



FIT TO LEARN, FREE TO PLAY:

THE IMPACT OF WEARING PE UNIFORM ALL DAY AT SCHOOL

Summary Report

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The Fit to Learn pilot project was a collaboration between Women in Sport, United Learning, the Youth Sport Trust and the Association for Physical Education (funded by Sport England). Led by Women in Sport, the project piloted a policy allowing pupils to wear their PE uniform all day on days they had PE lessons, with the aim of supporting them to be more physically active.

Whilst the benefits of such a policy may be felt by all pupils, we wanted to understand the impact on girls given the significant barriers they face to being active both in and outside of school. Girls are consistently less active than boys across all life stages, with just 46% meeting recommended minimum activity levels compared to 52% of boys. Girls are also 24% less likely than boys to participate in team sport (46% of girls vs 70% of boys).¹ Research shows that girls' engagement with PE is particularly affected by PE uniform and the changing room experience: for example, a third (33%) of girls feel better uniform options would help them participate more comfortably during their period, and over half (55%) of secondary-aged girls say they would like to wear PE kit all day on PE days.²



WHAT WE DID

The Fit to Learn pilot took place in the Autumn term of 2025 across twelve schools, who introduced the policy for select year groups. Following the pilot, an evaluation was carried out by Women in Sport from January to May 2026. Women in Sport worked with the twelve participating schools to survey pupils, PE teachers and Senior Leaders, running qualitative focus groups and depth interviews with five of these schools. These five were selected to represent diverse pupil populations and locations across the North and South of England.

PARTICIPANTS	
QUANTITATIVE SURVEYS	QUALITATIVE GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS
1,098 pupils	29 girls participated in focus groups (Yrs 7 - 9)
28 PE teachers	5 PE teachers participated in depth interviews
7 Senior leaders	5 Senior leaders participated in depth interviews

[1] Sport England (2025) Active Lives Children & Young People Survey, Academic Year 2024-2025

[2] Youth Sport Trust (2025) Girls Active National Report: June 2025 Girls' Report

THE IMPACT OF FIT TO LEARN



TIME SAVED, LEARNING GAINED

86% of PE teachers said around **10–25 mins extra learning time** was gained per lesson

↳ **9 in 10** (88%) felt this allowed them to **teach more PE**

IMPROVED ENJOYMENT, MOTIVATION AND CONFIDENCE IN PE

6 in 10 60% of girls said they **enjoyed PE more**



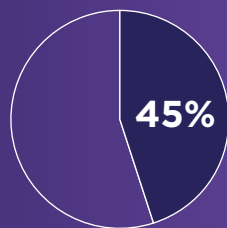
Half of girls

felt more motivated (53%) and **more confident** (49%) to take part in PE

GIRLS WERE MORE ACTIVE IN AND BEYOND PE

Nearly half

of girls said the policy made them **more active travelling to and from school**



Around 6 in 10 girls

(62%) were more **active in PE** and felt they **had more opportunities** to be active throughout the day (59%).



IMPROVED MOOD AND WELLBEING

Two-fifths

(41%) of pupils said the policy **improved their mood**



Girls were more likely than boys to report feeling **less stressed and anxious** overall



REDUCING PUBERTY RELATED BARRIERS

6 in 10 (63%) girls felt it was **easier to take part in PE on their period**

STRONG INCLUSION BENEFITS AND IMPROVED ATTENDANCE

Among PE teachers:

82% said it was easier for pupils from low-income backgrounds to comply with PE uniform policy

75% said it improved how the religious or cultural needs of pupils are met

71% said it improved inclusion for pupils with SEND

OVERWHELMINGLY SUPPORTED

7 in 10 (72%) pupils wanted the policy to continue



8 in 10 (78%) PE teachers would recommend it to other schools



Significant time savings unlocked more learning opportunities and behaviour challenges related to the changing room were eliminated

Three-quarters (75%) of PE teachers reported significant time savings because of the policy, with 86% estimating that between 10 and 25 minutes of learning time was recovered per lesson. Almost 9 in 10 teachers (88%) felt this allowed them to teach more PE. Pupils echoed this benefit.

Alongside this, the policy also removed friction around forgotten kit, which was historically a common reason for non-participation. Additionally, it smoothed out a potentially stressful point in the school day: 81% of PE teachers found it easier to manage the transition between lessons and 82% reported fewer behavioural issues resulting from clothing/changing room issues.

**THREE-
QUARTERS**

**OF PE TEACHERS SAID
THE POLICY SAVED TIME
GETTING CHANGED**

9 IN 10

**SAID THIS ALLOWED THEM
TO TEACH MORE PE**

“If you were to lose 10% of a maths lesson or 10% of an English lesson, someone would be saying, oh, this isn’t right, something’s going wrong here. We’re losing too much learning time. Yet in PE it was almost expected — oh, it’s okay, because I’ve got to get changed.”

Senior Leader

“I had so much time taken up by the transitions of getting changed at the start and the end of the lessons... I was getting about 25, 30 minutes of PE outside. Now I can get pretty much the full hour.”

PE Teacher



The policy reduced anxiety, improved wellbeing and eased puberty-related barriers

Girls were significantly more likely than boys to report feeling less stressed and anxious overall because of the policy (30% vs. 23%). Two-fifths (41%) of all pupils said it improved their mood. Girls described how the prospect of getting changed could hang over them for hours before their PE lesson, affecting their concentration in other subjects and, for some, their willingness to come to school at all.

30%

OF GIRLS FELT LESS STRESSED AND ANXIOUS

“Three lessons before PE, that’ll be on your mind in those three lessons. And then it will kind of distract you.”

Girl, Year 7

“You can do badly in other lessons because you’re worrying about PE.”

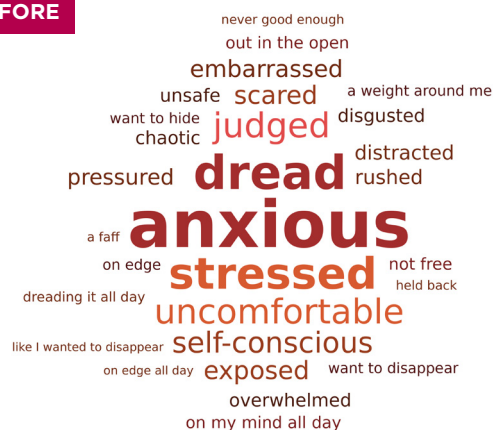
Girl, Year 7

The changing room was a space where girls felt exposed to judgment during a time of significant physical and emotional change during puberty. A quarter of girls (25%) reported feeling less anxious about getting changed in front of others as a result of the policy, and over a third of PE teachers (36%) cited ‘reduced anxiety or embarrassment around changing’ as one of the most important benefits. The shift in how girls described their feelings about PE, moving from words associated with anxiety and dread to those associated with freedom, confidence and enjoyment, reflect a meaningful change in their relationship with physical activity.

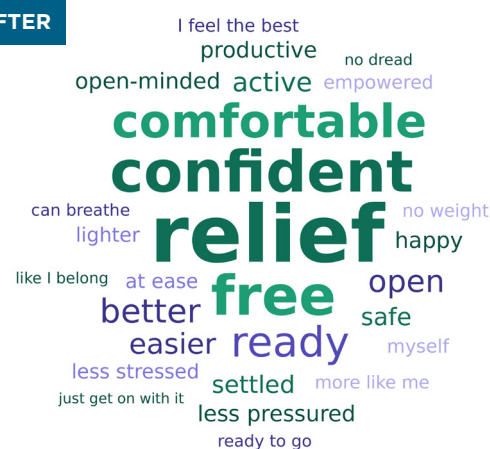
TWO-THIRDS

OF GIRLS (63%) SAID IT WAS EASIER TO TAKE PART IN PE WHEN ON THEIR PERIOD

BEFORE



AFTER



For girls managing their periods, the impact was particularly striking: two-thirds (63%) said it was easier to take part in PE when on their period. A third of PE teachers (32%) reported improved willingness among girls to participate in PE during their period as a key benefit.

“If you have a period, it’s like you can just go and do PE rather than having to worry.”

Girl, Year 7

“Their confidence, in essence, has gone up because you eradicate something that was the barrier — not the actual PE lesson and taking part in sport itself.”

PE Teacher

Improved comfort - improved focus, in PE lessons and beyond

Over a third of pupils (37%) felt wearing PE uniform all day made it easier to move around school; girls were more likely to say this was a main benefit of the policy than boys (40% vs. 37%), suggesting that without the restrictions of “feminine” uniforms like skirts and school shoes, they were free to move and ultimately be more active.

Being comfortable and able to move also had an impact on focus, which has positive implications for engagement in lessons throughout the school day: a third of pupils (37%) said that they could focus better in their PE lessons, while in the qualitative research some girls said that wearing PE uniform made it easier for them to concentrate in lessons more broadly as they felt physically comfortable.

“It’s just easier to concentrate if you’re not thinking about whether your uniform is too tight, or too stiff. So, I think I actually concentrate more if I’m comfortable.”

Girl, Year 7

Strong inclusion benefits and reduced absenteeism

By eliminating the changing room experience, the policy delivered significant inclusion benefits. Among PE teachers surveyed:

82%

reported that it had improved the ease with which pupils from low-income households could comply with PE uniform policy

71%

reported that it improved how the religious or cultural needs of pupils are met

75%

reported that it had made it easier for pupils with SEND to take part in PE

Teachers reflected on what the changing room had previously meant for pupils with SEND, describing it as a ‘chaotic and overwhelming environment’ which could prevent these pupils from engaging with PE at all. Some schools also saw a reduction in broader absenteeism: pupils who had previously avoided school altogether on PE days to escape the changing room were no longer doing so.

“Imagine going through puberty as an autistic child anyway. So, you don’t like change. You don’t like the sensations of puberty... So, you’re going through all of that and then we’re going to pile on you that you then need to do that in front of other people.”

Senior Leader

“Our attendance rates are really good, but they do tend to sometimes dip — or for our most vulnerable children, they’ll avoid going to PE or they’ll truant PE because they don’t want to get changed. That’s been eradicated.”

Senior Leader



Girls were more active in PE, including the least sporty

Six in ten (62%) girls said the policy made them more active in PE lessons. Crucially, the benefits were not limited to girls who were already engaged in sport: 43% of girls who described themselves as 'not sporty and never were' also said the policy made them more active. This reflects the real opportunity the policy has to reach the girls who face the most significant barriers to participation. Black/Black British girls were the most likely to report being more active in PE, a particularly significant finding given that Black girls are the least active group by ethnicity nationally.

PE teachers echoed these observations: two-thirds (67%) agreed the policy improved pupil engagement in PE lessons, and around half reported improved PE attendance for both girls (53%) and boys (47%).

"I feel like I have more freedom, like I'm more able to go to things after school and like I just feel better in PE lessons, and I can try my best as well because I feel the best."

Girl, Year 7

"We are experiencing 99, 100% engagement most of the time. Having worked in previous schools where this wasn't in place, most lessons you might have had two to three students — that many each lesson — that had an issue."

PE Teacher



Girls enjoyed PE more and felt more motivated and confident

Six in ten girls (60%) said they enjoyed PE more as a result of the policy, while half felt more motivated (53%) and more confident (49%) to take part. Three-quarters (74%) of PE teachers observed an increased sense of enjoyment overall for pupils. Beyond PE, around half of girls reported feeling more enjoyment, motivation and confidence when being physically active in school more broadly.

**SIX IN TEN
GIRLS**

**(60%) SAID THEY ENJOYED
PE MORE**

"I absolutely love not having to feel anxious or scared or thinking what other people would think of me."

Girl, Year 7

"I don't have to worry about who's judging me, what are they going to think, what are they going to say. I can just get on with it."

Girl, Year 7

Girls became more active beyond PE, especially on their journeys to school

Six in ten girls (59%) felt wearing their PE uniform all day meant they had more opportunities to be active at school, which is reflected in increased activity levels beyond PE lessons. Nearly half of girls (45%) said the policy made them more active travelling to and from school. Around a third were also more active in after-school, lunchtime or breakfast clubs (28%) and in community sport or leisure settings (29%). Schools observed girls seeking out more opportunities to be active, including during lunchtimes and in clubs, with PE teachers noting requests for more sports and activities.



NEARLY HALF

OF GIRLS (45%) SAID THE POLICY MADE THEM MORE ACTIVE TRAVELLING TO AND FROM SCHOOL

“If I’m in my PE kit, it’s easier to think I’ll walk to school rather than get a lift ... and then at the end of the day, it’s easier to go to the park and kick a ball around or like just run about with my friends rather than think I can’t because I’m in a skirt and my school shoes.”

Girl, Year 7

Overwhelming support to continue

Schools and pupils were positive about continuing the policy:

SEVEN IN TEN PUPILS

(72%) WANTED THE POLICY TO CONTINUE

EIGHT IN TEN PE TEACHERS

(78%) SAID THEY WOULD RECOMMEND IT TO OTHER SCHOOLS

ALL SENIOR LEADERS

SURVEYED WANTED IT TO CONTINUE

“I think every school should be doing it.”

Senior Leader

“Think carefully first about what the barriers and what the benefits are of the process. What you’ll find is that the benefits to doing it outweigh the barriers and the pitfalls of doing it.”

PE Teacher

ADVICE FOR SCHOOLS WHEN IMPLEMENTING THE POLICY

For schools keen to implement a Fit to Learn policy, planning proactively will be key to ensuring the policy has the most positive impact possible. Based on the findings of this pilot, our advice for schools is to:

“Changing from kit to uniform was such a big language change... the idea behind it is now that this is our PE uniform, we’re proud to wear it properly.”

Senior Leader



Ensure that PE uniform is well-designed – or the change may be counterproductive

- Consult with pupils and listen to their needs as part of any PE uniform re-design you do, including girls and pupils with SEND and religious or cultural needs.
- Offer a variety of appropriate PE uniform choices to meet different needs, for example shorts, leggings and tracksuit bottoms, long and short-sleeve options, and darker-coloured items. Consider consulting the **Inclusive Sportswear Charter** for best practice guidance.
- Ensure that PE uniform is affordable and accessible for all pupils, considering **UK government guidance** on developing school uniform, including limiting the number of branded items.

Be proactive and flexible when it comes to hygiene concerns – to ensure comfort and peace of mind

- Provide a PE uniform list which includes spare clothing items, washing aids and deodorant, alongside other essential items for good health, comfort and confidence such as sports bras.
- Keep a ‘caught short’ kit to hand for girls, including period and hygiene products like deodorant, which girls can access easily and discreetly.
- Ensure girls have access to a changing room and toilets during PE lessons so they can manage their periods effectively whilst being active, and change items of clothing if needed, for example in wet weather.

“We’ve just communicated with parents and said, on these days it might be worthwhile bringing in your uniform and we’ll give you time to change if the girls so wish to at the end of the lesson just so that you can change into something dry that’s comfortable.”

PE Teacher



Set clear expectations from the start and reinforce the benefits – with pupils, staff and parents

- Communicate the introduction of the policy and the accepted PE uniform in the term prior to introducing it and provide regular reminders across communications throughout the year (e.g. assemblies, parent newsletters, staff meetings).
- Share the evidence and benefits for girls, pupils with SEND and those from ethnically diverse communities.
- Consider the way PE clothing is described, for example describing a ‘PE uniform’ rather than a ‘PE kit’ to embed expectations and standards.
- On PE days, ensure PE uniform is checked at the start of the school day so that issues are dealt with swiftly rather than at the start of PE lessons.
- Consider a phased roll-out to help manage and learn from the policy change before rolling out across the whole school, starting with year 7s to set expectations early.

KEY BENEFITS

- ✓ Reduced anxiety
- ✓ Improved wellbeing
- ✓ More active learning time in PE
- ✓ Better focus in lessons
- ✓ Increased attendance
- ✓ Fewer behavioural issues





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you have used this research.**

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