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**YST RESEARCH**

Insight driving innovation and impact

## Girls Active 2017-2019

May 2019

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# YST GIRLS ACTIVE

## Executive summary

- Young people understand the importance of an active lifestyle
- Girls say they do less PE and the amount of PE they do decreases throughout the school years
- **Boys are more likely to be active both inside and outside of school** - nearly a quarter of secondary aged girls (23%) do not do any sport or physical activity outside of school
- Girls in year 10 are most likely to be concerned about **body image** and have negative feelings about the way they look
- Girls who are coaches, leaders, administrators or organisers are more likely to feel **confident, happier** and like taking part in **physical activity, PE and learning at school**

## Motivators

- Girls in KS4 are less likely to feel that their school and parents encourage them to take part in sport or physical activity
- Girls are less likely to enjoy competition than boys, however, **competition generally does not emerge as a big motivating factor for girls or boys to be physically active**. The value placed on competition decreases throughout the school years.

## Barriers

- **For secondary aged pupils, boys were more than twice as likely to say they have no barriers to sport and physical activity than girls**
- For girls from a BAME background, **having their period** is the biggest barrier to participating in sport and physical activity
- Confidence remains a continual barrier for girls
- The largest barrier that secondary aged girls experience to participating in sport or physical activity outside of school is **time**, with **26% of girls saying that they do not have time because of their school work**.

PRIMARY GIRLS BARRIERS IN SCHOOL	SECONDARY GIRLS BARRIERS IN SCHOOL
I don't like getting hot and sweaty I am not confident I am not good at it	I am not confident I don't like other people watching me When I have my period

The percentage of young people that love PE and being physically active decreases throughout the school years

More active girls have higher scores of wellbeing and more likely to like learning at school

Having fun is a key motivator for all age groups, genders and demographics

Boys are more likely to say they have no barriers to sport and activity than girls

## Context

As part of the Girls Active programmes run by the Youth Sport Trust, girls and boys in primary and secondary schools are asked to complete an online survey. The survey is distributed by teachers to pupils in their school. Each school receives an individual school report to capture an understanding of their school. There are two variations of the survey modified to be appropriate for each age group. There are some core questions within each survey, aiming to capture young people's current levels of activity, their barriers and motivators to physical activity and their perceptions of physical activity and sport. The secondary survey is slightly longer and captures data around extracurricular activity and wellbeing.

This report combines the data from all young people involved across two academic years 2017/18 and 2018/19.

The total number of primary aged pupil responses was **9,875**. The total number of secondary aged pupil responses was **25,725**. For both primary and secondary school samples, this consisted of **74 percent girls** and **26 percent boys**. As this is not representative of the population, the report predominantly focuses on the responses from the primary and secondary school girls, drawing comparisons to the boy's responses where appropriate. Please see the appendix for a more detailed breakdown of the samples.

For more information about Girls Active, please visit <https://www.youthsporttrust.org/girls-active>

## Abbreviations

KS3 – Key Stage Three (pupils aged 11-14)

KS4 – Key Stage Four (pupils aged 14-16)

KS5 – Key Stage Five (pupils aged 17-18)

BAME – Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic background

SEND – Special Educational Needs or Disabilities

PE – Physical Education

## Themes across both Primary and Secondary school

### Motivators to be physically active

PRIMARY GIRLS MOTIVATORS	SECONDARY GIRLS MOTIVATORS
Having fun (89%)	To have fun (63%)
Being with friends (85%)	To be healthy (61%)
Feeling happy (81%)	To feel good (43%)

Within both the primary and secondary school surveys, young people are asked what motivates them to take part in sport and physical activity. *Having fun* emerged as a key motivator for all age groups, genders and demographics. This was the top motivating factor selected for girls in both secondary and primary schools. There was some difference between the second most popular motivating factors at primary and secondary age, with primary aged girls more likely to value being with their friends and secondary aged girls more motivated by being healthy. Secondary aged girls were most likely to be motivated to take part in sport and physical activity to have fun (63%) and to be healthy (61%). Primary aged girls were most likely to say that they enjoyed having fun (89%), being with friends (85%) and feeling happy (81%)<sup>1</sup>.

'*Having fun*' and '*Getting fit and healthy*' as motivating factors increase through KS2<sup>2</sup>. For '*Having fun*' this more than doubles from year 3 to year 6, see figure 1 below.

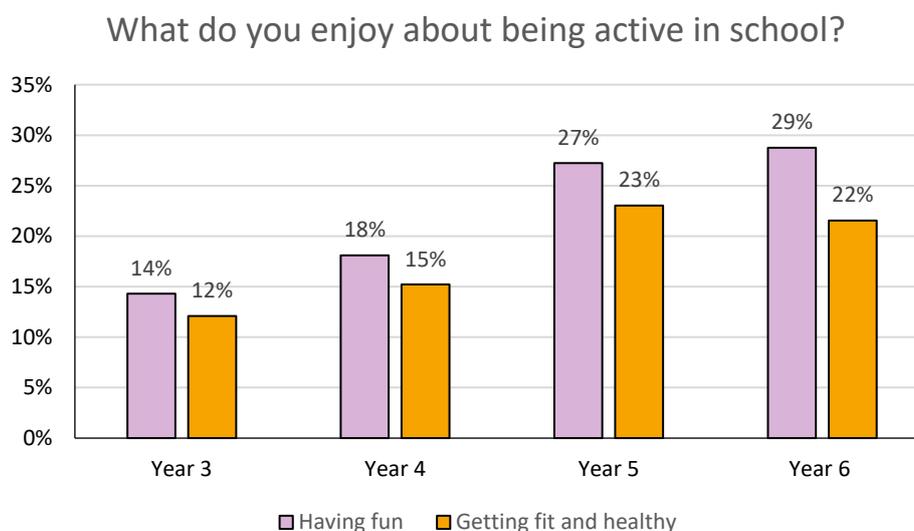


Figure 1: Primary girls n=2812

Secondary aged boys place more value on sport and physical activity enabling them to develop new skills, with this as their third most popular motivator (43%, n=2824) compared to the sixth most popular motivator for girls. There is also a noticeable decline throughout schooling in how much girls value sport and physical activity to develop new skills, try new sports and set goals, see figure 2.

<sup>1</sup> For motivators to be active for primary aged pupils the data from only year 2 of the survey are used. This is due to an error in the question in year 1 which skews the data and means that the two years cannot be accurately combined.

<sup>2</sup> This calculation only uses year 2 data (n=2812)

## What motivates you to take part in sport, physical activity and PE at school?

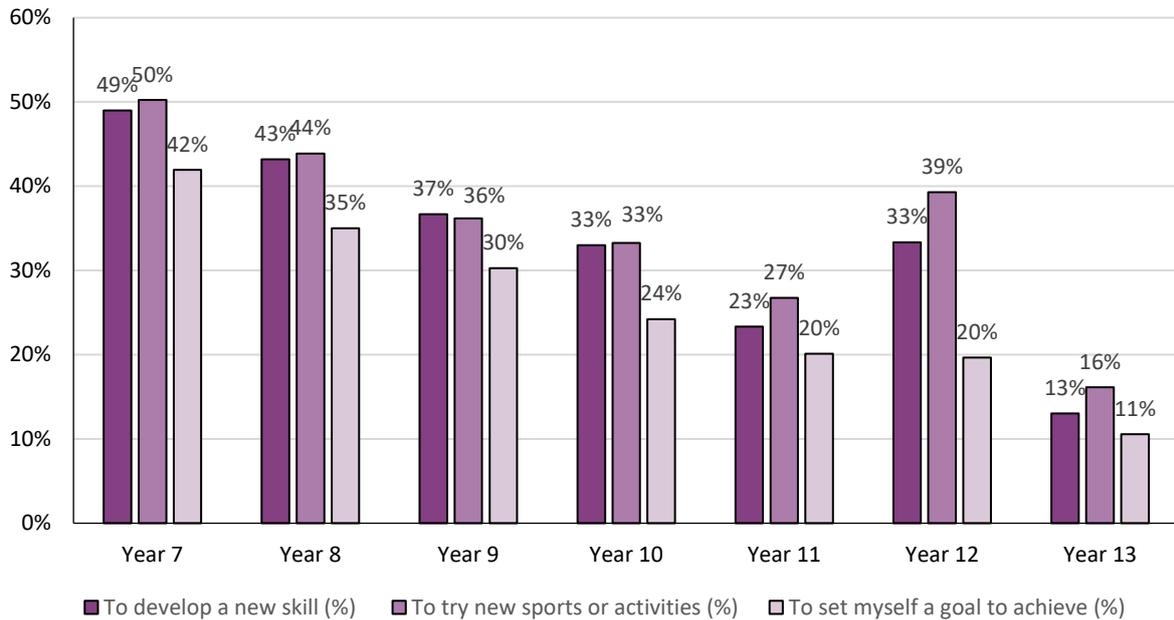


Figure 2: Secondary girls n=15655

For secondary aged girls, appearance as a motivating factor increases with age, with 24 percent of girls at KS3 selecting this as a motivator compared to 30 percent at KS4. This was the largest increase for a motivating factor for girls between KS3 and KS4. This seems to peak for girls around year 10, with nearly a third (30%) selecting this as a motivator, see figure 3 below.

### Motivator - 'To look good'

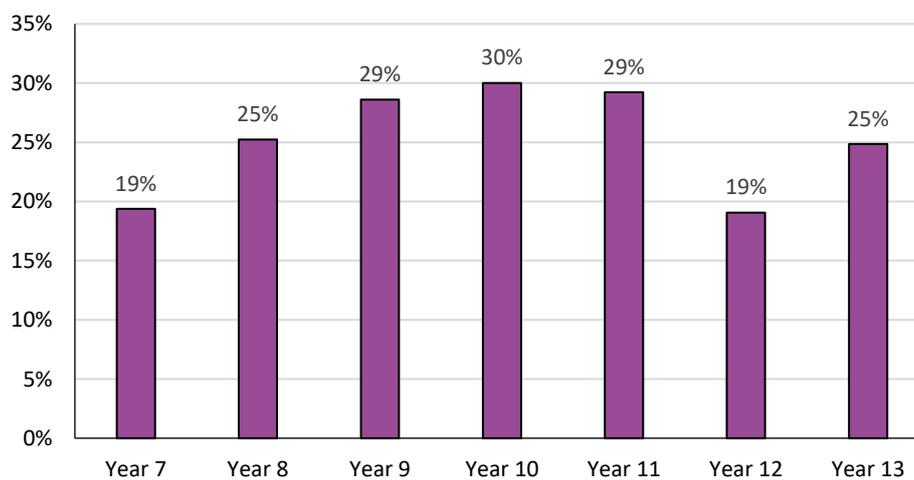


Figure 3: Secondary girls n=15655

## Barriers to being physically active

PRIMARY GIRLS BARRIERS IN SCHOOL	SECONDARY GIRLS BARRIERS IN SCHOOL
I don't like getting hot and sweaty (23%)	I am not confident (30%)
I am not confident (22%)	I don't like other people watching me (28%)
I am not good at it (20%)	When I have my period (28%)

Within both the primary and secondary school survey, young people were asked what stops them from being physically active. They were provided with a list of suggested barriers, an 'other' option and a 'none of the above' option which was treated as a proxy for having no barriers. At all ages, boys were more likely to select 'none of the above' than girls, suggesting boys were more likely to not have any barriers to sport than girls. **For secondary aged pupils, boys were more than twice as likely to select this option than girls** (41% compared to 18%). For girls, these potential barriers increase through schooling, with less girls selecting that they have no barriers throughout the school years. See figure 4.

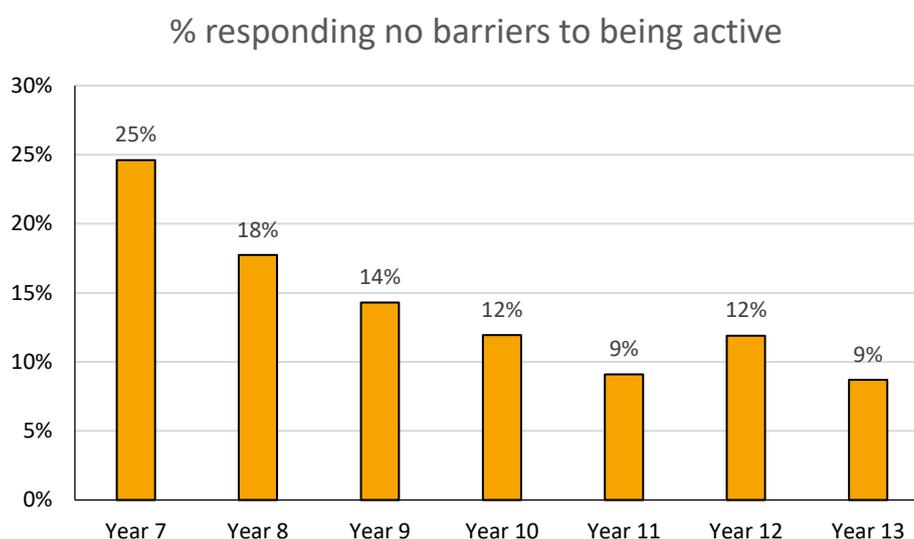


Figure 4: Secondary girls: n=15655

For primary aged girls, the biggest barrier is getting hot and sweaty (23%). Across all years, confidence remains a continual barrier, with 22 percent of primary aged girls and 30 percent of secondary aged girls selecting it. For secondary aged girls with SEND confidence is even more of a barrier, with 36 percent selecting it as a barrier compared to 28% of girls without SEND.

Periods are the third biggest barrier for secondary aged pupils. For girls from a BAME background it is the biggest barrier identified, with 31 percent of BAME girls selecting periods as a barrier compared to 27 percent of those from a white ethnic background.

### I do more than 60 minutes of activity a day<sup>3</sup>

	PRIMARY		SECONDARY	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Every day	25%	36%	7%	11%
Most days	35%	34%	35%	37%
Some days	33%	24%	52%	46%
Never	7%	7%	5%	6%

Table 1: Primary pupils n=6054, Secondary pupils n=19158

Overall, only 8 percent of secondary aged pupils (boys and girls) met the Chief Medical Officer guidelines of being active for 60 minutes every day. This was higher in primary school, where 28 percent of boys and girls said that they were active every day. Boys were more likely to say that they are active every day at both primary and secondary school. Inactivity levels were similar for both genders and ages.

The majority of young people understand the importance of an active lifestyle, with 97 percent of primary aged girls responding that they understand either a lot / little and 84 percent of secondary aged girls responding that they understand very / mostly.

<sup>3</sup> NB. Primary aged pupils were asked this question directly, secondary aged pupils were asked on how many days they were active which were then grouped as follows 7 days = every day, 4,5,6 days = most days, 1,2,3 = some days, 0 days = never.

## How do you feel about taking part in PE and physical activity?

Young people were asked how they feel about taking part in PE and taking part in physical activity.

In primary school, a large majority (93%) of girls responded that they love / like taking part in PE. For secondary aged girls, just under three quarters of girls (73%) responded that they like or like a lot taking part in PE. Throughout schooling the percentage of girls that love (primary) / like PE a lot (secondary) decreases, from nearly two thirds (63%) loving it in year 3 to only thirteen percent in year 13<sup>4</sup>. Within secondary school the most active girls were nearly three times more likely to like PE than the least active (54% compared to 20%).

Young people were also asked how they felt about taking being physically active. Nearly all girls in primary school either liked or loved being physically active (97%), for secondary aged girls, just over three quarters (76%) of girls responded that they like or like a lot being physically active. Responses to this question follow a similar downward trend throughout schooling to how young people feel about taking part in PE, but the decline levels off throughout KS4 and KS5.

% Girls that love being physically active and taking part in PE

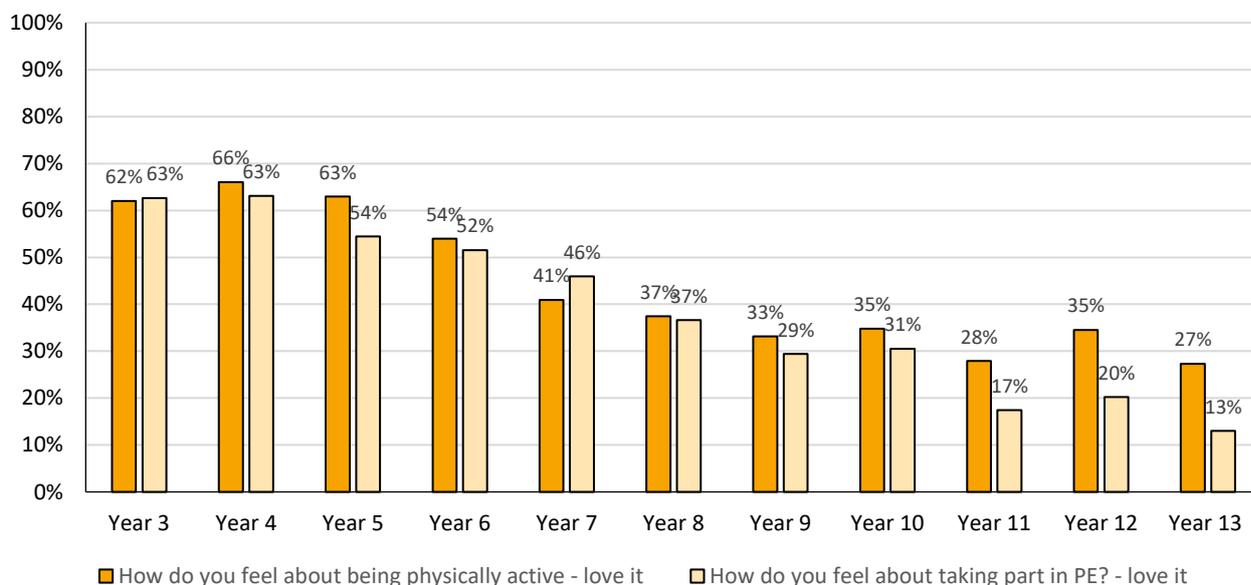


Figure 5: All girls, Primary girls n=7007, Secondary girls n=15655

### My school / family encourage me to be active

Both primary and secondary aged girls felt that their family and school generally encourage them to be active and take part in sport. For secondary aged girls there is a decrease between KS3 and KS4, with less girls feeling that their family or school encourage them to be physically active as they get older.

<sup>4</sup> This question was slightly different for primary and secondary schools and the top responses for each have been combined for this analysis, 'love it' responses for primary and 'like it a lot' for secondary

### My school / parents encourage me to be active and take part in sport 'Mostly / Very true'

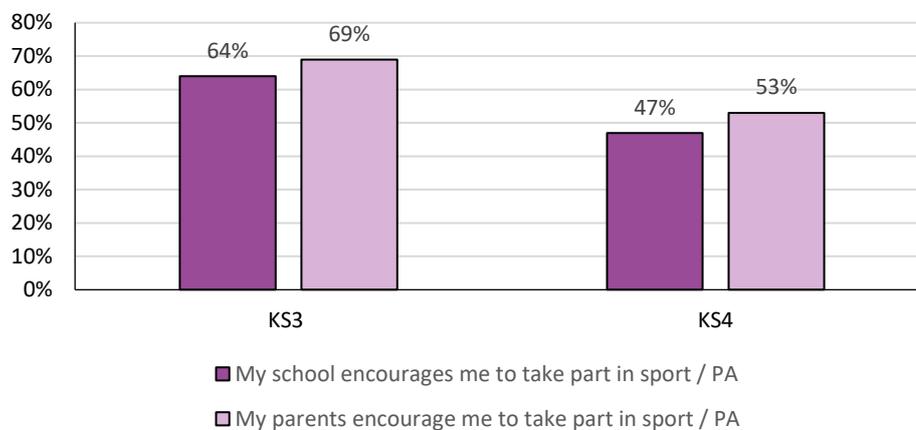


Figure 6: Secondary girls KS3/KS4 n=15326

## PE in the future

There is a difference between the activity's girls and boys in secondary schools would like to do. Girls are more interested in individual sports like trampolining, dance and swimming and boys are more interested in team sports, like football, dodgeball and parkour.

GIRLS TOP ACTIVITIES	BOYS TOP ACTIVITIES
Trampolining (24%)	Football (43%)
Dance (22%)	Dodgeball (22%)
Swimming (20%)	Parkour (19%)

Secondary pupils were asked what type of groupings they would prefer for their PE lessons. Both boys and girls would like to be grouped with their friends for PE, especially those in the least active category. Primary pupils were asked when they would like to be active. Primary aged girls would most like to be active at breaktime (57%), but this decreases throughout primary school, from 64% in year 3 to 48% in year 6.

### I would like to have a say in the activities we do in PE

Three quarters of primary aged girls responded that they would like to have a say in the activities they do in PE at school. This is higher than for secondary aged girls, where just under half (48%) said that they would like to. This is generally stable across years and genders.

### What are your favourite things to do when you are not at school?

Primary aged pupils were asked what they enjoyed doing whilst not at school. The top 20 responses from both girls and boys are recorded in table 2. In line with the question on motivations, for both girls and boys the top response was '**playing**'. There were some themes that emerged from both boys' and girls' responses and some key differences. Popular responses included, **football, games, TV and computers**. Boys responses focused on more computer gaming and consoles whereas girls focused on more informal activities such as drawing, family and the park.

Both	Girls only	Boys only
playing	gymnastics	Xbox
football	dancing	basketball
games	outside	tennis
TV	riding	Fortnite
computer	drawing	PS4
watching	phone	cricket
play	family	video
reading	park	rugby
running		
swimming		
friends		
bike		

Table 2: Girls' and boys' top things to do whilst not in school

## Competition

Competition does not emerge as a big motivating factor for girls or boys to be physically active or participate in sport. Only 21 percent of secondary girls selected 'to win competitions' as a motivating factor. Secondary aged girls are less likely than secondary aged boys to agree strongly that they like it when their PE lessons are competitive (41% compared to 26%). Girls from a BAME background are more likely to like competitive PE lessons with 31 percent stating this is very true for them compared to 24 percent from a white ethnic background. Girls classified as more active are nearly twice as likely to like competitive PE lessons.

Competition to motivate primary girls to be active in school decreases throughout KS2, from 41 percent of girls selecting this in year 3 to 30 percent of girls in year 6 (see figure 7). Similar to the primary aged girls, secondary aged girls experience a decrease in enjoyment of competition, from 50 percent at KS3 to 41 percent at KS4.

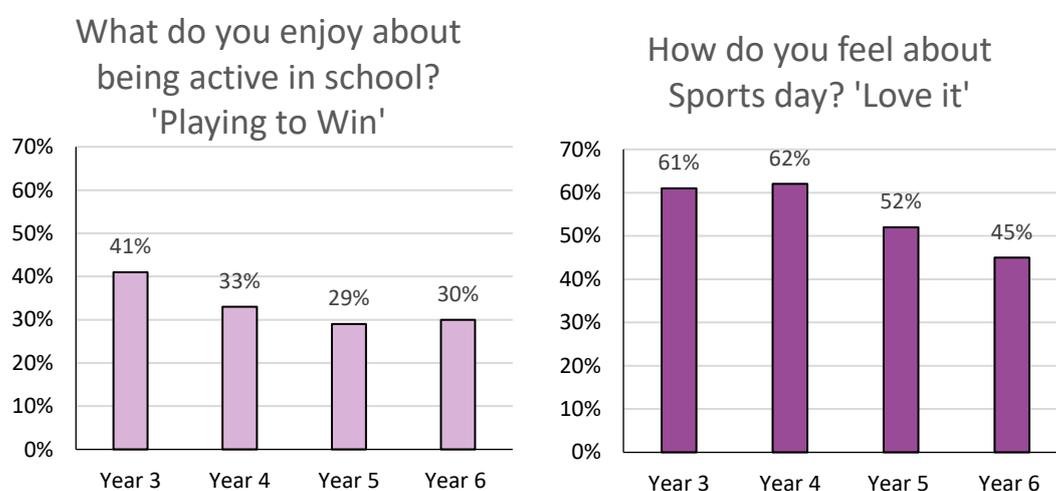


Figure 7: Primary girls n= 7162, Figure 8: Primary girls n= 6909

Eighty five percent of primary aged girls responded that they either like or love sports day. This proportion of girls loving sports day decreases from 61 percent in year three to 45 percent in year six (see figure 8).

## Current picture of activity for secondary aged pupils

### Minutes of PE per week

Boys report on average doing more minutes of PE in school per week than girls, with secondary aged boys reporting **141 average minutes per week** and secondary aged girls reporting **127 average minutes per week**. Overall responses suggest that schools are continuing to provide a minimum of two hours of PE a week for every pupil.

There does seem to be a difference by age of girls in the amount of reported PE with a declining trend in the number of minutes of PE girls do in school. Girls in KS3 stated that they did an average of 133 minutes per week compared to those in KS4 who do 107 minutes per week.

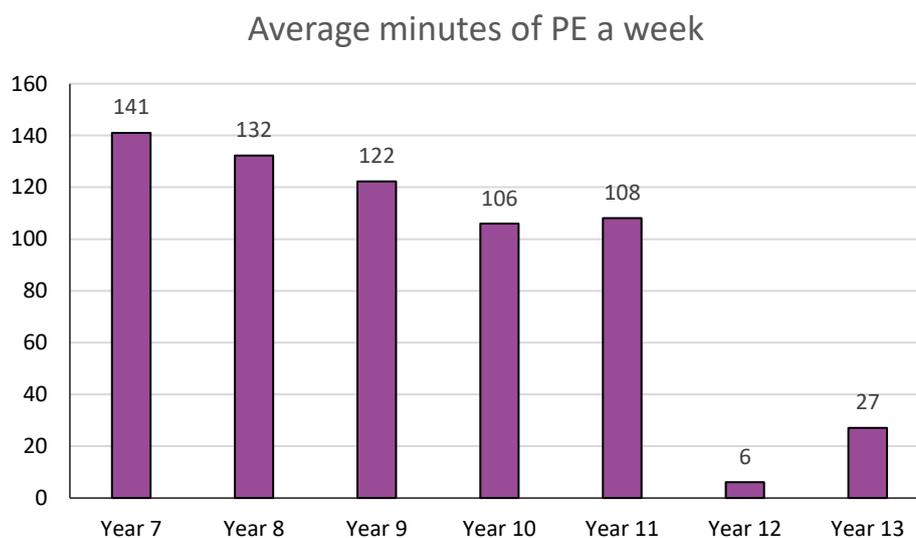


Figure 9: Secondary girls n=15655<sup>5</sup>

There is also a difference based on how active girls are. Girls categorised as least active stated that they do an average of 96 minutes per week compared to those in the most active category who stated that they do an average of 151 minutes per week.

### Additional activity inside school

Nearly half of secondary girls (45%) do not do any additional sport or physical activity in school *outside* of PE lessons. This increases from KS3 (43%) to KS4 (57%).

### Activity outside of school

Overall on average, secondary aged pupils participate in physical activity or sport outside of school on two days per week. However, nearly a quarter of secondary aged girls (23%) do not do any sport or physical activity outside of school. This is a particular issue for BAME secondary aged girls, with 30 percent of BAME girls not doing any sport or physical activity outside of school compared to 19 percent of those from a white ethnic background.

Boys are more likely to be active both inside (not in PE) and outside of school than girls.

<sup>5</sup> NB: The sample size for year 12 and 13 is much smaller

## Barriers to activity outside of school

I don't have time because of my school work (26%)

I am not confident (22%)

I don't like other people watching me (19%)

The largest barrier that secondary aged girls experience to participating in sport or physical activity outside of school is **time**, with 26 percent of girls saying that they do not have time because of their school work. Girls in year 12 are nearly three times more likely to say that time is a barrier than girls in year 7. See figure 10.

Barrier to sport and physical activity outside of school 'I don't have time because of my school work'

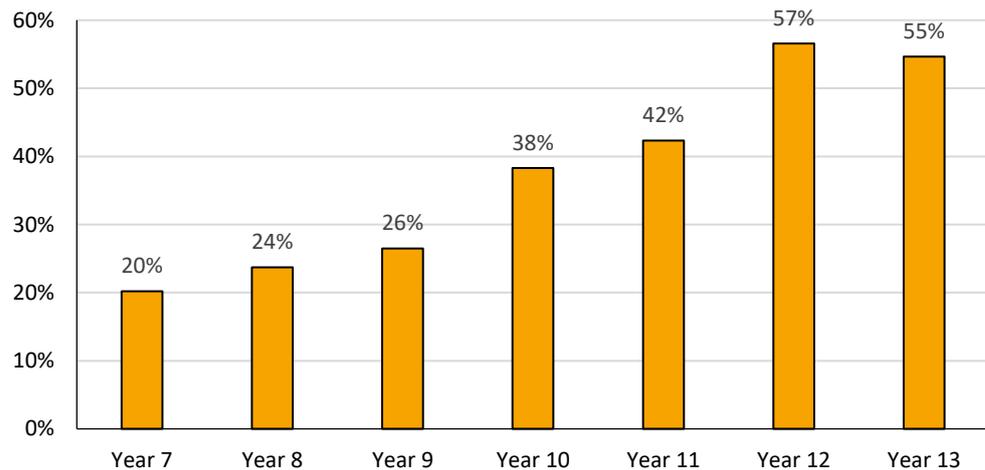


Figure 10: Secondary girls n=15655

## Wellbeing

Girls were asked to rate how often they felt certain aspects related to personal wellbeing, including confidence, resilience and happiness. They responded on a scale from always, often, about half of the time, rarely or never. Figure 11 displays the combined responses of always or often by how physically active girls are. For all questions, girls classified as more active were more likely to agree. More active girls showed higher levels of qualities associated with wellbeing. The largest difference was seen for resilience, which was asked through the question of ‘*how often do you stick at tasks until you succeed?*’. Over three quarters (77%) of more active girls responded as being resilient compared to under half (46%) of less active girls.

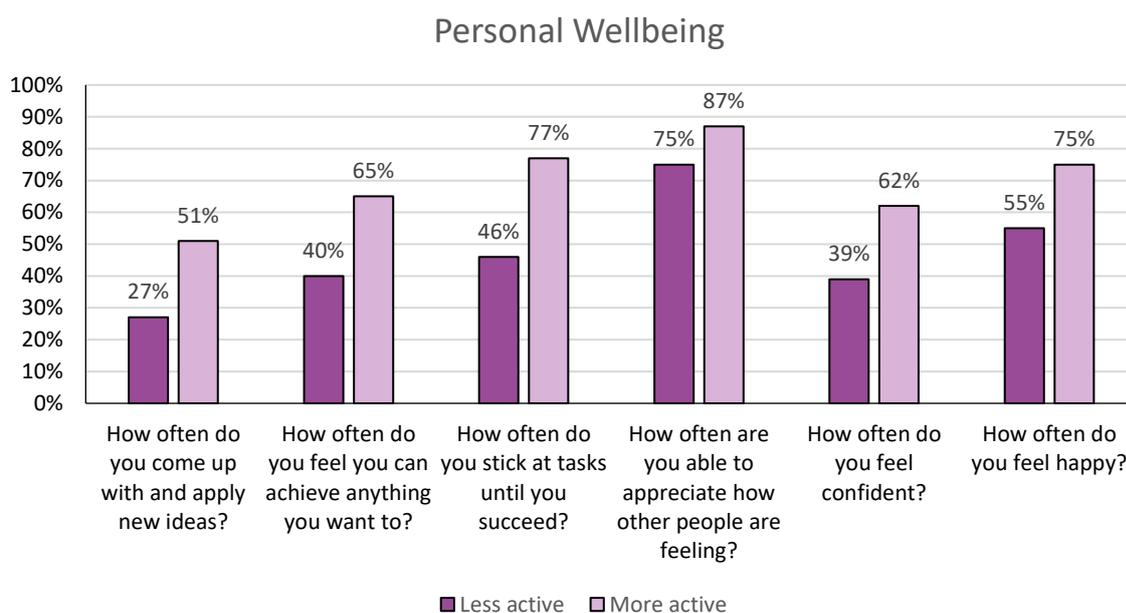


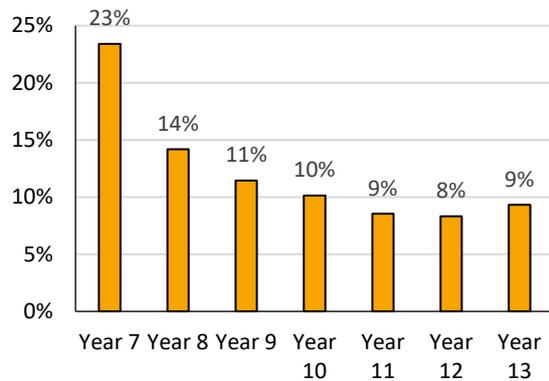
Figure 11: Secondary girls, more active n=5117, less active n=3216

## Body image

Young people were asked how true the statement ‘*I am happy with the way my body looks*’ was for them. Girls were more likely to feel this was not true for them than boys, with 29 percent of girls responding that this was not true / mostly not true for them compared to 18 percent of boys. For girls, the percentage that were very happy with the way their body looks decreases throughout secondary school, from nearly a quarter in year 7 (23%) to just 9 percent in year 13<sup>6</sup>. Girls in year 10 were most likely to say that they were not happy with the way that their body looks.

<sup>6</sup> NB: the sample size for key stage 5 is smaller

I am happy with the way my body looks 'very true' (%)



I am happy with the way my body looks 'not true for me'

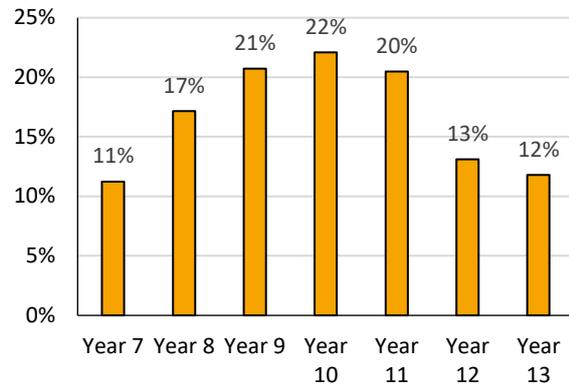


Figure 12: Secondary girls n=15655    Figure 13: Secondary girls n=15655

### Learning at school

Overall, 65 percent of secondary aged girls either liked or liked a lot learning at school. More active girls are more likely to like learning at school a lot (27%), compared to the least active girls (16%).

## Coaches, leaders and administrators

Secondary aged boys are more likely than girls to be coaches, leaders, administrators or organisers both inside and outside of school than girls. The biggest difference was for leaders, with 22 percent of boys currently having leadership roles compared to 16 percent of girls.

Girls do have a desire to be more involved with these roles, especially in school.

- **34 percent** of girls would like to be a coach either inside or outside of school
- **44 percent** of girls would like to be leaders either inside or outside of school
- **33 percent** of girls would like to have administrator or organiser roles either inside or outside of school

Responses showed that girls who are already coaches, leaders, administrators or organisers are;

- More likely to feel **confident to lead or influence their peers** or other young people
- More likely to **like taking part in physical activity, PE and learning at school**
- More likely to **not report any barriers** to participating in sport, physical activity or PE
- More **body confident**
- More likely to believe that **physical activity is an important part of their life**
- **Happier**
- **More confident** generally

This is in comparison to girls who do not hold any of these positions.

The biggest difference between girls who have these roles and those that do not is their confidence to lead or influence their peers and other young people. Overall, 46 percent of girls feel confident to lead or influence their peers and other young people. Girls that are leaders, coaches or administrators or organisers are more confident to lead or influence their peers than girls who are not, with those who do not have these positions all reporting lower levels of confidence (see figure 14).

## How confident do you feel leading or influencing your peers or other young people?

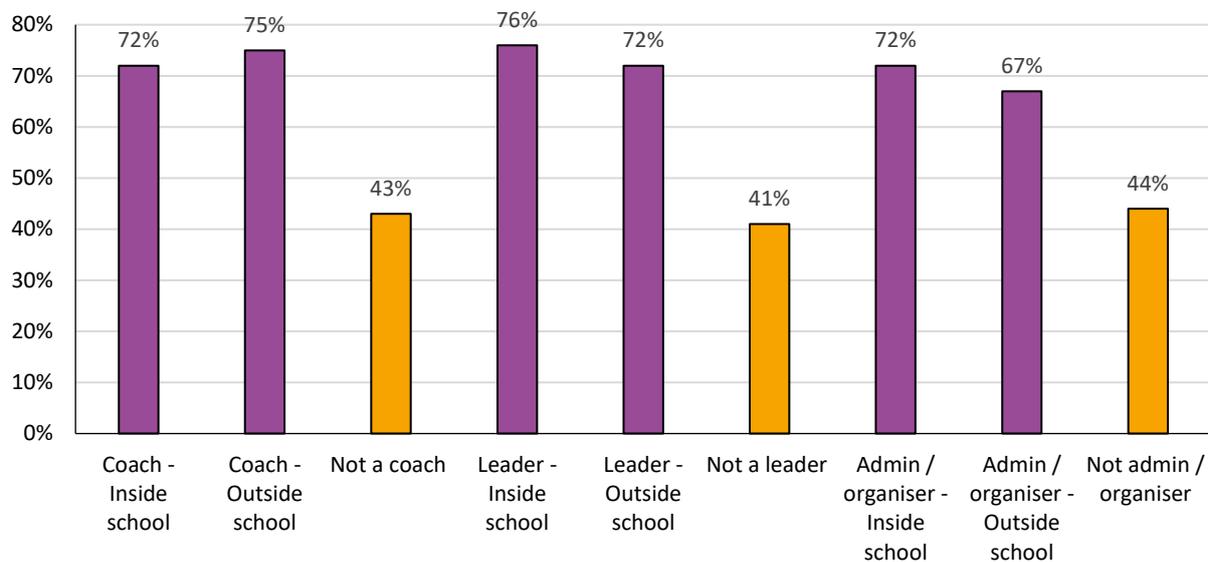


Figure 14: Secondary girls, coaches (in school n=425, outside school n=1108, neither n=17707) leaders (in school n=1262, outside school n=2009, neither n=16111) admin/organisers (in school n=657, outside school n=1087, neither n=17522)

## Conclusions

This report provides a wealth of insight into the current situation of girls and boys physical activity as well as providing detail into key barriers and motivators for being active. It is hoped that through identifying these, change can occur to support young people both boys and girls to be more active and lead healthier lifestyles.

## Appendix

### Primary demographics

GENDER			YEAR GROUP		
	n	%		n	%
Boys	2545	26	Year 3	1819	19
Girls	7282	74	Year 4	2514	26
No response	48	0	Year 5	2901	30
			Year 6	2555	26
			No response	86	1
ETHNICITY			RELIGION		
White	5343	57	Christian	3248	35
Asian / Asian British	1082	12	No religion	3184	34
Mixed / multiple ethnic groups	694	7	Muslim	1284	14
Other	427	5	Hindu	213	2
Black / African / Caribbean / Black British	406	4	Other	167	2
Prefer not to say	1391	15	Buddhist	49	1
No response	523	5	Jewish	32	0
			Prefer not to say	1147	12
			No response	474	5

### Secondary demographics

GENDER			YEAR GROUP		
	n	%		n	%
Boys	6566	26	Year 7	7098	35
Girls	19159	74	Year 8	6249	30
			Year 9	4444	22
			Year 10	1572	8
			Year 11	777	4
			Year 12	188	1
			Year 13	180	1
			No response	5217	20
Long-term illness, health problem or disability			RELIGION		
Yes	2661	10	No religion	13129	51
No	20489	80	Christian	6774	26
Prefer not to say	2575	10	Muslim	2722	11
ETHNICITY			Prefer not to say	1703	7
White	16919	66	Other religion	509	2
Asian / Asian British	3060	12	Hindu	453	2
Mixed / multiple ethnic groups	2018	8	Sikh	212	1
Black / African / Caribbean / Black British	1269	5	Buddhist	125	0
Other	488	2	Jewish	98	0
Prefer not to say	1971	8			

### **Girls Active Leader (including GLAMs)**

Four percent of girls completing the survey identified as Girls Active leaders (n=787). Of these, nearly three quarters had been Girls Active leaders for less than a year (70%) with only 11 percent having been Girls Active leaders for 2 years or more.

## YST RESEARCH

The Youth Sport Trust (YST) is a national children's charity passionate about creating a future where every child enjoys the life-changing benefits that come from play and sport. YST Research offers research, analysis, insight and evaluation services to organisations with an interest in the wider children and young people's sector. Our research expertise is focussed on improving the wellbeing of children and young people through sport and physical activity.

Our specialisms include:

- Education, PE and school sport
- Community sport / clubs
- Early years settings
- Life skills and employability
- Activism and volunteering
- Health (physical, social and emotional)

By working with us, you are supporting us to achieve our mission to improve children's lives and their future.

### Contact us:

#### Youth Sport Trust

SportPark Loughborough  
University  
3 Oakwood Drive  
Loughborough  
Leicestershire LE11 3QF

T 01509 226600  
E RESEARCH@YOUTHSPORTTRUST.ORG  
W WWW.YOUTHSPORTTRUST.ORG

 @YOUTHSPORTTRUST  
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