



PE Toolkit for Schools



About Inspire

Inspire was founded in 2019 with a clear vision: to tackle health inequalities and amplify the voices of young women across Cheshire and beyond. We recognised that too often girls' experiences are overlooked, and their needs in areas such as physical activity, mental health, and wellbeing are not fully understood. Our aim is to change this by placing young women at the heart of everything we do.

Through our projects and research, we work to remove barriers that prevent girls from thriving. Whether it's supporting schools to deliver inclusive P.E. lessons, creating safe spaces for young women to share their views, or offering practical wellbeing resources, Inspire is committed to improving both physical and mental health outcomes for the next generation.

Our Mission

- To encourage young women to find their voice and recognise their true value.
- To inspire young women to take action and make positive changes within their lives and the wider community.
- To empower young women to improve their mental and physical health and wellbeing.

About the toolkit

This toolkit has been created to support schools in removing barriers and making P.E. and sport more inclusive for girls and young women. It provides practical guidance and ideas based on local research (Hear Her Voice) and national insight from Women in Sport, ensuring that girls' voices are at the heart of how P.E. is delivered.

The toolkit focuses on:

- Challenging gender stereotypes and stopping the separation of "girls'" and "boys'" sports.
- Adapting P.E. lessons to be inclusive of different abilities, confidence levels, and access needs.
- Embedding girls' opinions and lived experiences into planning and timetables.
- Offering variety, choice, and flexible approaches (including alternative activities).
- Recognising the role of P.E. in supporting girls' wellbeing, health, confidence, and sense of belonging, not just physical fitness.

By listening directly to young women, this toolkit highlights why many girls disengage from sport, and what changes schools can make to help them feel confident, motivated, and included.



More than one million teenage girls (43%) who once considered themselves 'sporty', disengage from sport following primary school.

What are the Barriers for Girls?

Personal Barriers

- Confidence and anxiety: Girls report feeling judged, nervous, and insecure in P.E. settings.
- Body image: 75% of girls say they feel self-conscious about their bodies
- Periods and puberty: Over half of girls have used their period to avoid P.E. lessons, and many lack access to products or supportive policies.

Practical Barriers

- Limited variety: Girls describe school P.E. as "boring" and "repetitive," with activities chosen for them rather than with them.
- Changing rooms: Unhygienic, overcrowded, or unsafe changing spaces are a recurring issue.
- Uniform rules: Strict kit policies increase insecurity and discourage participation.

Environmental Barriers

- Male-dominated culture: Sport is often seen as "for boys," with girls discouraged from trying activities such as football or rugby.
- Teacher influence: Girls in our research reported being shouted at, or seeing "favourites" chosen by staff, which discouraged others.
- Competitive culture: Many girls said large groups and high-pressure environments reduce enjoyment and confidence.

What are the Barriers for Girls?

Social and Cultural Barriers

- Peer influence: 58% of girls agree they drop out of sport because their friends do.
- Stereotypes: Girls face ongoing assumptions about what sports they "should" or "shouldn't" play.
- Lack of role models: 42% of girls say there are not enough positive sporting role models for them to look up to.

The Result

- Only 12% of girls aged 14 meet recommended physical activity guidelines – roughly half the number of boys.
- 57% of girls in our Hear Her Voice research said they do not currently participate in any sport or physical activity.

The Conclusion

- Together, these barriers show why it is essential for schools to rethink how P.E. is delivered
- Schools can do this by making it inclusive, varied, and confidence-building rather than repetitive, competitive, and intimidating.

Listening to Girls' Voices

An important part of creating inclusive P.E. is listening directly to students and making sure their voices shape the activities on offer. Girls in our Hear Her Voice research told us they often feel unheard when it comes to P.E. and sport, and that their concerns about confidence, body image, or enjoyment are dismissed.

Schools can change this by regularly asking:

- What activities do students enjoy most, and which feel least engaging?
- What new sports or activities would they like to try that aren't currently offered?
- Do students feel restricted to activities traditionally labelled as "girls' or boys' sports"?
- Do they feel comfortable, included, and supported in P.E. lessons?

Simple questionnaires, quick polls, or feedback sessions each term can give pupils the chance to express their opinions and suggest improvements. This not only helps schools design more engaging programmes but also shows girls that their voices matter.

By acting on pupil feedback, schools can offer a wider variety of sports, challenge gender stereotypes, and signpost young people to local opportunities outside school- ensuring every girl feels confident, included, and heard.



Listening to Girls' Voices

"Don't use the box of spare P.E. kit!!"

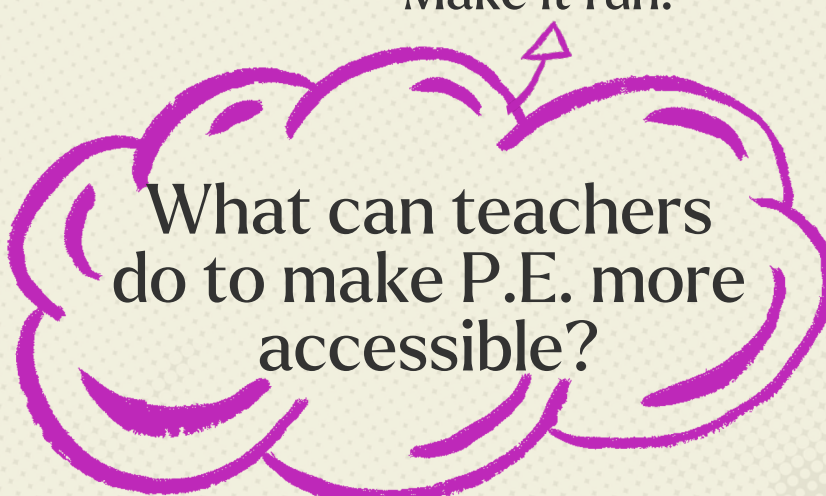
"Don't separate into 'girls' and 'boys' sport."

"No male teachers in the girls' changing room."

"Make it fun!"

"More time to get changed."

"Let people opt out."



What can teachers do to make P.E. more accessible?

"Take girls' problems seriously."

"Keep boys away from the girls' changing rooms!"

"Make the changing rooms more private and big enough."

"We prefer to have women teachers."

"Offer alternatives and more choice."

"Be more understanding and sensitive about mental health and self harm."

As part of our Hear Her Voice research we asked girls what they wish teachers would do to help them feel more comfortable to participate. This is what they said.

Improving Confidence

What we can do to ensure P.E. lessons improve confidence:

- Ensure every girl is included in activities and teams, regardless of confidence, ability, or previous experience. No one should be left sitting on the side.
- Prioritise wellbeing and enjoyment over competition. Girls told us they value the social, health, and confidence benefits of being active. Schools can build this in by combining physical activity with supportive discussions or workshops on topics like mental health, nutrition, body confidence, and healthy lifestyles.
- Listen to girls about kit and comfort. If students feel uncomfortable in what they are wearing, they are less likely to enjoy or participate. Involve them in decisions about uniform rules or kit design to reduce barriers.
- Use relatable role models. Invite current or former students, local young women, or female athletes to share their journeys. Seeing people "like them" enjoying sport makes a powerful difference.
- Put confidence at the centre. Every P.E. lesson should help girls leave feeling stronger, more capable, and more positive about themselves.



Removing Barriers: Periods

Periods should never be a barrier to participation in P.E., yet many girls avoid sport during their cycle because of pain, discomfort, or embarrassment. Our Hear Her Voice research also highlighted that even when free products are available in schools, girls often have to ask for them, which can feel intimidating, especially if they have to approach a male member of staff. This prevents many from accessing the support they need.

Schools can reduce these barriers by:

- Providing free, easily accessible period products in changing rooms and toilets- without the need to ask.
- Normalising periods in conversations so girls don't feel ashamed or singled out.
- Encouraging gentle activity such as yoga, stretching, light strength training, or aerobic exercise, which research shows can reduce cramps, improve mood, and ease symptoms.
- Offering options and flexibility. Not every girl experiences the same symptoms or cycle. Giving students a choice; from low-impact activities, to more energetic options- ensures they can stay active in a way that feels manageable.

By making periods part of the conversation and providing the right support, schools can help girls feel confident to take part in P.E. throughout the month, rather than feeling excluded or embarrassed.



Benefits of Being Active for Girls

For many girls, the message around physical activity is often reduced to "it's good for you". While this is true, it doesn't explain the full picture, especially why being active is particularly important for women's health and wellbeing throughout their lives.

Physical health

- **Bone and muscle strength:** Regular activity in teenage years builds stronger bones, which helps protect against osteoporosis later in life – a condition that affects women more often than men.
- **Heart health:** Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death for women worldwide. Being active helps reduce the risk and supports a healthy heart from a young age.
- **Hormonal health:** Exercise can ease period pain, regulate cycles, and support a healthier menopause transition later in life.

Mental wellbeing

- **Reduced stress and anxiety:** Movement releases endorphins that improve mood and reduce stress.
- **Better body image:** Physical activity can help girls feel stronger and more positive about what their bodies can do, rather than how they look.
- **Confidence and resilience:** Learning new skills and overcoming challenges in sport builds confidence that carries into other areas of life.

Social connection

- **Friendship and belonging:** Girls told us they value the chance to connect with others in a relaxed, supportive environment.
- **Role models and inspiration:** Seeing other women active– friends, teachers, mothers, coaches– shows girls that sport is for them too, at every stage of life.

Lifelong impact

Being active as a girl sets the foundations for adulthood. Women who stay active are more likely to:

- Maintain independence and mobility in later life.
- Manage stress, sleep better, and balance busy lifestyles.
- Model healthy behaviours to the next generation.



Checklist

Use this checklist to make sure your P.E. lessons are accessible, engaging, and inclusive for all girls.

1. Environment & Facilities

- ☐ Are changing rooms clean, private, and safe?
- ☐ Are free period products available in toilets/changing rooms without having to ask?
- ☐ Do students have access to drinking water and space to rest if needed?
- ☐ Do students have adequate time to change into kit and shower before changing back into uniform?
- ☐ Are kit/uniform rules flexible to support comfort, religion, body confidence, and weather?

2. Activity Choice

- ☐ Does the timetable include a variety of activities (e.g. yoga, dance, football, boxing, trampolining, walking)?
- ☐ Are students regularly asked for feedback on what activities they'd like to try?
- ☐ Do lessons avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes (e.g. only boys doing football)?
- ☐ Are there confidence-building alternatives available for girls who feel anxious in large groups?

3. Teaching Style

- ☐ Are lessons delivered in a supportive, encouraging way rather than focusing only on competition?
- ☐ Do teachers and coaches understand the importance of body confidence and sensitivity when working with girls?
- ☐ Do staff use inclusive language and avoid favouritism?
- ☐ Are pupils recognised for effort, progress, and enjoyment – not just winning?

4. Access & Inclusion

- ☐ Are activities adapted for students with different abilities or additional needs?
- ☐ Are there women-only opportunities or quiet/sensory-friendly sessions available where possible?
- ☐ Are girls signposted to local affordable clubs or opportunities beyond school?
- ☐ Are role models (older students, alumni, local female athletes) used to inspire participation?

5. Wellbeing & Voice

- ☐ Do lessons highlight the mental health and wellbeing benefits of being active, not just fitness?
- ☐ Are girls given regular opportunities to share their views and influence what happens in P.E.?
- ☐ Is student feedback acted on and fed back to them ("you said, we did")?
- ☐ Do lessons help build confidence, friendships, and a sense of belonging?

If you can tick most of these boxes, your P.E. is on track to be inclusive, engaging, and empowering for girls.

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All national statistics in this resource
sourced from: womeninsport.org/