# Decline in secondary school PE hours hits nearly 4,000 in a year amid rising child inactivity



A concerning report from the Youth Sport Trust (YST) has highlighted what it describes as a "troubling decline" in physical education (PE) within England's secondary schools. According to the charity, nearly 4,000 hours of PE have been forfeited in just the last year among state-funded schools. This significant reduction marks a worrying trend that YST argues should serve as a wake-up call to society regarding the health and well-being of young people. The statistical review reveals that, following the London 2012 Olympics, there has been a staggering cumulative loss of almost 45,000 hours from secondary school PE timetables, alongside a 7% reduction in the number of PE teachers nationwide.

The implications of these findings extend beyond mere numbers. In a striking revelation, it was noted that around 30% of children in England are not achieving even 30 minutes of physical activity each day, a figure that underscores the severity of physical inactivity among young individuals. YST's CEO, Ali Oliver, has advocated for PE to be recognised as a core subject within the national curriculum, asserting that necessary changes in educational policy are essential to reverse these downward trends.

The Education Secretary has responded by stating the government’s commitment to "break down barriers to accessing PE and school sports for young people." However, this reassurance stands in the face of broader concerns emanating from educational professionals. Recent commentary suggests that the pressure stemming from examination reforms and the push towards a more academically-focused curriculum have led to a significant decline in timetabled PE. In fact, reports indicate that nearly four in ten secondary schools have reduced PE allocations for students aged 14 to 16 in the past five years.

Moreover, evidence presented in the Youth Sport Trust's 2022 report highlights critical health issues. It reveals that approximately 25% of Year 6 pupils are classified as obese, and less than half of all children in the UK meet the Chief Medical Officer's recommended guidelines for physical activity. This alarming health crisis coexists with the cuts to PE, suggesting a systemic issue that impacts not only students' physical health but also their mental well-being.

The advocacy by the Youth Sport Trust for PE to be a core component of the curriculum stems not only from an educational perspective but also from a public health standpoint. With many primary schools suffering from inadequately trained instructors in PE, Oliver emphasises the need for robust teacher training to enhance the quality of physical education. This initiative could potentially pivot young people's engagement and attitudes toward sports and exercise, fostering a more active future generation.

As calls for reform intensify, the intersection of education policy and youth health continues to evoke critical discussions. Stakeholders from various sectors are being urged to consider long-term strategies that prioritise physical activity, with hopes that the collective response will shift the focus back toward the essential role of physical education in developing well-rounded, healthy children.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/sport/articles/cz634pyz51po), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2023/dec/07/youth-sport-trust-childrens-activity-levels-in-england-a-national-concern)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2025/feb/25/britain-has-fewer-pe-teachers-since-london-2012-olympics-mps-told), [[5]](https://www.tes.com/magazine/archive/exclusive-pe-spiralling-downward-quarter-secondaries-cut-classes)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/primary-school-pe-training-woefully-inadequate-mps-told), [[6]](https://www.youthsporttrust.org/research-listings/research/pe-school-sport-the-annual-report-2022)
* Paragraph 4 – [[7]](https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/secondary/pe-lesson-decline-blamed-dfe-policy-changes)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bbc.com/sport/articles/cz634pyz51po> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2025/feb/25/britain-has-fewer-pe-teachers-since-london-2012-olympics-mps-told> - This article reports that Britain has 7,000 fewer PE teachers than when London hosted the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics. It highlights that 30% of children are now doing less than 30 minutes of any physical activity, including walking, a day. The Youth Sport Trust's CEO, Ali Oliver, calls for PE to be made a core subject in schools to address these declines. ([theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2025/feb/25/britain-has-fewer-pe-teachers-since-london-2012-olympics-mps-told?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/primary-school-pe-training-woefully-inadequate-mps-told> - The chief executive of the Youth Sport Trust, Ali Oliver, warns that teacher training in primary-level physical education is 'woefully inadequate'. She advocates for PE to become a core curriculum subject to improve standards and teacher training. The article also notes that there were 41,000 fewer hours of PE taught in the last academic year compared to 2011-12. ([tes.com](https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/primary-school-pe-training-woefully-inadequate-mps-told?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2023/dec/07/youth-sport-trust-childrens-activity-levels-in-england-a-national-concern> - The Youth Sport Trust expresses concern over new figures showing that 53% of children and young people in England do not meet the chief medical officer’s guidelines for daily activity. The article also highlights that 2.2 million children aged between five and 16—30% in total—do not even get 30 minutes of activity. ([theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2023/dec/07/youth-sport-trust-childrens-activity-levels-in-england-a-national-concern?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.tes.com/magazine/archive/exclusive-pe-spiralling-downward-quarter-secondaries-cut-classes> - The Youth Sport Trust warns that nearly four in 10 English secondary schools have cut timetabled physical education for 14- to 16-year-olds over the last five years. The article suggests that increased pressure for performance on high-stakes testing has caused many schools to reduce the amount of time allocated for physical education. ([tes.com](https://www.tes.com/magazine/archive/exclusive-pe-spiralling-downward-quarter-secondaries-cut-classes?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.youthsporttrust.org/research-listings/research/pe-school-sport-the-annual-report-2022> - The Youth Sport Trust's 2022 report outlines the current state of PE, school sport, and physical activity in England. It highlights issues such as a quarter of Year 6 pupils being classed as obese and less than half of all children in the UK meeting the Chief Medical Officer's guidelines for taking part in sport and physical activity. ([youthsporttrust.org](https://www.youthsporttrust.org/research-listings/research/pe-school-sport-the-annual-report-2022?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/secondary/pe-lesson-decline-blamed-dfe-policy-changes> - The article discusses how government policy changes, such as exam reforms and accountability measures, have led to a decline in the number of hours of PE being taught in secondary schools. It includes comments from Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, who attributes the fall to the government's policy objectives of making the secondary curriculum more academically focused. ([tes.com](https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/secondary/pe-lesson-decline-blamed-dfe-policy-changes?utm_source=openai))