How learning builds in Physical Education

A guide for parents and carers | Years 3 to 6

Children develop the skills, knowledge and confidence to enjoy being active. Across Key Stage 2, they build control and coordination, learn to make decisions in games and use feedback to improve. Familiar skills are revisited through different activities with increasing challenge and independence.

Area	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
Movement and performance	Build balance, coordination and control. Link shapes, travelling actions and balances in gymnastics and short dance sequences.	Use controlled jumps and landings on suitable apparatus. Perform longer dance sequences using different levels, speeds and actions.	Explore matching, mirroring and partner balances. Create and refine a dance phrase within a theme, with greater precision and timing.	Apply established control and coordination across activities such as hockey, volleyball and sports hall athletics. Refine movements after observing their effect.
Games and tactics	Learn to pass, receive, strike and find space. Follow simple rules and try basic attacking, defending and fielding decisions.	Combine skills more fluently. Use positioning, passing choices and teamwork to keep possession or make scoring more difficult.	Apply skills under greater pressure. Use movement and space to create opportunities and choose actions that support the team.	Combine technical skills with tactical choices. Respond when possession changes and explain how decisions help a team attack or defend.
Running jumping and throwing	Learn sprinting, paced running, relay passing, a standing jump and simple pull and push throws. Follow safe routines.	Compare sprint starts, control running pace and refine jumping and throwing. Begin to use a sling throwing action.	Refine sprint and relay technique, pace a middle distance run and combine a hop, step and jump in an introductory triple jump.	Refine running, jumping and throwing techniques. Use comparable results and observations to choose a specific improvement and work towards a personal best.
Reflecting and working together	Cooperate with a partner or group. Describe what worked well and try a change following feedback.	Share roles, give specific feedback and recognise progress. Set a personal fitness target and compare repeated performances.	Use observation, feedback and recorded information to select practice. Explain or demonstrate activities clearly to others.	Justify a practice choice and evaluate its effect. Adapt team strategies during challenges and take increasing responsibility for improvement.

Revisiting knowledge

Progress is about applying skills with greater control, consistency and understanding. Children return to familiar movements and decisions in new contexts; improvement is recognised through personal progress as well as successful participation.

Applying learning in new contexts

The activities provide different ways to use and extend earlier learning. The examples below show how skills connect across the school; the curriculum overview lists the units for each year group.

Area	Earlier learning	Later application
Passing and finding space	Year 3 ringball and Year 4 netball Pass, catch and pivot; look for a teammate in space.	Year 5 basketball and Year 6 handball Combine movement and passing under pressure. Use space to create a scoring opportunity and respond when possession changes.
Creating movement sequences	Year 3 dance and gymnastics Link shapes, travelling actions and balances. Keep to a musical beat and repeat a short sequence.	Years 4 and 5 dance and gymnastics Develop longer phrases, apparatus work and partner balances. Refine timing, body shape and transitions using feedback.
Striking and fielding	Year 3 kickball and rounders Send a ball into space and work together to return it quickly.	Year 5 cricket and Year 6 rounders Apply more consistent fielding and striking. Communicate decisions and use performance information to identify improvements.
Cooperation and problem solving	Year 4 multi-skills Coordinate actions with others and use communication to solve shared physical challenges.	Year 6 outdoor and adventurous activities Agree roles and strategies, adapt a plan when a challenge changes and evaluate how well the team worked together.

Swimming and water safety

In Year 5, children attend swimming lessons led by instructors at the local leisure centre. Teaching develops confidence and works towards three outcomes: swimming competently, confidently and proficiently over at least 25 metres; using a range of strokes effectively; and performing safe self-rescue in different water-based situations.

Confidence and participation

Across PE, children learn to follow rules, use equipment safely, cooperate and respect others. Activities can be adapted through equipment, space, task or support so that children can participate and experience success. Fitness learning helps them understand how different activities develop the body and why regular activity matters.

How to use this guide

Read this alongside the PE curriculum overview to see both the activities children experience and how their learning develops. Units may be taught at different points in the year, with earlier skills revisited when they are needed.