BURNLEY
SCHOOL SPORT PARTNERSHIP

READY, SET, MOVE
ACTIVE SCHOOLS NETWORK

Sir John Thursby

Youth Insight
PE, School Sport and physical Activity



This report summarises the findings from a consultation with girls at Sir John Thursby College regarding their relationship with PE, physical activity and school sport. The purpose of the consultation was to better understand their attitudes towards PE, their physical literacy, including how they think, feel, and connect with movement, as well as their knowledge, skills, confidence, and motivation to participate. We were also keen to find out what activities they would like to take part in and what the intent of any inter-school events should be.

What we did.....

A total of 61 girls from across Y7 took part

15/16 girls at a time, came out of lesson for a 35 minute engaging and interactive session.

The girls were split into small groups of 5 to 6 and completed two focus from the below:
Focus group 1: PE
Focus group 2: Physical Activity
Focus group 3: Enrichment, Sport and Inter-school activities

PE: Using a grafiti style wall, girls were given several prompts to share their likes, dislikes and thoughts.
Physical Activity: Understanding motivation, confidence, knowledge and understanding to take part, (physical literacy, barriers to taking part, and activities they like and dislike!
Enrichment and Inter-school activities: Intent of taking part in inter-school activities, what a good event would include, types of activities that would appeal to them.

What we found out..... A summary



1. **Confidence is the primary barrier.**
Around half of pupils report low confidence and motivation. Concerns relate to appearance, fear of judgement, lack of correct kit, performance anxiety (particularly in dance), and not feeling safe or comfortable.

2**. Social belonging drives engagement.**
Working with friends is the single strongest participation lever. Being forced into groups with peers they do not feel comfortable with significantly reduces enjoyment and confidence.

3. **After-school provision is structurally misaligned.**
Cultural commitments (e.g. madrassah), homework, and fatigue mean after-school sport has limited appeal. 65.5% prefer events during the school day; none favour after-school events.

4**. Atmosphere matters more than outcomes.**
Pupils prefer fun-focused, low-pressure, inclusive activities. Only a minority prioritise winning. They want effort recognised, participation rewarded, and aggression reduced.

5. Informal and social activity is more appealing than traditional competitive sport.
Walking, park-based activity, trampolining, swimming, gym sessions with music, and socially played games are popular. High-exposure or performance-based activities (e.g. running, dance performances) reduce confidence.

6. **Environmental and relational factors impact engagement.**
Cold outdoor lessons (without coats), written work replacing practical PE, and perceived lack of teacher engagement reduce motivation. Positive teacher–pupil relationships strongly enhance enjoyment.

Physical Education



Things Pupils Like in PE

Friends!
A key theme was the importance of working with friends

Getting to choose who we work with

Working with our friends

lessons make us feel happy and comfortable

Trampolining

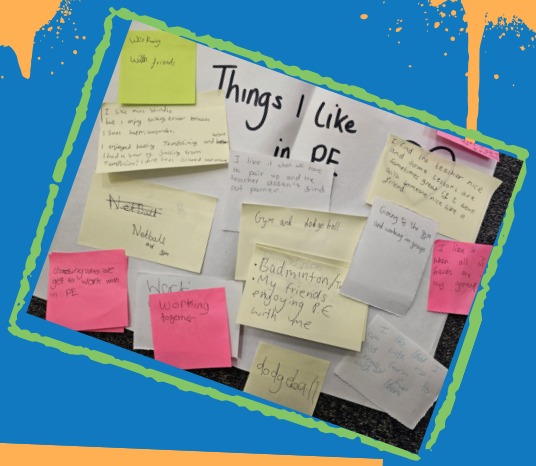
Gym based sessions - with music

Activities Fun and Engaging

Some of the teachers

Badminton

'Easy to talk to to'



Key Messages

Responses to the question **"Things I like in PE"** highlighted activities and approaches that **increase enjoyment.** Trampolining, gym-based sessions with music, and badminton were frequently cited as fun and engaging activities.

A key theme was the **importance of working with friends**. Pupils reported higher enjoyment when they are allowed to choose who they work with, rather than being paired by teachers.

A few pupils also commented **positively** on teaching staff, with Miss Windle described as `easy to talk to', and her lessons noted to make pupils feel happy and comfortable. This suggests that positive teacher–pupil relationships play a significant role in pupils' experiences of PE.

Physical Education

BORING!!

Things they find boring

- teachers chatting rather than actively teaching
- No being able to work with our friends
- Too much waiting and talking
- Missing PE to complete written work
- Not active enough



Key Messages

Pupils are most likely to feel bored when:

- They are inactive for long periods
- The same routines are repeated
- They aren't working with their friends
- The teachers aren't motivating

They want PE to be active, fair, fast-paced, and varied. A common theme was that pupils dislike spending long periods not being active and not feeling motivated or encouraged by the teachers.

Specific sports they find boring in PE



Dance
Orienteering
Football
Benchball



Things we find difficult in PE

Getting into groups

Dancing

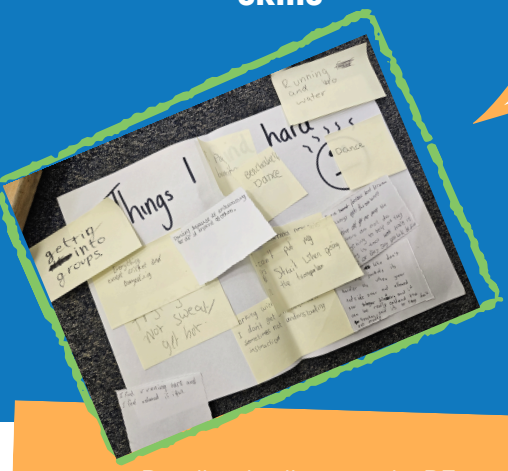
Performing in front of others 'Embarrassing'

Working with people who aren't our friends

Running

Learning new skills

Finding people to work with



Being outside in the cold

Understanding the rules

What this might mean.....

Pupils challenges in PE are not just about physical competences. They also include:
Worries over social interactions
Organisation
Knowledge and Understanding
Not feeling confident in front of their peers

Recommendations

- Provide enough time and opportunity for pupils to practice skills and understand rules
- Provide clear instructions,
- Consider smaller group performances that run simultaneously in gymnastics and dance
- Give pupils some flexibility in selecting who they work with

Things we don't like about PE!

being paired or placed in groups with girls they do not get along with

Outdoor PE Not being allowed to wear coats when teachers are!

Disliking the PE teacher



"If I Were in Charge of PE, I Would..."

Pupils at Sir John Thursby shared a wide range of ideas about how they would change PE if they were in charge. Overall, their responses focused on comfort, fairness, fun, choice, and variety.

My big idea is.....

PE Kit and uniform changes

- Changing the PE kit
- Being less strict on PE uniform
- Wearing trainers all day instead of changing
- Being allowed to wear a coat during outdoor lessons!

A very strong theme from pupils was the desire for a more comfortable and flexible PE kit.

My big idea is.....

Inter-school Events

They suggested:

- Holding tournaments during the afternoon
- Relays and Obstacle Courses
- Speed stacking

My big idea is.....

Fairness & inclusion

They suggested:

- Picking fair teams
- More flexibility in who they work with
- Group by friendships not ability

Many pupils spoke about fairness, teamwork, and making sure everyone feels included.

My big idea is.....

More variety & choice

They suggested:

A wider variety of sports
Letting students pick what they want to do
More gym based sessions
More dodgeball
Trampolining
Ice-skating/roller-skating

PE Summary

Social aspects of PE:
Pupils value working with friends and dislike being forced into groups with students they do not get along with.

Environmental comfort:
Outdoor PE in cold weather without coats is a consistent barrier to enjoyment and engagement.

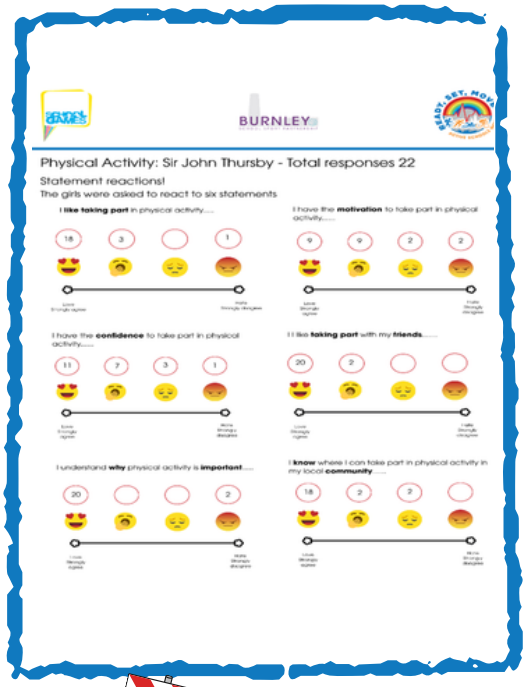
Activity variety:
Pupils enjoy trampolining, gym sessions, and games but find certain activities repetitive or embarrassing (e.g., dance, orienteering).

Teacher influence:
Positive relationships and active teaching increase enjoyment; lack of engagement or poor pacing can reduce it.

Choice and autonomy:
Pupils want more control over kit, partners, and activities to enhance motivation.

Statement reactions using emoji's





Relationship with Physical Activity

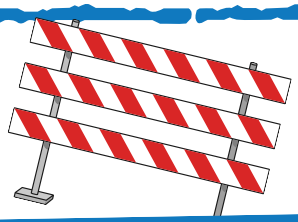
The majority of girls **(81%)** responded positively and reported that they enjoy taking part in physical activity. They demonstrated a good understanding of the benefits of physical activity for health and wellbeing.

However, **59%** reported feeling motivated to take part. Motivation appears to increase significantly when activities involve friends. Peer support and friendships were identified as important factors in building confidence and encouraging participation.

Confidence levels remain a concern:

50% of girls do not feel confident taking part in physical activity.

Many cited concerns about not being good enough or worrying about how they look.



Barriers to participation

Girls identified their top three barriers to participation through a voting activity. Confidence is the central barrier to participation.

Confidence-related factors were the most prominent overall barrier (60) combined votes across related categories). These include:

- Not looking cool
- Body confidence
- Fear of being judged
- Not feeling safe or welcome
- Worries about not having the right kit



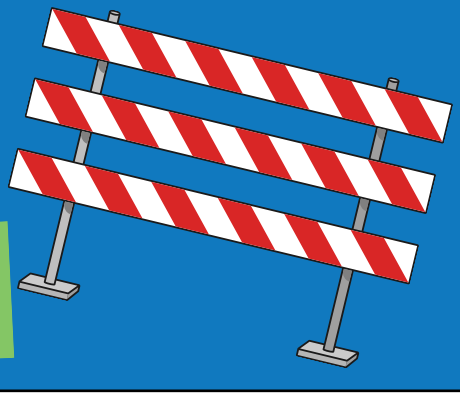


One of the most significant structural barriers identified was attendance at madrassah, along with homework demands and tiredness after school. These factors contribute directly to lower motivation and limited availability for after-school activities.



- Notably 85% of pupils would prefer inter-school events during the school day
- 0% want after-school events

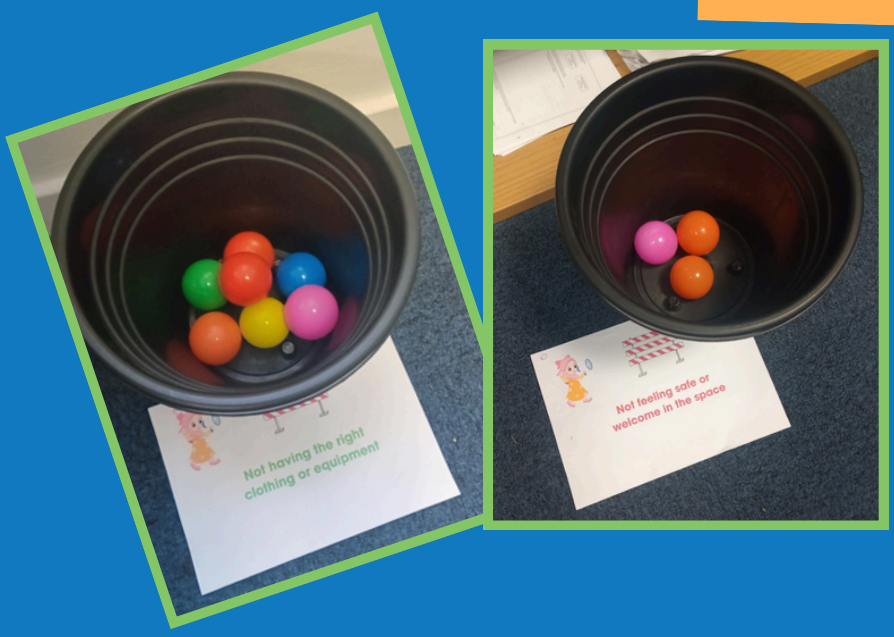
After-school provision alone will not shift participation.



Barriers to participation - voting buckets

Barrier	Votes
Mosque/Madrassah time	23
Not looking cool*	4
Friends won't take part with me	6
Not having the right equipment or clothing*	10
Cost of activities	4
Body confidence and fear of how they will look*	3
Not feeling safe or welcome*	10
Parent influence/not acceptable/fear of being judged*	1
Parent influence – Risk - fear of injury	
Fear of being judged by boys*	1
Not knowing what is available	7
Medical conditions	1
Too much school work/homework	2

***Confidence barriers**



Ways to keep active.....

Using a voting grid - the girls voted for their top three activities that they do or would like to do to keep active

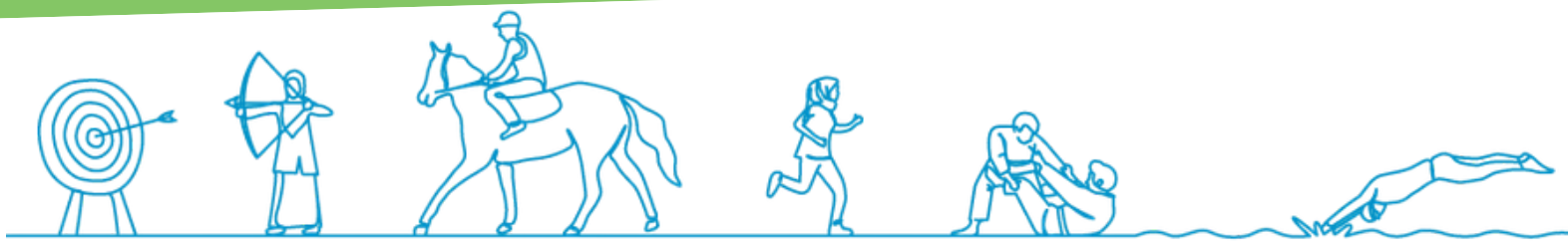
Walking including walking to school 16	Swimming 15	Going to the park 17	Football 12	Cycling 13
Horse-riding 1	Running 3	Archery 2	Martial Arts 3	Gym/Fitness 3
Ten Pin Bowling 3	Rounders/cricket 3	Dancing at home 9	Golf 16	Badminton/Tennis 3
Dancing with a club 6	Dodgeball 12			

Key insights

- Going to the park emerged as the most popular physical activity. This was described as 'hanging out', playing on the equipment or walking – all girls who voted for this mentioned it being informal, relaxed and social but also stressed that access was sometimes restricted by parents.
- Swimming was greatly valued but recognized as challenging to access; girls voiced a need for girls-only sessions.
- Golf was seen as an activity that the girls would be keen to try, as opposed as a way of keeping fit. However, it is important to note that this mas the modified/adapted game of adventure golf, as this would be more 'fun and social'.
- Dodgeball is popular for events, but interestingly only 2 votes in the general physical activity grid, this may suggest it's seen as "event fun" rather than everyday activity.
- Traditional and competitive team sports, (with the exception of football) such as netball and rugby, were notably less popular among the girls.

Emerging patterns:

- Social
- Informal
- Chat-friendly
- Not skill-dominant
- Not high exposure



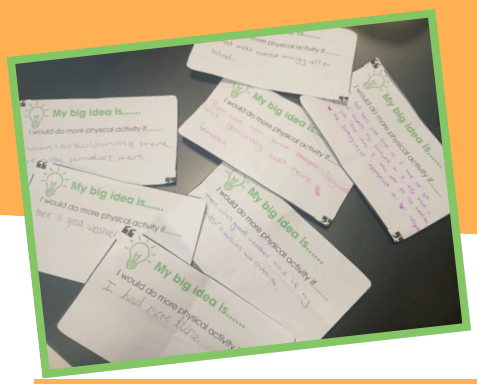
Motivators for increased participation

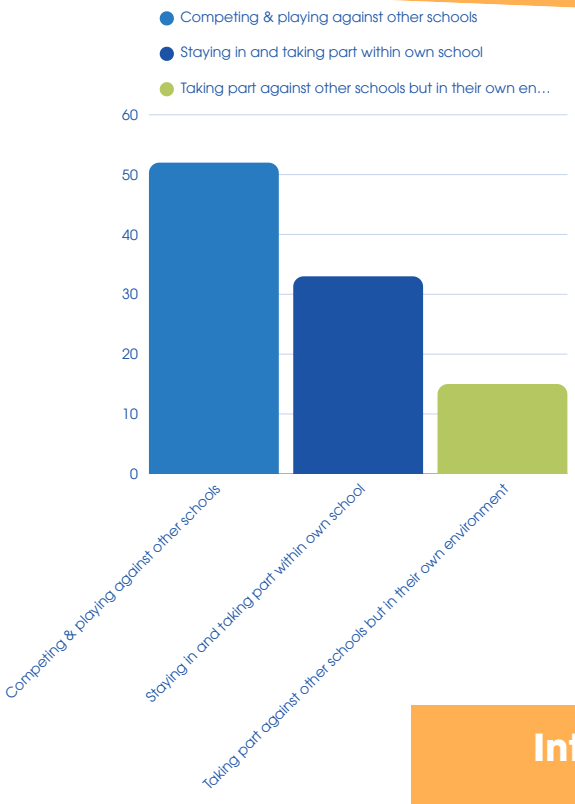
When asked, **"I would do more physical activity if..."**, the most common responses included:

- Having more time
- Feeling more motivated
- Having friends to take part with
- Gaining parental permission
- Having access to suitable kit
- Better weather



If friends attend, they attend.





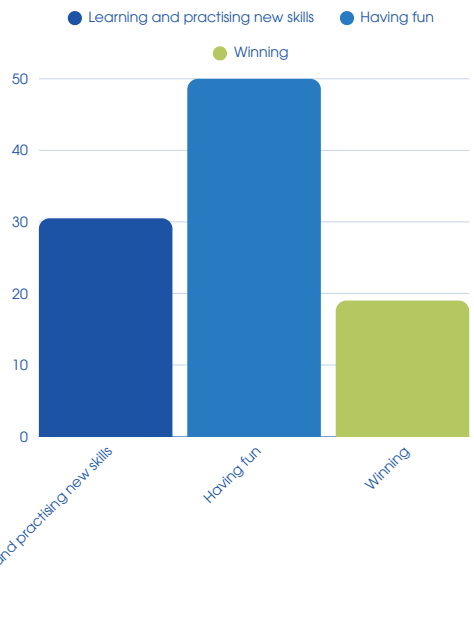
Inter-school activities

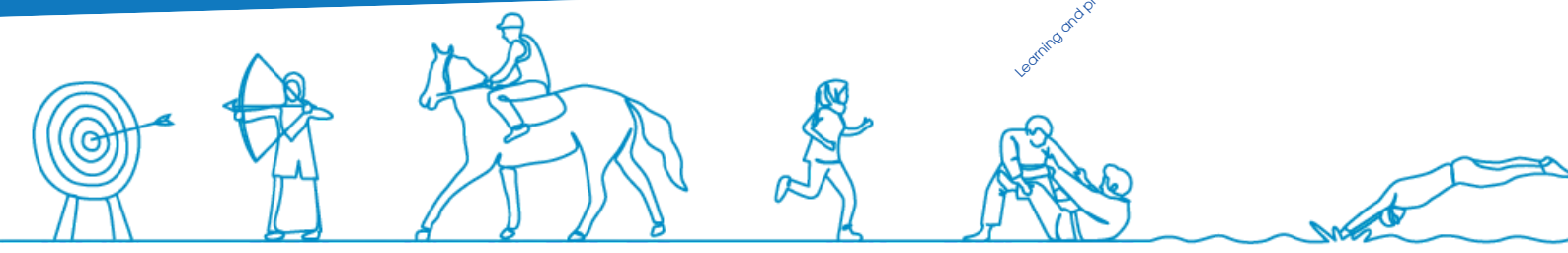
The preference clearly favoured informal, fun-based inter-school events rather than competitive formats.

The girls are not driven by performance outcomes they are driven by enjoyment.

Intent and Purpose

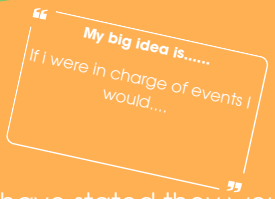
50% of girls asked, believed the focus of sporting events should be about having fun.
31% of girls asked, believed the focus of sporting events should be about learning new skills and trying new activities.
20% of girls asked, believed the focus of sporting events should be about winning.





Pupil ideas!







A number of pupils have stated they would like to see **prizes** (e.g. trophies/medals) given to all those participating.
Pupils believe their efforts for **participation** and **trying hard** should be rewarded as well as the overall winners.

Another popular opinion was that students only wanted to attend competitive events if their **friends** were doing so. This was said to boost confidence level and would gain more interest if they knew their friends would be joining them.

More say in what type of events!

Only events during the school day! **85%** of pupils said all events should be during the school day. Not one pupil voted to take part in events after-school!



What type of inter-school activities....



Through a group "**Hot Air Balloon"** decision-making activity, girls selected the following preferred activities:

- Dodgeball
- Football
- Benchball

These were described as fun, easy to play and social.

The following events were also names but were less poplar than the above;
Park activties
Relay races
Golf
Speed stacking* (this has growing in popularity since the introduction of it into the SSP primary event programme).



Recommendations.....



Develop Confidence-Focused Programming

- Deliver non-competitive, inclusive sessions.
- Introduce beginner-friendly and "no experience needed" activities.
- Promote body-positive messaging and create psychologically safe spaces.

Reframe Competitive Events

- Focus messaging on fun + team spirit
- Introduce:
  - Participation medals
  - Effort awards
  - "Spirit of the Game" awards
- Keep events to 1-2 hours long

Introduce 'Bring a Friend' Entry Model to Events and Clubs

- Allow sign-ups in friendship pairs/groups
- Promote team entry
- Encourage class-based sign-ups

Develop a "Social Physical Activity" Offer

Based on preferences:
You could pilot:

- Social walking club
- Park-based informal sessions
- Social adventure golf introduction







Strategic Recommendations.....

Prioritise In-School Activity Over After-School

Given the clear rejection of after-school events:

- Pilot PE enrichment afternoons or collapsed timetable sport events.
- Embed inter-form competitions within curriculum time.
- Rotate short (1–2 hour) themed events during the school day.

This is likely to have immediate participation impact.

Embed Social-First Structuring

Given 81% value being active with friends:

- Allow friendship pair or small-group sign-ups for events.
- Where pedagogically appropriate, offer partial partner choice in lessons.
- Pilot class-based or form-based competitions rather than ability grouping.
- Introduce "Bring a Friend" entry for enrichment events.

Participation is socially contagious in this cohort.

Remove Environmental and Practical Barriers

- Review outdoor PE coat policy in cold weather.
- Introduce discreet loan kit provision.
- Offer alternative kit options where feasible.
- Minimise written work replacing practical time.
- Ensure lessons are active and well-paced.

Small operational changes could significantly improve perception.

Support Staff Alignment and CPD

Given teacher influence is clearly impactful:

- Reinforce consistent grouping approaches.
- Share findings on confidence barriers.
- Develop strategies for managing dance/running anxiety.
- Align language around effort, safety, and belonging.

Cultural shift requires staff consistency.

Final Conclusion!

Pupil voice from Year 7 girls at Sir John Thursby Community College shows that enjoyment of physical activity is relatively high, but sustained participation is limited by confidence, social dynamics, timing, and emotional safety.

Year 7 girls are socially motivated, enjoyment-oriented, and highly sensitive to confidence and belonging. This is a huge lever. Sport is social currency. They value working with friends, feeling comfortable in their own environment, and being recognised for effort rather than outcome.

Structural barriers; particularly after-school timing, cultural commitments, cold outdoor conditions, and performance-focused models, currently limit engagement more than motivation does.

By shifting towards a more inclusive, socially structured, school-day-accessible model that prioritises psychological safety and participation over competition, the school can meaningfully increase engagement and confidence.