

A group of five children are captured in mid-air, jumping towards a basketball hoop on an outdoor court. The children are wearing colorful athletic wear: a light blue tank top and neon green shorts, a blue tank top and red shorts, a blue tank top and red shorts, a neon green tank top and red shorts, and a red tank top and red shorts. A basketball is suspended in the air above them. The background shows a green basketball hoop and backboard, a chain-link fence, and lush green trees under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds.

PE & Sport Advice Guides

Part 4 - Encouraging sports and PE across all ages

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In our last guide we talked about all of the funding available, to schools, to support the development of outdoor space used for physical activity. But, we know, from over 20 years as the UK's leading play and outdoor space experts, that it isn't as simple as having a big pot of money to spend on equipment. Your outdoor space needs to earn its keep, and that usually means working for a variety of age groups and abilities.

In this guide we look at physical literacy, set against the National Curriculum, and consider the things you need to consider to design the very best, most flexible age-appropriate outdoor activity space.

What about physical activity? Why do children specifically need access to sports and active play facilities?

We've long campaigned for play as a solution to the childhood obesity epidemic. We think getting children active has obvious benefits. Our top reasons for including sports, PE and active play equipment in your scheme are:

- 1. It improves physical health** - Well this one is a bit of a 'no-brainer' to us. With recent reports stating that almost a third of children aged between two and fifteen are overweight or obese getting children active has to be a key priority. Sitting behind a desk isn't the answer.
- 2. It improves social skills** - We're not just talking about team sports here. Learning to share and take turns, as well as working together to assess risk, find solutions, and listen to others. The opportunities for social development are huge with outdoor activity.
- 3. It improves mental well-being** - According to the NSPCC children as young as eight are reporting anxiety issues, stress and tension. Getting active can help to decrease this. In fact our own impact evidence reserach showed that 85% of Playforce customers saw improved health and wellbeing in their pupils following their outdoor project.
- 4. It builds confidence** - Receiving praise from a parent or parent, for doing a good job is one of the ways outdoor activity can be used to build confidence. But it goes further. Learning to manage and assess risk is important for a child's development. Confidence comes from knowing they've assessed things right and been able to do something well.
- 5. It helps children understand friendly competition** - Learning to work as a team to achieve a 'team objective' is a useful skill for adult life (and later in school). But learning how to treat an opponent is also a skill we all need. Outdoor activity gives children a chance to learn how to focus on a collective goal, as well collaborating to overcome challenges.
- 6. It teaches them about making friends** - It's not just a case of encouraging interaction and collaboration, as we've already mentioned. Sporting activity gives children a common interest, from which to build friendships. Once again, this develops valuable skills in terms of learning how friends are made and understanding the various challenges that go along with this (like handling criticism from friends, or being on opposing teams).
- 7. It gives opportunity for engagement outside of your school** - Whether you're hosting a sports day or having a 'friendly' against a local school it does children good to have to learn to interact with new bodies of children, often with different cultures and ways of working. Sport is a wonderfully accessible way of introducing this to children.
- 8. It teaches them to 'stick at it'** - Sports and outdoor activities are fairly simple in terms of life skills. They're a great way to teach a child that working hard ... and, of course, learning to 'stick at it' ... result in outcomes that merit reward.
- 9. It helps with classroom learning** - Sport isn't just an attractive alternative activity. Studies have proven that sport gives children energy, throughout the day, which results in higher performance levels in classroom subjects.
- 10. It gives opportunities to support classroom learning** - It's not just sport for sport's sake. There are plenty of learning opportunities that support classroom learning, whether that's understanding distance and measuring, counting and maths, using a stopwatch or using role play to support literacy. Helping to demonstrate how sports and outdoor activity is relevant to everything in life is a really big 'win' in our book.



Working out how to introduce physical literacy at your school

So, we understand (and agree) that sports and physical activity are an essential part of any school day, and any outdoor space. But before we get onto designing a play or sports area we need to work out what you're planning to deliver, by way of physical literacy.

Thankfully, the hard thinking has been done for us. When planning a playground or outdoor grounds development, focused on PE and sports, the first place to start has to be the National Curriculum for Physical Education. This sets out the requirements for physical education (including swimming, which we haven't included here).

Key stage 1 - Pupils should develop **fundamental movement skills**, become increasingly competent and confident and access a broad range of opportunities to extend their **agility, balance and coordination**, individually and with others. They should be able to engage in competitive (both against self and against others) and co-operative physical activities, in a range of increasingly challenging situations. Pupils should be taught to:

- master basic movements including running, jumping, throwing and catching, as well as developing balance, agility and co-ordination, and begin to apply these in a range of activities
- participate in team games, developing simple tactics for attacking and defending
- perform dances using simple movement pattern

Key stage 2 - Pupils should continue to apply and develop a broader range of skills, learning how to use them in different ways and to link them to make actions and sequences of movement. They should enjoy communicating, collaborating and competing with each other. They should develop an understanding of how to improve in different physical activities and sports and learn how to evaluate and recognise their own success. Pupils should be taught to:

- use running, jumping, throwing and catching in isolation and in combination
- play competitive games, modified where appropriate [for example, badminton, basketball, cricket, football, hockey, netball, rounders and tennis], and apply basic principles suitable for attacking and defending
- develop flexibility, strength, technique, control and balance [for example, through athletics and gymnastics]
- perform dances using a range of movement patterns
- take part in outdoor and adventurous activity challenges both individually and within a team
- compare their performances with previous ones and demonstrate improvement to achieve their personal best

But we don't know about you... this is all great but it doesn't really help us understand exactly what we might do, and the facilities we'll need to do it.

Don't worry. [The Primary School Physical Literacy Framework](#) has been developed by Youth Sport Trust (YST) in partnership with Sport England, County Sport Partnership Network, Association of Physical Education, sports coach UK and Community of Providers of Physical Activity and Sports. They've also consulted dozens of National Governing Bodies of Sport and Membership Organisations. The framework has been designed to support those working in primary schools to consider how best they can structure their PE and school sport provision to ensure maximum opportunity is provided to develop the physical literacy of all their pupils.

They say: "In a school context developing physical literacy is the foundation of PE and school sport. Physical literacy is not a programme, rather it is an outcome of any structured PE and school sport provision, which is achieved more readily if learners encounter a range of age and stage appropriate opportunities. This framework will help you to consider what those age and stage appropriate opportunities need to focus on to maximise the potential to develop the physical literacy of all pupils through PE and school sport."

It provides a handy guide to three areas of focus:

1. Physical Education Curriculum

2. Extra-curricular School Sport (breakfast, lunchtime or after-school programmes)
3. Competitive School Sport (a year round programme)

Each of these is broken down by the age of the children, from EYFS through to upper KS2 and including those with special needs. It might not give you everything you need but it is a really good place to start working out your objectives.

And, of course, if you're using your **Sports & PE Premium** funding it's important that you approach this methodically, setting out a strategy and deciding how you're going to measure impact and return on investment.

Primary School Physical Literacy Framework			
Supporting primary schools to develop the physical literacy of all their pupils			
	Physical Education Curriculum	Extra-curricular School Sport Breakfast, lunchtime or after-school programmes	Competitive School Sport A year round programme
Focus	Literacy Learning, Leadership	Exercise, Engagement, Enjoyment	Coaching, Competition, Clubs
Driver	High quality physical education for every child	Equipping every child to lead healthy active lifestyles	Creating participation pathways inclusive of all young people
Delivered by	Delivered by teachers	Delivered by teachers and appropriately qualified and skilled coaches/professionals*, supported by young leaders and volunteers	Delivered by teachers, coaches and volunteers, supported by young leaders (including young officials)
EY	Through the provision of structured and free play, create environments which introduce and develop control and co-ordination in large and small movements, helping children to move confidently in a range of ways, negotiating space safely, helping them to understand factors that contribute to keeping healthy, such as physical exercise and the food they eat. Pupils can express themselves about things they can do to keep themselves healthy and safe		Not applicable
KS1	Creating a movement foundation to underpin lifelong participation, enabling pupils to access a range of learning experiences which supports the development of competent and confident movers	Multi-skill clubs for every child that builds on the development of movement foundation within the curriculum PE sessions. Place them in clubs that provides play and reinforces the importance of being physically active, as well as introducing basic leadership opportunities and social interaction	Year round programme of activities focused on setting personal challenges, based on movement foundation and multi-skill sports. This supports PE or extra-curricular time and culminating in a one-off annual celebration event
Lower KS2	Adapted physical activities through which a young person develops and applies a broad range of skills in different contexts — enhancing their creative, social and thinking skills in PE. They also begin to gain an understanding of the positive benefits of being physically active	Fun and engaging non-traditional/alternative activity formats that get children and young people active in themed multi-activity environments, introduces simple messages around health, e.g. in Change4Life Sports Clubs (Combat, Adventure, Fight)	Themed formats, delivered in extra-curricular time. Building from competition introduced in PE, focused on games and personal challenge activities that use the skills and characteristics of NGB sports. This supports School Games competition at Level 1 (SHA), Level 2 and 3 (Stax) i.e. Target, Netball, Combat or Inclusive Games festivals. The very few early specialisation sports may have NGB formats for this age
Upper KS2	Learning physical, social and thinking skills through sport specific activities (modified to be age and stage appropriate). They are also developing leadership skills and are able to articulate the benefits of regular exercise	Alternative or modified extra-curricular activity that supports young people interested in an alternative sports and activity pathways that transition into recreational opportunities offered at KS3 i.e. Dodgeball, Ultimate Frisbee, Cheerleading, StreetDance or wheelchair Sports Skills	Sport specific (modified to be age and stage appropriate) extra-curricular clubs for young people wanting to be involved in intra- and inter-school sport. Supporting transition to a local club/mark (or equivalent) accredited community sports club
Think INC.	Teachers supported to deliver inclusive PE ensuring that children and young people who have special educational needs (SEN) or disabilities fully access and engage in PE lessons	Identifying and addressing the barriers to participation in consultation with young people who have SEN or disabilities and their carers. Utilise adaptive games packages such as TOP Sportsability to increase opportunities for young disabled people to access a range of activities and sports	Modifying and adapting activity to create 'inclusive competitions' utilising existing NGB 'inclusive' formats and designing personal challenges that enable young people who have SEN or disabilities to achieve their personal best

*The minimum qualification, recommended by the National Partners, for a coach or professional working in the primary school context is considered to be a BACC Level 2 coaching qualification or equivalent in the activity being delivered.



**Ok, you've worked out what you want to do.
Let's get designing this outdoor space!**

Let's start with the nuts and bolts of design

There's a big difference between equipment for Early Years and what a thirteen year-old will want. But there are a number of things to consider that are applicable to every age and every playground or outdoor sports area:

- **Think about the space around it** – we call this 'transitional' space but considering access points, drainage and other surrounding spaces is important. And don't forget to consider whether you need bike and scooter 'parks' as well to encourage active travel to school.
- **Consider your surroundings** – it's important that your playground fits in with the wider scheme you're developing. Playgrounds don't have to be all bright colours – some are entirely [wooden and natural](#) in style. When you're selecting your equipment and planning the space, talk to a specialist in designing for education to make sure the overall look and feel fits in with your other plans and the practicalities of the school day.
- **Nothing is the same, twice over** – in the same way no two children are the same, neither are two outdoor spaces. It's important you consider the different groups that will be using the space, when and how. It's not just a case of thinking about how old the children are but whether it will be used after school or in the holidays, with lots of adult supervision (or limited), and the overall tone you want to set.
- **Children like to explore** – we think that outdoor activity is one of the best ways of learning. When you're creating your design consider installing equipment that children can use in different ways. Our experts can help you understand the different opportunities each element of a design offers.

- **Risk is good** – nobody wants to put children at risk but reasonable, measured and controlled risk is central to learning and development. Once again, our experts can help you to identify equipment that will challenge children (and keep them interested) in a controlled way.
- **Don't forget the surfacing** – it's easy to get carried away thinking about equipment but, when you're planning your budget, surfacing needs to be an important factor. Our experts can give you guidance on exactly the right [surfacing](#) to suit the outcomes you want to achieve, and for sports areas which sports or activities you want to offer.
- **Always ask the children** – when you've spent time thinking about surfacing, equipment, design and budgets it can be easy to forget fun. The most important part. It's always a good idea to involve children in the design process for every playground. They will be your toughest critics and help you make sure it's not only current but great fun!
- **Build an expert team** – we've spent decades creating the very best outdoor spaces across the UK and further afield. What makes us stand out, however, is that we understand how to design for schools and our team of designers and regional consultants spend every single day living and breathing it.

Now we've got the basics of playground design covered, it's time to consider how you can integrate play and sport in the same space. Because we're talking about sports and physical literacy, we're not going to cover EYFS in any detail here. We wrote a handy guide about [designing the perfect playground for Early Years](#) on our blog and the Physical Literacy Framework (previously mentioned) includes some suggestions.



What we're going to talk about here is how to develop outdoor space that will support physical activities, allowing children aged between six and twelve to move from 'active play' to 'sports participation', and even encourage teenagers to carry on playing outdoors.

Six to twelve: forming physical literacy habits

Designed appropriately, playgrounds are a great place for primary school children to develop skills such as running, jumping, balancing, throwing, rolling, climbing, catching and crawling - in short, agility, balance and coordination.

But the benefits don't stop there. Not only are physical skills learnt during this primary school period, play is also fundamental to encouraging enthusiasm about physical activity, for the future.

And we haven't even mentioned the skills development across understanding feelings, reactions and motives, as well as expanding vocabulary and communication, and the development of a better understanding of rules.

The key areas to consider, when designing your play space, for this age group are:

1. ABC: That means agility, balance and coordination.
2. Rules: Creating areas of play that require rules and measurements, allowing children to benchmark themselves against others and extend their comfort zones.
3. Engagement: Environments with measurable challenges, difference paces of activity and areas where small groups can work together, help to develop engagement and communication skills.

The Physical Literacy Framework mentioned previously gives a good place to start, up to KS2. But after this point it's important to increase the opportunities for fitness and activities. KS2 is the point at which we can start to

introduce sports in a more traditional format, alongside play. [Active trails](#) are a great way to do this - encouraging children to engage in a mixture of upper and lower body exercises, as well as testing their fitness, balance and agility. By introducing physical activity, at this age, in this focused way, alongside play, it helps to establish 'exercise' as a positive thing, encouraging children to carry on as they get older.

Some ideas:

- Lots of variety is key for short attention spans and skills development.
- Different levels of challenge is also important, for different age groups.
- Don't forget: [hard surfaces for ball games](#) and maybe even [shady spots for cooling down](#).





Safety first

As children get older they crave more independence, as well as space away from adults. This means, when designing your playground, that you need to combine a perceived level of freedom, as well as opportunities for supervision.

Similarly, whilst children like higher degrees of risk, as they get older, it's essential that safety comes first. That means making sure equipment is of the right size and type to meet the objectives you have, as well as using safety surfacing that is fit for purpose.

Other things to consider might be access routes, perimeter fencing and ensuring members of staff are up to date on risk assessments... and of course, that your play and outdoor space is properly maintained.



We're here to help

Our consultants are trained to support you in getting the best outdoor and play space for all of your children, across the ages. You can book a consultation [here](#). Our consultants are trained to support you in getting the best outdoor and play space for all of your children, across the ages. You can book a consultation [here](#).