statement as evidence of positive feelings towards it. For example, when a child strongly agrees they enjoy taking part in sport, we describe that child as enjoying sport and physical activity. These statements were developed by an expert advisory group commissioned by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and Sport England.




<sup>1</sup>By looking specifically at those who “strongly agree”, we both mitigate the tendency of children and young people to “agree” to socially desirable statements, and focus on how the firmest attitudes relate to activity and health and social outcomes.



# Positive attitudes

## Years 1-2 (ages 5-7)

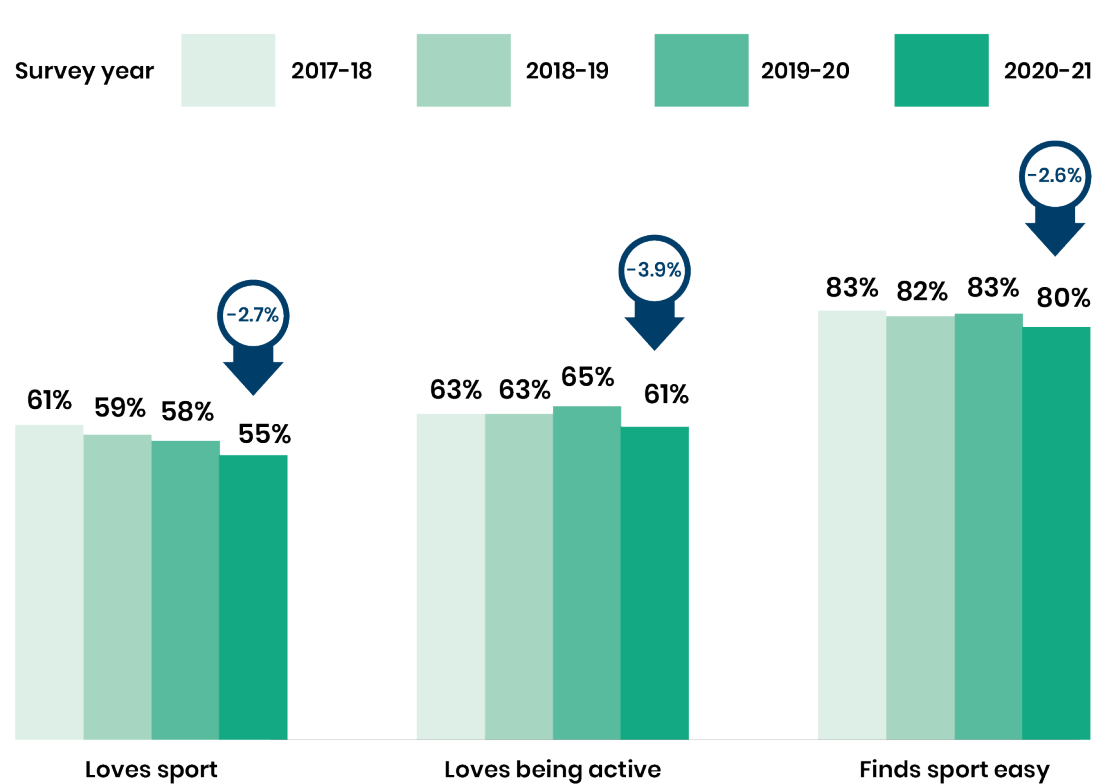
 Arrows show the percentage point change on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change



### Fewer young children enjoy taking part and find it easy

Both loving sport and being active (enjoyment) and finding sport easy (competence) are down for children in Years 1-2 (ages 5-7), compared to 12 months ago. Enjoyment was down across the year, whereas drops in finding sport easy (competence) have only been seen since the spring term.

### Attitudes towards sport and physical activity



Note: For this question, data for children in Years 1-2 is collected directly. Only questions deemed appropriate for 5-7 year-olds are used.

[Link to data tables](#)



# Positive attitudes

## Years 3-11 (ages 7-16)

Arrows show the percentage point change on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change



### Children and young people are reporting fewer positive attitudes

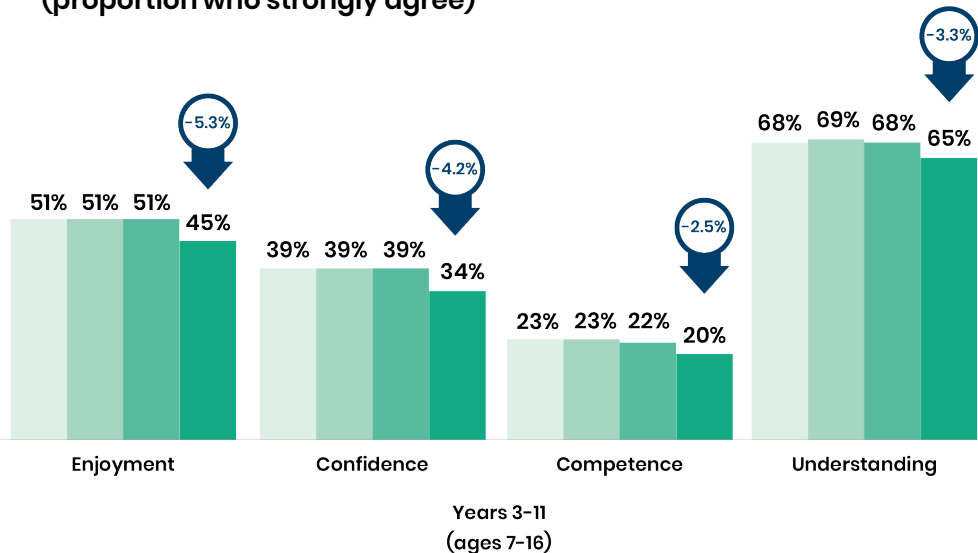
Fewer children and young people strongly agreed to each of the attitudes compared to 12 months ago, with the largest drops being seen for enjoyment and confidence. As such, there have been increases in those reporting zero positive attitudes.

Compared to 12 months ago:

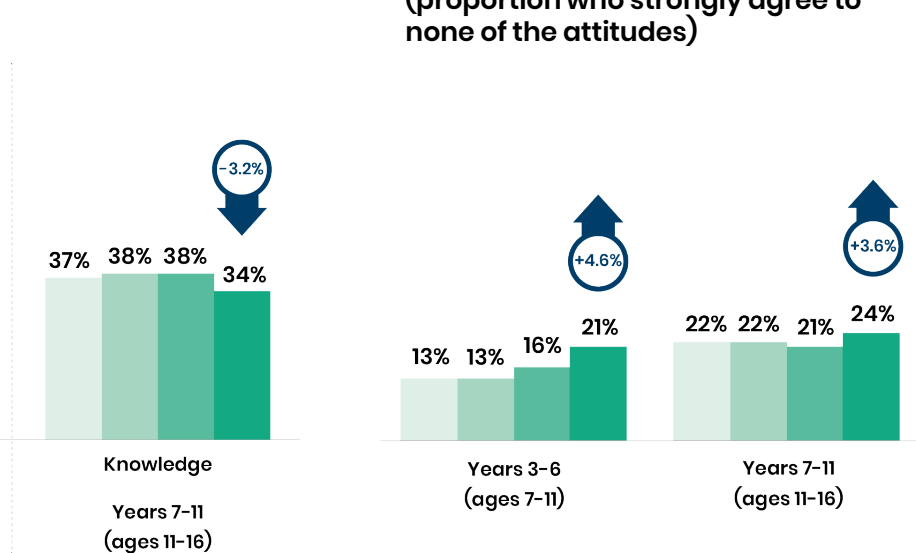
- Children in Years 3-6 (ages 7-11) are less likely to report 3+ positive attitudes and more likely to report zero or one
- Young people in Years 7-11 (ages 11-16) are less likely to report 2+ positive attitudes and more likely to report zero.




### Attitudes towards sport and physical activity (proportion who strongly agree)



### Zero positive attitudes (proportion who strongly agree to none of the attitudes)



# Positive attitudes

 Arrows show the percentage point change on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change



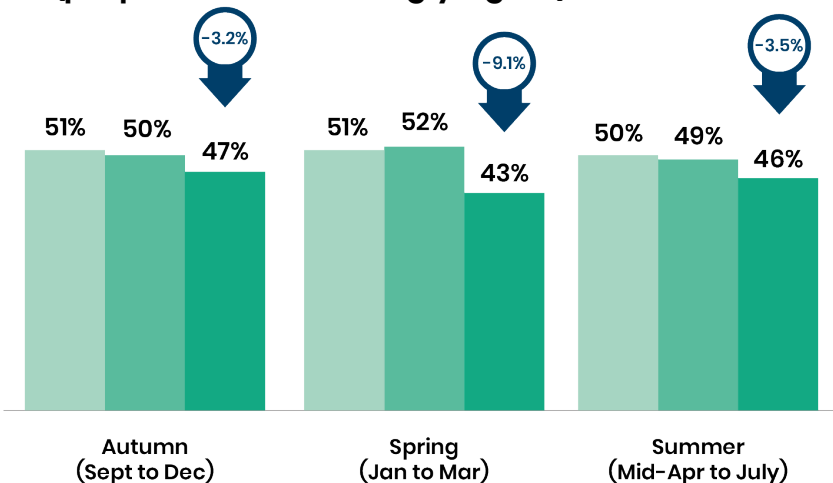
## The more restrictions in place, the more positive attitudes fell

Drops were generally greater in magnitude in the spring term compared to the autumn term, coinciding with stricter restrictions and school sites being predominantly closed to most pupils. This highlights the significant impact the ongoing restrictions had at this point in the year.

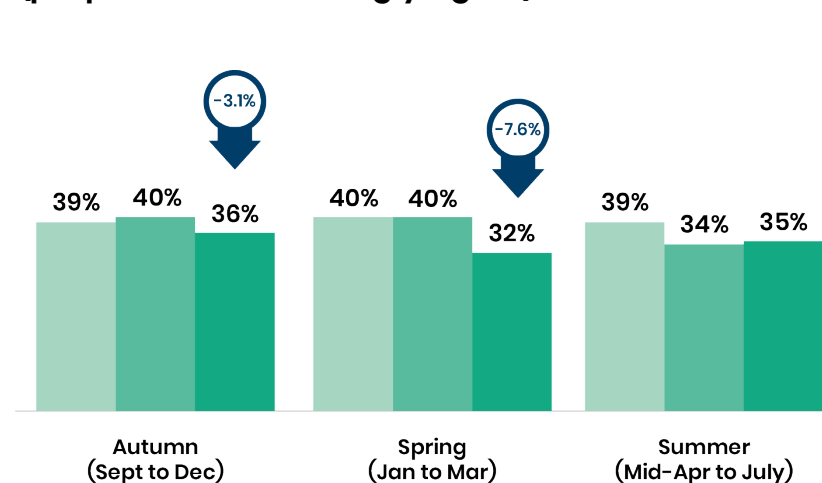
In the summer term, confidence and competence remain down following drops seen 12 months earlier at the start of the pandemic. The remaining attitudes (such as enjoyment, which is charted) saw drops this year, meaning all attitudes are now down in the summer term compared to pre-pandemic levels (2019). Drops are of a similar scale to the autumn term, reflecting a similar level of disruption.

Survey year  2018-19  2019-20  2020-21

### I enjoy taking part in exercise and sports (proportion who strongly agree)



### I feel confident when I exercise and play sports (proportion who strongly agree)



[Link to data tables](#)



# Positive attitudes

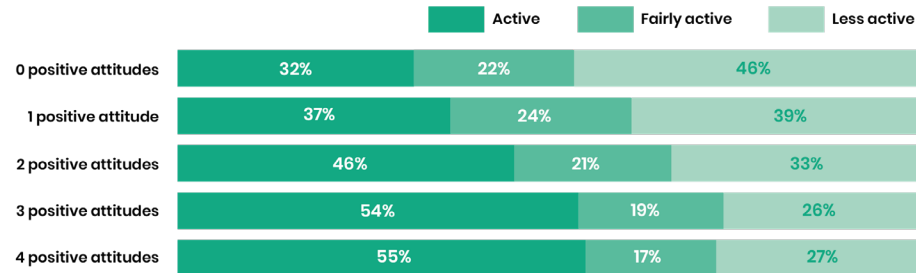
## Associations: Years 3-6



The positive association between positive attitudes and activity levels, mental wellbeing, individual and community development reinforces the importance of supporting all children to be as active as possible

### There's a strong positive association between physical literacy and activity levels

55% of children who report four positive attitudes are active, compared to just 32% who report no positive attitudes.



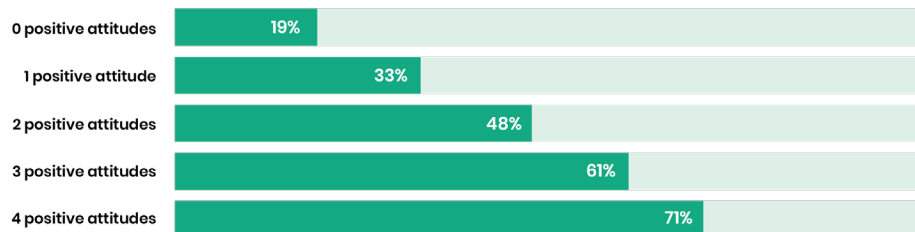
### Physically literate children and young people are happier

Children who report four positive attitudes score, on average, 8.2 out of 10 on happiness (where 10 is very happy and 0 is not happy at all). This falls to 7.3 for those who report no positive attitudes.



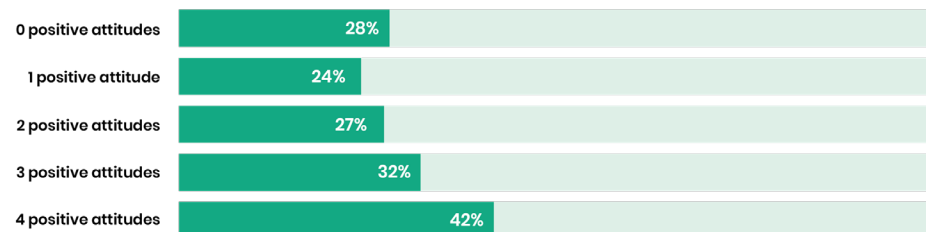
### Physically literate children have higher levels of individual development

Of children who report four positive attitudes, 71% strongly agree to the statement 'if I find something difficult I keep trying until I can do it'. This falls to 19% for those who report no positive attitudes.



### Physically literate children have higher levels of community development

Of children who have a positive attitude to all four statements, 42% strongly agree they can trust people of a similar age to themselves. This compares with 28% for those who report no positive attitudes.



# Positive attitudes

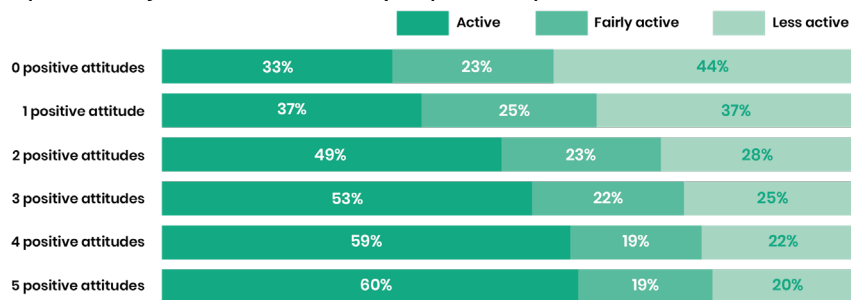
## Associations: Years 7-11



The positive association between positive attitudes and activity levels, mental wellbeing, individual and community development reinforces the importance of supporting all young people to be as active as possible

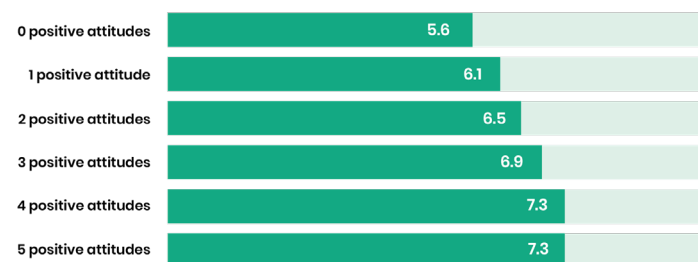
### There's a strong positive association between physical literacy and activity levels

60% of young people who report five positive attitudes are active, compared to just 33% when they report no positive attitudes.



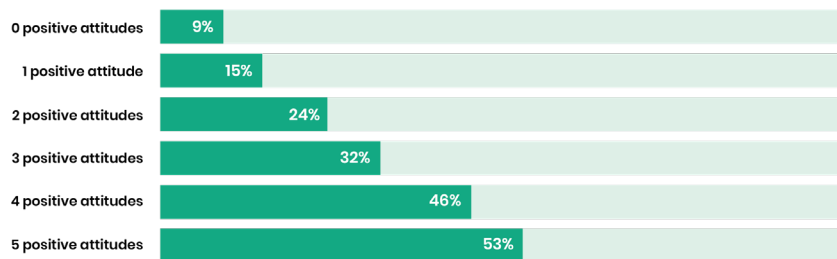
### Physically literate children and young people are happier

Those who report five positive attitudes score, on average, 7.3 out of 10 on happiness (where 10 is very happy and 0 is not happy at all). This falls to 5.6 for those who report no positive attitudes.



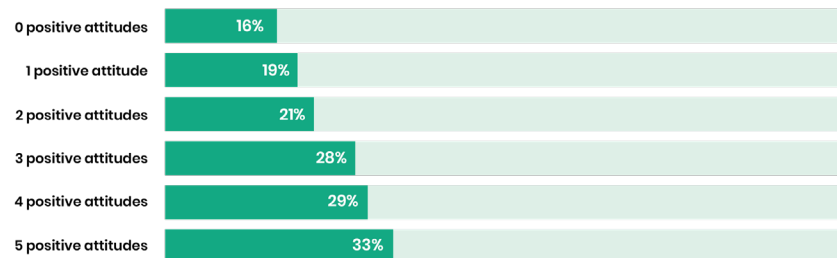
### Physically literate children have higher levels of individual development

Of young people who report five positive attitudes, 53% strongly agree to the statement 'if I find something difficult I keep trying until I can do it'. This falls to 9% for those who report no positive attitudes.



### Physically literate children have higher levels of community development

Of those who report five positive attitudes, 33% strongly agree that they can trust people of a similar age to themselves, compared to 16% of those who report no positive attitude.





# Positive Attitudes

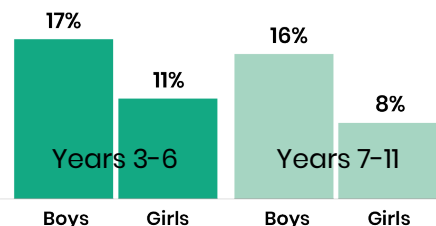
- 4 positive attitudes (years 3-6, ages 7-11)
- 5 positive attitudes (years 7-11, ages 11-16)



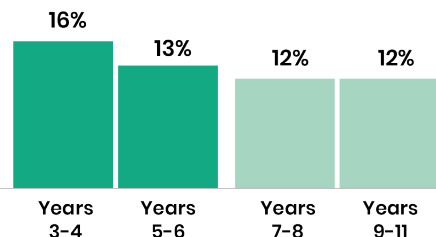
## Summary of demographic differences

Our data shows there are significant inequalities:

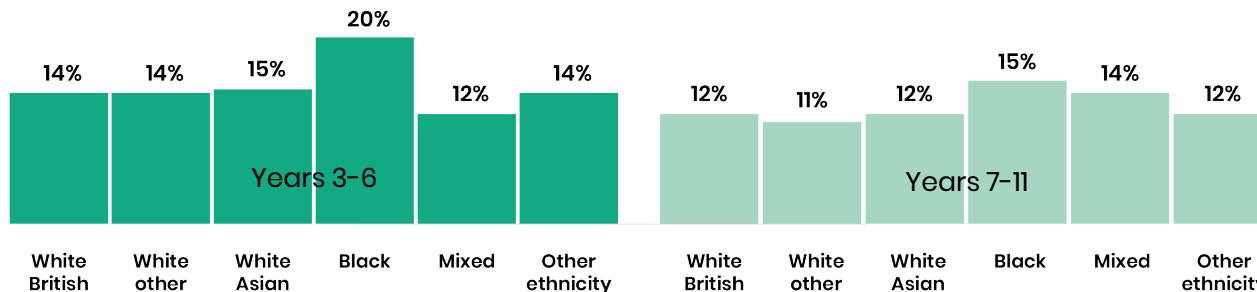
**1 Gender**  
Boys are more likely than girls to have 4/5 positive attitudes.



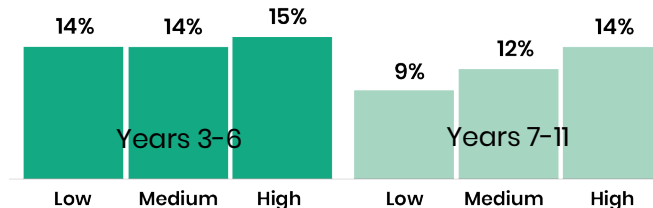
**2 Year group**  
Those in Years 3-4 (ages 7-9) are more likely than those in Years 5-6 (ages 9-11) to have four positive attitudes.



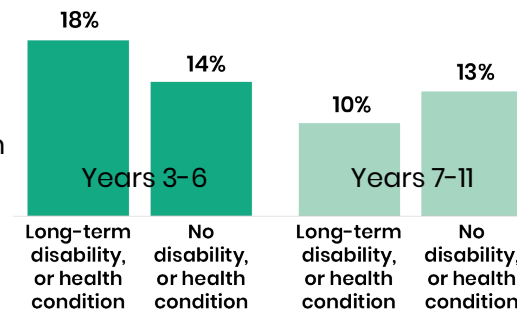
**5 Ethnicity**  
Black children and young people are more likely to have 4/5 positive attitudes than children and young people overall.



**3 Family affluence**  
Young people in Years 7-11 (ages 11-16) from the least affluent families are the least likely to have five positive attitudes. There are no differences by affluence for children in Years 3-6 (ages 7-11).



**4 Disability and long-term health conditions**  
Children in Years 3-6 (ages 7-11) with a disability or long-term health condition are more likely to have four positive attitudes, but those in Years 7-11 (aged 11-16) are less likely to have five positive attitudes, compared to those without.



[Link to data tables](#)

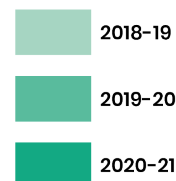


\* See our [definitions](#) page for the full definition of each demographic group.

# Positive attitudes

## School year and gender

Survey year



Arrows show the percentage point change on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change

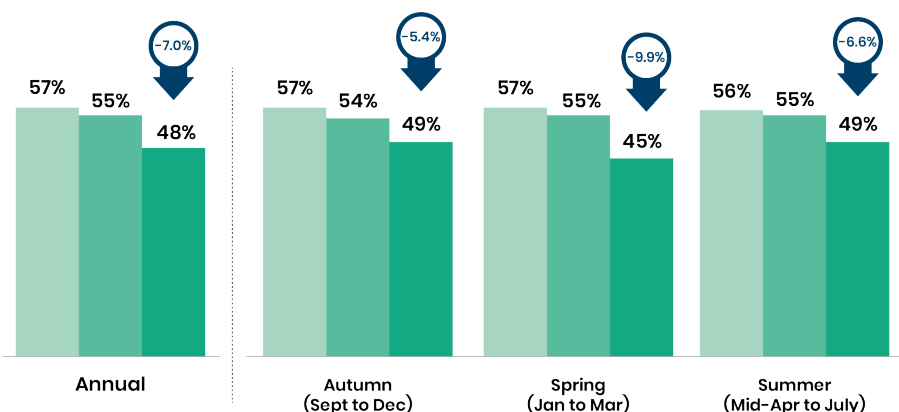
### Junior age

Across the year as a whole, the proportion of junior age children (Years 3-6, ages 7-11) strongly agreeing to each of the four attitude statements is down compared to 12 months ago.

The greatest drops were seen during the spring term, when restrictions were most severe.

Indications are that the duration of the pandemic is impacting attitudes in this age group, with large drops seen in the summer term despite restrictions easing.

#### Children in Years 3-6 (ages 7-11) I enjoy taking part in exercise and sports (proportion who strongly agree)



[Link to data tables](#)

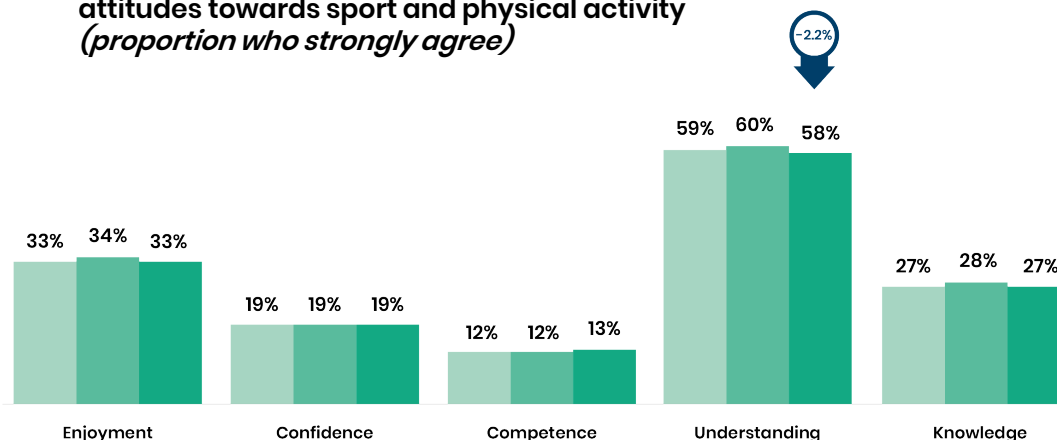
### Secondary age

Young people in Years 7-8 (ages 11-13) have seen drops in those strongly agreeing to all attitudes except competence, compared to 12 months ago.

Teenage boys (Years 9-11, ages 13-16) also saw a drop in competence, whereas teenage girls (Years 9-11, ages 13-16) saw no drops, except to understanding.

The greater resilience of positive attitudes (alongside activity levels) further suggests the range of activities available during the pandemic has suited girls better than boys.

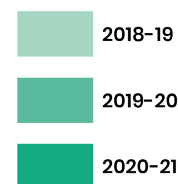
#### Teenage girls (Years 9-11, ages 13-16) – annual attitudes towards sport and physical activity (proportion who strongly agree)



# Positive attitudes

## Affluence and health conditions

Survey year



Arrows show the percentage point change on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change

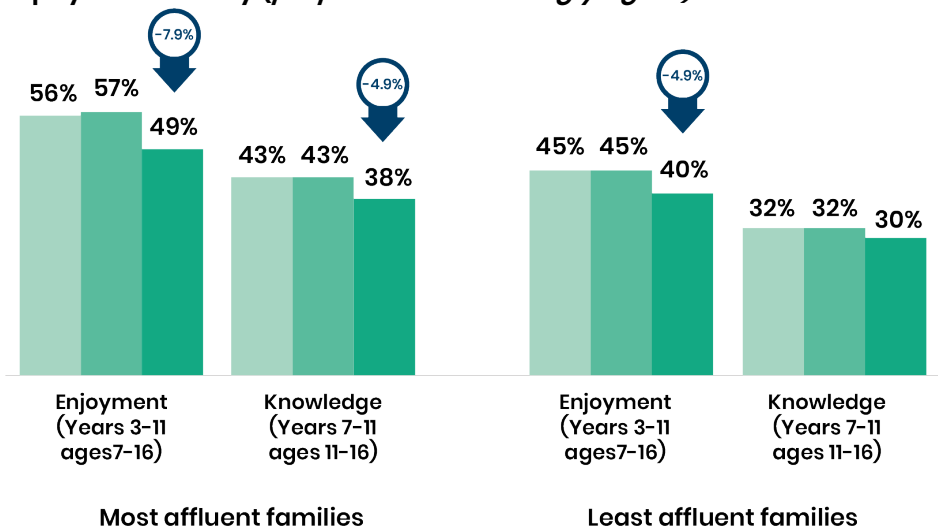


### Family affluence

The annual drops in positive attitudes are similar across children and young people from both the most and least affluent families for confidence, competence and understanding.

However, for enjoying taking part and knowing how to get involved the drops were greater among those from the most affluent families.

#### Family affluence – selected attitudes towards sport and physical activity (proportion who strongly agree)

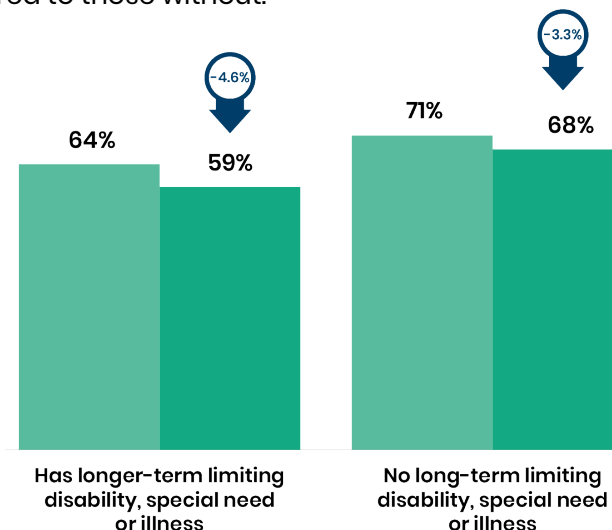


### Disability and long-term health conditions

For children and young people with a disability or long-term health condition, drops have been seen in those strongly agreeing to all attitudes except finding it easy (competence), compared to 12 months ago.

The drop in understanding why exercise and sports are good for them is larger for those with a disability or long-term health condition, compared to those without.

#### I understand why exercise and sports are good for me (proportion who strongly agree)



[Link to data tables](#)

#### Notes:

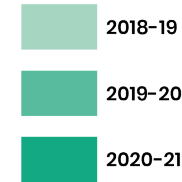
- Due to the coronavirus pandemic, one of the components used to generate the family affluence scale is not currently applicable. As such the data presented here is per an adjusted definition.
- A new disability and long-term health conditions question was introduced for 2019-20 to capture consistent data across all year groups. As such, only one year of comparison data is available.

See our [definitions](#) page for more details.

# Positive attitudes

## Ethnicity

Survey year



Arrows show the percentage point change on 12 months ago. No arrows indicate no change



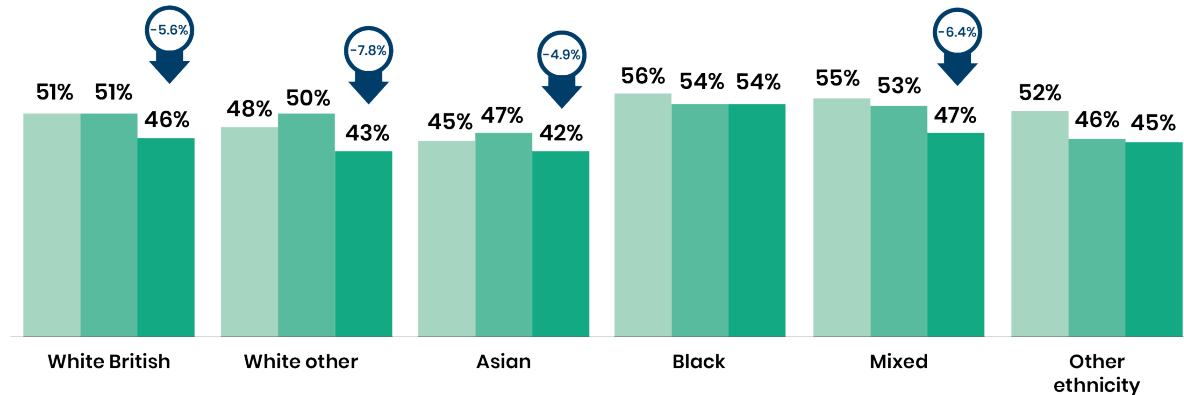
### Enjoyment is down for most ethnic groups

Across the year as a whole, those with Mixed backgrounds saw the largest changes compared to 12 months ago, with those strongly agreeing to all five attitudes down.

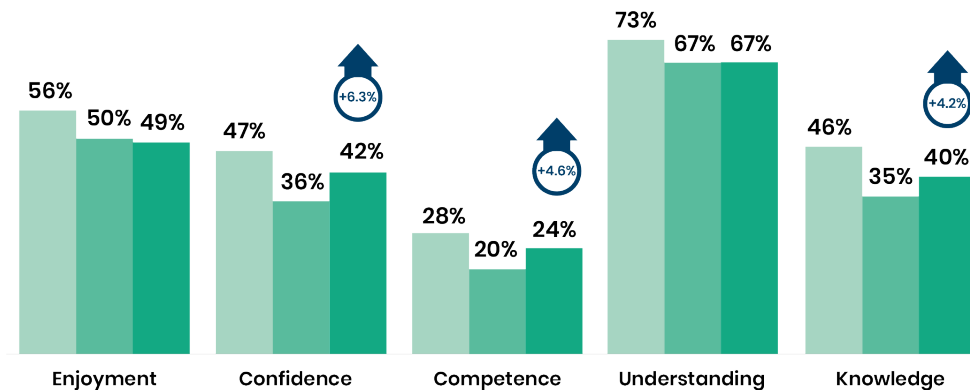
Enjoying taking part saw the most widespread drops, being down for most ethnic groups compared to 12 months ago. As a key driver for activity levels, this suggests other groups might start to see drops if enjoyment levels aren't recovered.

However, it was Black children and young people who saw the most impact initially, with drops in strong agreement to all attitudes in the summer term 2020. While we've seen partial recoveries in confidence and knowledge, both remain significantly down compared to pre-pandemic levels (2019). There isn't a reportable difference in competence compared to 2019.

### Annual picture I enjoy taking part in exercise and sports (proportion who strongly agree)



### Summer term Black children and young people



[Link to data tables](#)



# Further breakdowns

## Local level data

Data for local areas (regions, Active Partnerships and local authorities) are available for the following measures:

- Levels of activity
- Volunteering at least twice in the last 12 months.

## Exploring the data






Please use the [Active Lives Online Tool](#) to run your own analysis of the data – the tool will be updated with the latest data shortly after its publication.

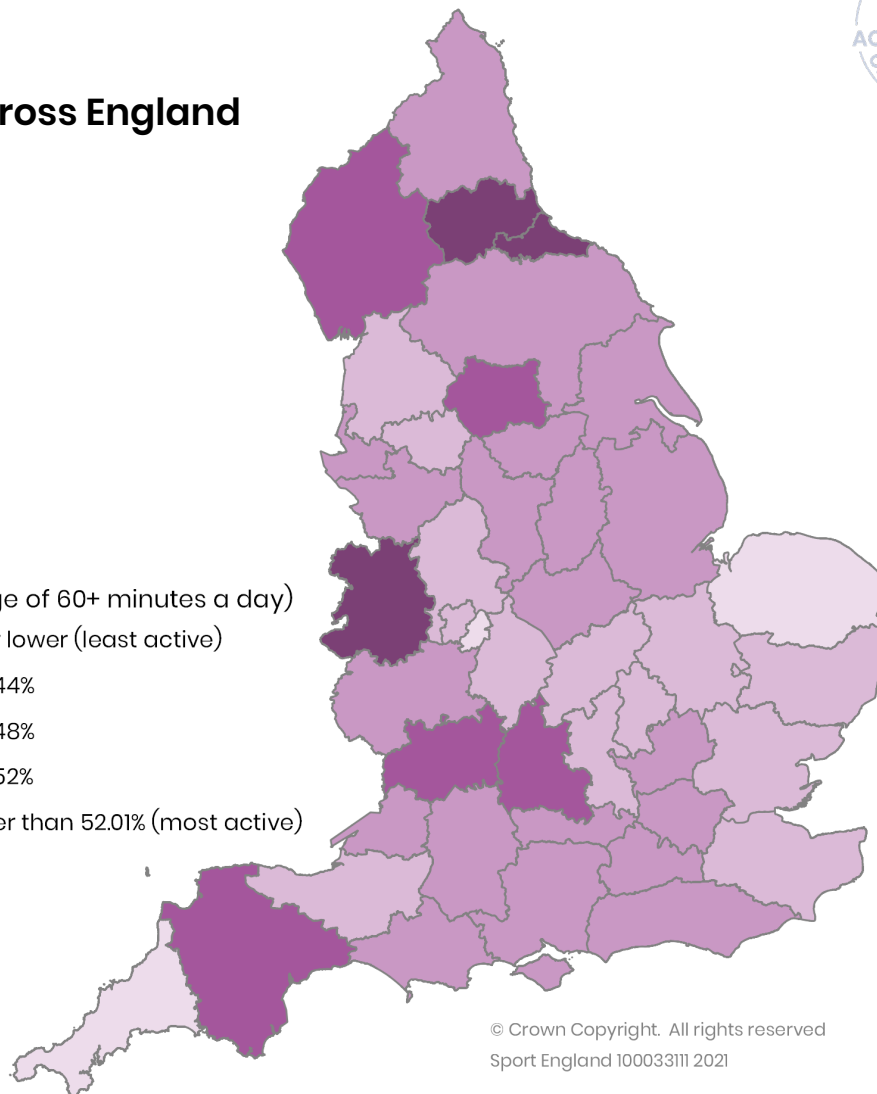
[Link to data tables](#) 

## The picture across England

### Active

(an average of 60+ minutes a day)

-  40% or lower (least active)
-  40.01-44%
-  44.01-48%
-  48.01-52%
-  Greater than 52.01% (most active)



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Sport England 100033111 2021

# Definitions

The Chief Medical Officer recommends, across the week, children and young people do an average of 60-plus minutes of at least moderate activity a day. This effectively means they need to do at least 420 moderate minutes a week to meet the guidelines, which you can read [here](#).

[Link to more information on measures and demographics](#) 

**Moderate activity** is defined as activity where you raise your heart rate and feel a little out of breath (in 2018-19 this was updated to ask people whether the activity made them breathe faster than sitting down reading).

**Vigorous activity** is defined as activity which makes you hot or tired.

**Volunteering roles** are defined as:

- Been a 'sports leader' or 'sports ambassador'
- Helped with setting up or clearing away (Years 5-6 only)
- Helped with refreshments: food or drink (Years 5-6 only)
- Coached or instructed an individual or team(s) in a sport, dance or fitness activity: other than solely for family members (Years 7-11 only)
- Refereed or umpired at a sports match, competition or event (Years 7-11 only)
- Acted as a steward or marshal at a sports or dance activity or event (Years 7-11 only)
- Given any other help (Years 5-6 only)
- Provided any other help for a sport, dance or fitness activity, e.g. helping with refreshments, setting up sports kit or equipment, scoring matches, first aid (Years 7-11 only).

**Positive attitudes**

This refers to strongly agreeing to the statements on enjoyment, confidence, competence, understanding and knowledge. If a child or young person strongly agrees, they're reported as having a positive attitude towards that element.

**Associations**

Where associations between wellbeing, individual and community development and engagement in sport and physical activity are referenced, this doesn't tell us about causality. We don't know the direction of the association or whether we're seeing a direct or indirect link.

# Definitions

Standard demographic questions aren't always applicable for children of all ages, therefore simpler questions were often used.

Note: Special schools don't form part of the sample, however, more than 90% of those with a disability or long-term health condition attend mainstream schools.

[Link to more information on measures and demographics](#) 

## Age

The survey is undertaken in schools, therefore we've used school year as the main age variable.

This is split into three groups:

- Infant, Years 1-2 (ages 5-7)
- Junior, Years 3-6 (ages 7-11)
- Secondary, Years 7-11 (ages 11-16).

## Gender

Children and young people in Years 3-11 were given the option to select 'boy', 'girl', 'other' or 'prefer not to say'. Responses to 'other' are included in the data tables but not presented in this report due to low sample sizes. As a result, the volunteering profile of responses by gender doesn't sum to 100%. Children in Years 1-2 were only given the options of 'boy' and 'girl'.

## Family Affluence Scale

The Family Affluence Scale gives an indication of the social status of children and young people's families. The scale is derived from a series of questions about their home and family, such as car ownership, computers, and foreign holidays. As a result of the pandemic and foreign holidays not being as likely, an adjusted scale is presented in this report – please see the technical note for further details. Care should be taken when looking across year groups as the age of the child is likely to impact on certain elements of the scale (e.g. families with older children may be more likely to own digital devices).

## Disability or long-term health condition

Disability or long-term health conditions refer to children and young people who report they have a disability, special need or illness which has a big effect on their life (is limiting) and expected to last for a year or more (is long term). Children then select from a list of impairments which we use to create the number of impairments metric. The data presented refers to long-term limiting impairments.

The question used is designed to align as closely as possible to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) harmonised disability question, with the language adapted to be more appropriate to children. This is an updated question for academic year 2019-20 onwards and unlike previous years, the same question is asked to all age groups. As such, data isn't comparable with earlier years and only one comparison point is presented in this report.

## Ethnicity

Children and young people in Years 3-11 were asked a simplified question about ethnicity, while parents of Years 1-2 children were asked the full ONS standard question. For the purposes of analysis, Chinese has been grouped with 'Other' from the parent responses.

# Notes

The Active Lives Children and Young People Survey is an online survey. Carried out by Ipsos MORI, it involves online questionnaires being completed during school lesson time (including at home when school sites were closed to most pupils), with secondary schools being given the option to complete it at as homework. Parents of Years 1-2 children are asked to complete a separate online questionnaire providing behavioural data for these children – the children themselves answer basic questions about their attitudes only. The survey covers both state and independent schools.

More information on the survey can be found [here](#).

[Link to more information on measures and demographics](#)



## The achieved sample

Behavioural responses:

- Pupils in Years 3-11 and parents of pupils in Years 1-2: 109,503 in 2017-18 and 113,728 in 2018-19, 89,303 in 2019-20 and 86,828 in 2020-21.

Attitudinal responses:

- Pupils in Years 3-11: 104,263 in 2017-18 and 109,248 in 2018-19, 86,222 in 2019-20 and 81,280 in 2020-21
- Pupils in Years 1-2: 25,927 in 2017-18, 23,587 in 2018-19, 14,576 in 2019-20 and 13,886 in 2020-21.

**Data have been weighted** to Department for Education (DfE) pupil population estimates from 'Get Information about Schools' (2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20) for geography and key demographics.

**Population totals** are estimated values and have been calculated using 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20 and 2020-21 DfE pupil population estimates. Confidence intervals also apply to these. More detail can be found [here](#).

## Population profile

Throughout the volunteering section, to show the representativeness of volunteers, the demographic profile of volunteers has been compared to the population profile.

Given the limited availability of demographic population data by school year, the weighted profile of the survey has been used to generate these proportions as the survey is weighted to be nationally representative.

**Confidence intervals** can be found in the linked tables. These indicate that if repeated samples were taken and confidence intervals computed for each sample, 95% of the intervals would contain the true value. Only significant differences are reported within the commentary. Where results are reported as being the same for two groups, any differences fall within the margin of error.

**Significance tests** can be found in the linked tables. The tests indicate that if repeated samples were taken, 95% of the time we would get similar findings, i.e. we can be confident that the differences seen in our sampled respondents are reflective of the population. When sample sizes are smaller, confidence intervals are larger, meaning differences between estimates need to be greater to be considered statistically significant.



## Sport spectating

While not covered in this report, data tables showing the number of people attending live sports events form part of this release.

[Link to data tables](#)



## How we measure change

Figures reported are based on the responses of the children and young people (and parents of Years 1-2) sampled, which we then scale up to provide an England-wide picture. That means there'll naturally be small fluctuations when we compare the figures we have now with 12 months ago.

In accordance with Government Statistical Service good practice guidance, we highlight changes within the report where we're confident they're genuine differences. If the data is showing only small differences which are within the margin of error, they're noted as "no change".

All changes reported are percentage point changes. We've used '%' as shorthand to represent this throughout.

## Term dates

Due to differing school term dates across years, academic year 2020-21 reference dates have been used.

## Data collection during the coronavirus pandemic

Fieldwork has continued throughout the pandemic however a few small changes should be noted:

- In academic year 2019-20, fieldwork ended two weeks early in the spring term 2020 and started slightly later (mid-May) in the summer term.
- In periods during which schools were closed, most pupils completed the survey at home rather than at school, as is usually the case.
- Small questionnaire changes were made to ensure the survey remained relevant in the summer term 2020 and were retained throughout the academic year 2020-21.

More details of these can be found in the technical note.

[Link to more information on measures and demographics](#)

