Equal Play: Recommendations to Government

Introduction

Physical education, play and movement are fundamental to human happiness. It improves physical and mental health and helps develop motor and social skills.

With such enormous benefits, it should be a given that all children and young people have equal access to movement, play and physical activity.

However, the access to PE, play and movement is not equal. For far too many, there are barriers to them being able to participate:

- Only 1 in 4 disabled children take part in PE at school.
- 1.7 million disabled and / or SEN children – 20% of the school population.
- Barriers range from a lack of accessible spaces such as changing rooms to a lack of training and career development opportunities to learn how to teach inclusive PE – only 56% of primary school teachers report feeling confident teaching PE.
- There is a clear desire from teachers to improve accessibility and inclusion but they are lacking the tools, skills and knowledge to do so.

The new national curriculum and Enrichment Framework offer a huge opportunity to correct this injustice and ensure that all children and young people have an equal ability to take part in physical activity at school and receive all the benefits it brings.

Redefining PE and building confidence among teachers

It is the context—not the child—that disables.

It is the responsibility of the system and educators to adapt the delivery of PE to meet diverse needs, ensuring every pupil can participate meaningfully rather than being expected to fit a narrow model of sport.

To make PE and school sport truly inclusive, we need to change PE to focus on teaching fundamental movement skills that adapts to the needs of the pupils as well as upskill the workforce with the confidence and knowledge to deliver it.

ParalympicsGB

Recommendation 1

Embed disability inclusion and inclusive physical education as a core element of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and Initial Teacher Education (ITE) to upskill the next generation of the teaching workforce.

Why is this needed?

- The Government's Schools White Paper highlighted the importance of a 'universal offer of high-quality teaching'[1], yet formal primary school teacher training includes only a few hours of PE in total, leaving only 56% of primary teachers feeling confident teaching PE.[2]
- The Schools White Paper puts inclusion at the core of the education system, yet there is currently a lack of focus on inclusion within ITT. Even those specialising in PE at secondary level spend minimal amounts of time focusing on inclusion, with no core requirement for training teachers to engage with disabled students.
- The content of the new PE curriculum will require trainee teachers to have the knowledge and confidence to deliver inclusive PE and address equity of access for all young people.

Ensuring teaching is open for all

Our teaching workforce should reflect our society.

Our teachers are role models to those they teach but it is currently extremely rare to be taught by a disabled teacher. The latest data available from 2025 suggests that only 3% of teachers and 4% of support staff are disabled, far below the 23% of the current UK workforce who are disabled.

[1] Department for Education, Every child achieving and thriving, accessed Apr 2 2026. Available at: Available at: Every child achieving and thriving - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

[2] Ofsted, Levelling the playing field: the physical education subject report (Ofsted, 2023), accessed Mar 30, 2026. Available at: Levelling the playing field: the physical education subject report - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

ParalympicsGB

Recommendation 2

Launch a national campaign to increase the number of disabled people joining the teaching profession, with 20% of the teacher and trainee workforce being disabled by 2035.

Why is this needed?

- Research from the Youth Sport Trust shows that disabled young people are more likely to take inspiration from a PE teacher than non-disabled children[3], ParalympicsGB athletes told us that as students they did not see themselves represented at the front of the classroom, and teachers don't come with the lived experience that would help them develop truly inclusive PE.
- Disability data for the teaching workforce is not currently being collected, and hasn't been for 10 years (disabled teachers made up only 0.5% of the workforce in 2016[4]).
- With such low numbers of disabled teachers and a crisis in attracting and retaining teachers in the workforce there is the potential for attracting a significant number of people into the profession.
- Increasing awareness and improving access routes into the profession would also contribute to closing the disability employment gap, which was 29.7 percentage points in Q2 2025[5].
- With the last figures on the makeup of the teaching workforce collected in 2016 there is the urgent need to collate and publish the number of disabled

[3] Youth Sport Trust, The Class of 2035: How sport can empower a generation to build a brighter tomorrow, (Youth Sport Trust, 2021), accessed Mar 30, 2026. Available at: yst-class-of-2035-2021-edition.pdf (youthsporttrust.org).

[4] Department for Education, School Workforce in England 2016, (Department for Education, 2017), accessed Aug 07, 2024. Available at: School workforce in England: November 2016 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

[5] Department for Work & Pensions, The employment of disabled people 2025, accessed Mar 30, 2026. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2025/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2025#main-points

teachers in the workforce so that we can judge how well we are attracting a disabled workforce into the profession.

Supporting teachers with their professional development

Learning about disability inclusion should not stop as soon as a trainee teacher finishes their training. A lack of training and development on inclusive PE has led teachers to feel underqualified and underconfident.

Teachers should feel empowered to teach inclusive PE throughout their career through being able to access ongoing high-quality training and guidance.

Recommendation 3

Provide dedicated funding for ongoing training and high-quality Continuous Professional Development (CPD) on inclusive education.

Why is this needed?

- To ensure that existing teachers, sports coaches and other practitioners across the primary and secondary workforce regularly access high-quality CPD on how to deliver adaptive and inclusive PE, this should also include the importance of physical education in a child's development (e.g. using the Inclusive PE and Activity Training Programmes provided by YST and Activity Alliance), with training delivered to all practitioners by September 2028. The Enrichment Framework and School Sports Partnerships should be used to support this work, putting inclusivity at the core and ensuring equity for disabled children and those with SEN.
- The Schools White Paper promises an enrichment entitlement for all children, and it is important that steps are taken to ensure this is equitable for disabled children, given research tells us that only 25% of disabled children take part in

sporting activity all of the time at school, compared to 41% of non-disabled children.[6]

- The content of the new PE curriculum will require the existing cohort of qualified teachers to have the knowledge and confidence to deliver inclusive PE and address equity of access for all young people.
- Physical education is a crucial part of young people's development: it helps support better health and wellbeing, which in turn supports effective learning and in turn academic attainment,[7] yet research with trainee teachers showed that PE is perceived as having low status and priority as a subject.[8] Even when PE is prioritised within the curriculum, teaching approaches often emphasise traditional sports, which can be more difficult to adapt for disabled children.

Building Capacity and Accessible Sports Spaces in our Schools and Community

> *PE, sport and physical activity have a tremendous power to change the lives of disabled people by providing purpose, wellbeing and supporting key social skills like confidence, teamwork and leadership.*
>
> *However, too many disabled people find themselves unable to take part due to a lack of accessible facilities, changing rooms and equipment.*

Recommendation 4

Introduce a specific framework in line with the Ruby Bishop Inclusive Physical Education and Equal Access to Sport Campaign whereby all schools ensure

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[6] Activity Alliance, My Active Future: Including every child (Activity Alliance, 2020), accessed Mar 30, 2026. Available at: https://www.activityalliance.org.uk/how-we-help/research/5658-my-active-future-including-every-child-march-2020.

[7] Youth Sport Trust, Evidence Paper - The Link Between Physical Activity and Attainment in Children and Young People (Youth Sport Trust, 2022), accessed Mar 30, 2026. Available at: The Link Between Physical Activity and Attainment in Children and Young People - Youth Sport Trust.

[8] Vicky Randall, "We want to, but we can't': pre-service teachers' experiences of learning to teach primary physical education" Oxford Review of Education, 49, no. 2 (2022): 209-228.

their outdoor and indoor PE spaces, changing facilities and equipment are accessible for disabled children, and where PE is being provided at external leisure and sports facilities **ensure that disabled children are provided with accessible transport and facilities.** Such adaptations may include the provision of sports wheelchairs, pool hoists, ramps, modified surfaces, clear signage, and adapted equipment such as larger or softer balls, and adjustable height nets and goals. Working collaboratively with local providers will assist with ensuring the community workforce are upskilled to provide inclusive experiences across extracurricular sport, school competitions and wider sporting opportunities.

Why is this needed?

- One of the barriers that teachers talk about when it comes to the activity gap in schools is around a lack of accessible spaces or equipment within schools for inclusive PE.
- Providing these inclusive spaces and equipment isn't just about supporting disabled pupils but also encouraging their non-disabled peers to broaden their awareness and improve their understanding, creating a whole-school culture of belonging and empathy.
- The Government has promised funding for inclusive physical spaces in schools, and this should include space and equipment for inclusive PE.
- Sport for Development Charities and social prescribing must be leveraged to fill geographic gaps in inclusive sport and physical activity provision and facilitate a "warm handover" between schools and community clubs. Combined with a specific framework for accessible school and community sports facilities.
- These pathways could be linked to upskilled volunteering roles to provide vital upskilling and employment opportunities for NEETs and long-term economically inactive disabled people.