



Children's Sport Participation  
and Physical Activity

# Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study 2022





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# CONTENTS

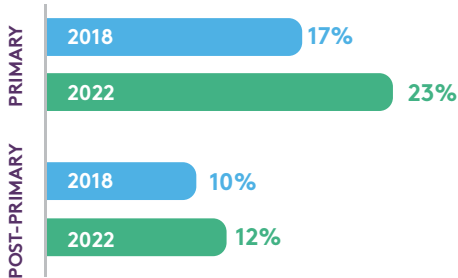
	Foreword	7
1.	Executive summary	8
2.	Introduction	13
3.	Physical Activity	16
4.	Overall Sport Participation	22
5.	Community Sport	26
6.	School Sport	35
7.	Physical Education	44
8.	Active Travel	53
9.	Contemporary Issues in Physical Activity	57
10.	Northern Ireland	64
11.	Summary of Findings and Recommendations	82
12.	References	86
	Appendix: Study Methodology	88



# Republic of Ireland Key Findings

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Students meeting the Physical Activity Guidelines

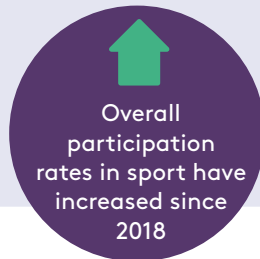
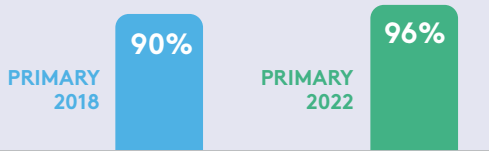


The number of children meeting the National Physical Activity Guidelines has increased since 2018



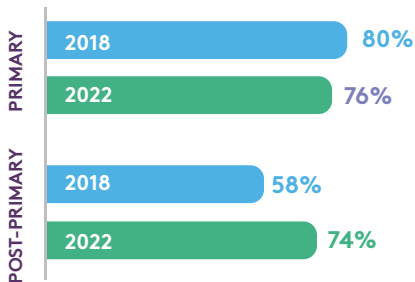
## ANY SPORT

Students participating in any sport at least once a week



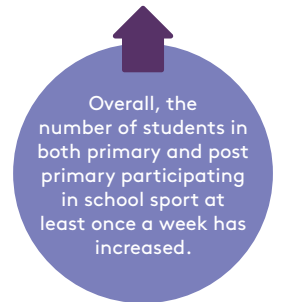
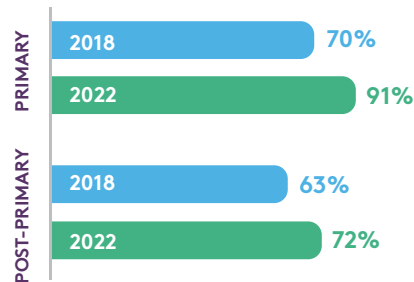
## COMMUNITY SPORT

Students participating in sport in a sports club or community setting at least once a week



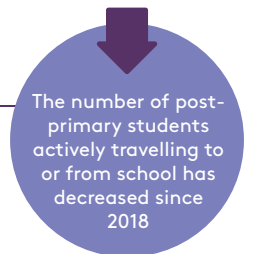
## SCHOOL SPORT

Students participating in sport at school, outside of PE, at least once a week



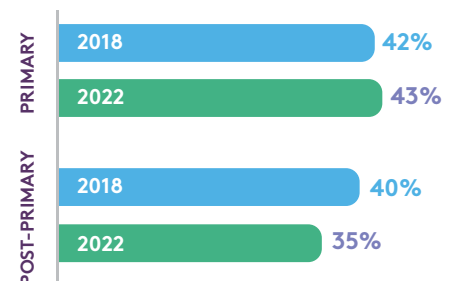
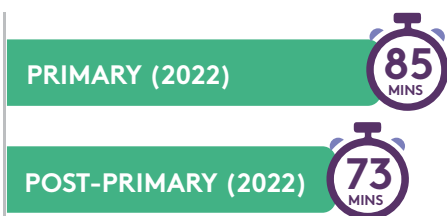
## ACTIVE TRAVEL

Students who actively travel to/from school



## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

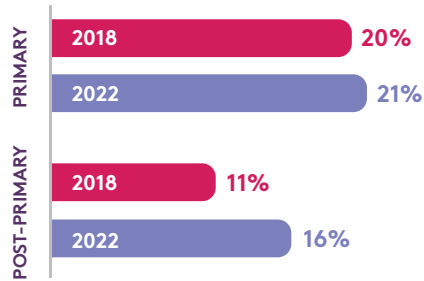
Average PE minutes per week in schools



# Northern Ireland Key Findings

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

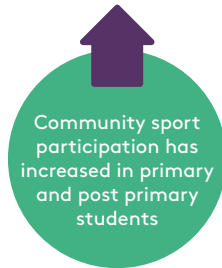
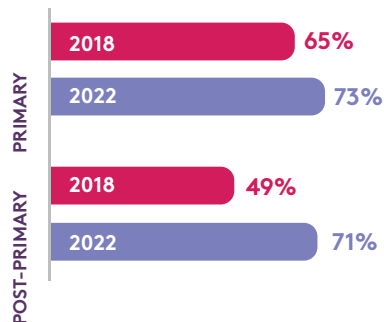
Students meeting the Physical Activity Guidelines



The number of children meeting the National Physical Activity Guidelines has increased since 2018

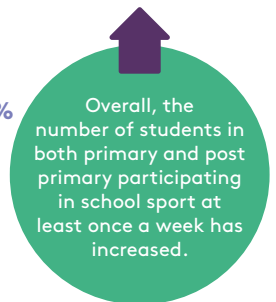
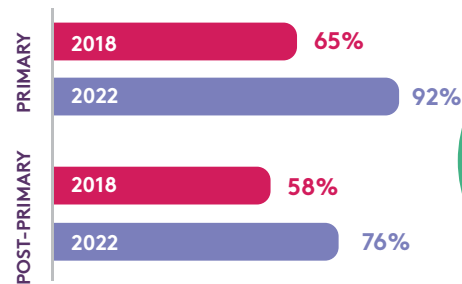
## COMMUNITY SPORT

Students participating in sport in a sports club or community setting at least once a week



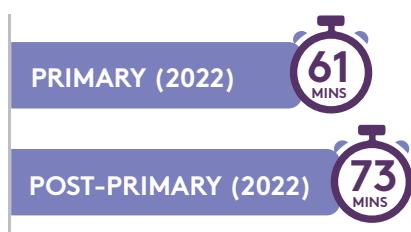
## SCHOOL SPORT

Students participating in sport at school, outside of PE, at least once a week



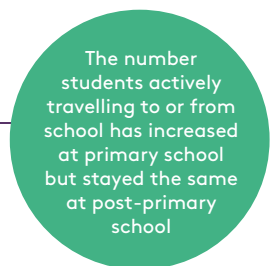
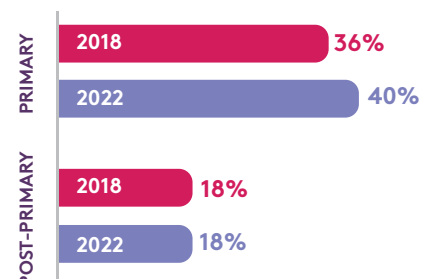
## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Average PE minutes per week in schools



## ACTIVE TRAVEL

Students who actively travel to/from school



“This report provides us with many positive findings as well as highlighting some significant challenges in the areas of physical activity, sport participation and physical education.”



## Foreword

We are delighted to introduce the 2022 Children’s Sport Participation and Physical Activity study (CSPPA 2022). This all-island research project was commissioned by an all-island collaboration between our respective organisations, Sport Ireland, Healthy Ireland and Sport Northern Ireland, with the support of the Department of Education.

This latest wave of CSPPA provides valuable insight into the experiences of children and adolescents throughout the island of Ireland around sports participation, physical activity and physical education. The all-island nature of the project provides us the clearest picture of children’s sports participation and physical activity behaviours across both jurisdictions following on from the COVID-pandemic. It is particularly encouraging to see that physical activity and sports participation have broadly increased since the last iteration of CSPPA in 2018, despite the dramatic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

This report provides us with many positive findings as well as highlighting some significant challenges in the areas of physical activity, sport participation and physical education. The number of children meeting the World Health Organisation guidelines of 60 minutes daily moderate to vigorous physical activity remains unacceptably low, however it is encouraging to see these proportions have increased in both jurisdictions since the 2018 CSPPA report. Other significant challenges highlighted by this report include the large drop-off in school sports participation amongst teenage girls and the widening socio-economic divide in community sports participation.

For each of our organisations and for those with whom we collaborate, the results from this study will help inform and shape policy initiatives in key areas of children’s sport and education, as well as providing us a snapshot from which to evaluate future progress towards achieving our shared policy objectives.

Over 8,500 students from 153 schools across the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland along with school principals and teachers gave generously of their time to facilitate this study and provide us with the rich information from which this report is drawn. We are most appreciative of their contributions in this regard.

We also wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the CSPPA research team comprising of researchers and students from University of Limerick, Dublin City University, University College Cork, and Ulster University for their tireless work in delivering this report. Finally we would like to thank our staff and collaborators in Sport Ireland, Sport Northern Ireland, Healthy Ireland and the Departments of Education in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland who supported and contributed to the 2022 CSPPA study.

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## SECTION 1 Executive Summary

### Background

The Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study 2022 (CSPPA 2022) is an All-Island population research project that follows on from CSPPA in 2018 and 2010. A total of 8,881 school children and young people aged 10 to 19 on the island of Ireland were asked to report on various aspects related to sport participation and physical activity. CSPPA was a multi-centre study, undertaken by the University of Limerick, Dublin City University, University College Cork, and Ulster University. It was funded by Sport Ireland, Healthy Ireland and Sport Northern Ireland, with additional support from the Departments of Health and Education in the Republic of Ireland.

### Key findings (Republic of Ireland)

#### Physical Activity:

- Fifteen percent (15%) of students in the Republic of Ireland reported meeting the physical activity guidelines of at least 60 minutes of daily moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (23% primary and 12% post-primary), an increase from 2018 when 13% met the guidelines (17% primary and 10% post-primary).
- Eleven percent (11%) of girls met the national physical activity guidelines compared to 19% of boys. This gender difference was evident in both primary (17% girls vs. 28% boys) and post-primary (9% girls vs. 15% boys) schools.
- Fewer primary school children with disabilities (15%) met the physical activity guidelines than those without disabilities (24%).
- More primary school children from rural schools (24%) met the physical activity guidelines than those from urban schools (18%).
- In post-primary school, 12% of students from families of lower socio-economic status met the physical activity guidelines compared to those with higher socio-economic status (15%).
- Forty-three percent (43%) of students met the World Health Organisation (WHO) muscle strengthening guidelines (at least 3 days a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic activities, as well as those that strengthen muscle and bone), (48% primary students and 41% post-primary students); however fewer girls (33%) met the muscle strengthening guidelines than boys (53%).

#### Overall Sport:

- 'Overall sport' participation is a combination of school and community sport. 96% of primary and 84% of post-primary students reported participating in some form of community and/or school sport at least once a week, an increase since 2018 (primary 90%, post-primary 76%).
- There was an increase in the percentage of girls at primary (97%) and post-primary (80%) participating in some form of sport at least once a week in 2022, compared to 2018 (89% at primary and 72% at post-primary).
- Primary school girls' overall weekly sports participation rate (97%) was higher than boys (95%). However, due to a greater reduction in girls' participation as they transition to post-primary school, at post-primary school boys' participation rate (90%) was higher than girls' (80%).
- There were significantly lower rates of overall community and school sport participation amongst students with disabilities (primary: 92%, post-primary: 77%) compared to those without disabilities (primary: 97%, post-primary: 87%).
- Significant socio-economic differences in overall community and school sport participation were evident, particularly at post-primary level where students from families of lower socio-economic status participate less in sport (78%) compared with those from medium (84%) and high socio-economic status (91%).
- Students from other ethnicities participated less at post-primary (76%) than their white Irish peers (post-primary: 87%).
- Socio-economic differences in sports participation rates were greater in community sport than school sport, however gender differences were greater in post-primary school sport than community sport.



## Community Sport:

- Seventy-six percent (76%) of primary school and 74% of post-primary school students reported participating in community sport at least once a week, an increase for post-primary students compared to 58% in 2018, but a decrease for primary students from 80% in 2018.
- Thirty-six percent (36%) of both primary and post-primary school students participated in community sport four or more times a week, an increase from 29% for primary and 23% for post primary in 2018.
- There was no statistically significant difference between boys' (77%) and girls' (75%) community sports participation rates at primary school however at post-primary school, boys (80%) recorded higher levels of community sport participation than girls (69%).
- The gender gap, the difference in rates of participation in community sports between boys and girls, has narrowed since 2018 at both primary (9% in 2018 vs. 2% in 2022) and post-primary school level (14% in 2018 vs. 11% in 2022).
- Students from both rural primary (78%) and post-primary (77%) schools reported higher levels of participation in community sport than students from urban primary (69%) and post-primary (68%) schools.
- Seventy-seven percent (77%) of primary school and 63% of post-primary school students were members of a community sports club. Fifty percent (50%) of post-primary boys and 45% of post-primary girls reported volunteering in sport in the last 7 days.
- Sixty-six percent (66%) of community sport participants in post-primary school reported receiving coaching. Boys (73%) received a greater amount of coaching than girls (59%). Only 18% of post-primary students reported being coached by a female while 79% reported being coached by a male.

## School Sport:

- Ninety-one percent (91%) of primary and 72% of post-primary school students reported participating in school sport at least once a week, an increase compared to 2018 for both primary (70%) and post-primary (63%) students.
- At primary school, more girls (94%) reported participating in school sport than boys (89%). However, this trend was reversed in post-primary school where boys school sports participation (79%) was higher than girls (65%). This is primarily due to a large drop in girls' school sport participation rate between primary and post-primary school.
- Post-primary students from rural schools (75%) reported higher levels of participation in school sport than their urban peers (66%).
- Game based sports, particularly team sports, continue to be the most popular type of sports participated in both primary (81%) and post-primary school (60%).
- There was a decrease in the proportion of post-primary students competing in inter-school sport (62% in 2018 vs. 47% in 2022). It is possible that inter-school sports competitions had not fully returned to pre-COVID levels at the time of the survey.
- Thirty-eight percent (38%) of primary schools and 15% of post-primary schools surveyed reported no on-site access to an indoor space for sports/PE.

### Physical Education (PE):

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- Primary students reported an average of 85 minutes of PE per week, almost double the 46 minutes reported in 2010.
- Post-primary students reported an average of 73 minutes of PE per week, which represents a slight decline on the 77 minutes reported in 2010.
- Primary school girls reported more minutes of PE per week (90 minutes) than primary school boys (80 minutes), however this trend reversed at post-primary school where boys reported more minutes of PE (75 minutes) than post-primary girls (71 minutes).
- At both primary and post-primary, students attending DEIS schools reported more minutes of PE (118 and 78 minutes respectively) than non-DEIS schools (81 and 72 minutes respectively).
- Seventy-five percent (75%) of primary students and 72% of post-primary students reported receiving the Department of Education's recommended amount of PE per week.
- Activities from the PE Curriculum games strand, particularly invasion games, continue to dominate the content of PE classes, with other strands less prevalent. Most notably, participation in the aquatics strand of primary PE appears to be in decline from 50% in 2010 to 43% in 2018 to 28% in 2022.
- Eight percent (8%) of primary and 9% of post-primary students reported that they were "non-swimmers", however 3% of primary and 4% of post-primary students from families of high socio-economic status reported they were non-swimmers in comparison to 15% and 17% of their respective peers from families of low socio-economic status.

### Active Travel:

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- Overall, fewer students reported actively travelling to or from school in 2022 (37%) than in 2018 (42%).
- Primary students reported similar rates of active travel to or from school (43%) compared to 2018 (42%).
- Post-primary rates of active travel to or from school in 2022 (35%) was lower compared to 2018 (40%).
- Post-primary rates of walking to or from school were lower in 2022 compared to 2018 (to school: 23% vs 28%; and from school 30% vs 36%). Post-primary rates of cycling to/from school however increased from 2% in 2018 to 4% in 2022.
- Post-primary students reported higher rates of travelling to school by car in 2022 compared to 2018 (to school: 48% vs 40%; from school 38% vs 32%) while travel to school by bus was lower among post-primary students in 2022 compared to 2018 (to school: 24% vs 27%; from school 26% vs 29%).
- Overall, more girls than boys actively travel to or from school (primary: girls 45% vs boys 42%; post-primary: girls 37% vs. boys 33%).
- Students living in urban environments, with lower socio-economic status and from other nationalities reported higher levels of active travel both to and from school than those from rural environments, higher socio-economic status and Irish nationality respectively.

### Contemporary issues in Physical Activity:

- More students perceived that COVID-19 measures had a positive, rather than negative impact, on their overall health (53% positive vs 18% negative), fitness levels (51% positive vs 22% negative) and physical activity (51% positive vs 26% negative).
- The most common reasons for post-primary students to participate in sport were the importance of “keeping fit” (15%), and “something to do” (12%) followed by the influence of parents (father 8%, mother 3%) and friends (8%).
- The most common reasons why post-primary students gave up a sport were a lack of interest (18%), sport being too time consuming (13%) and schoolwork (11%). Fewer students report giving up a sport due to the quality of their coaches (4%) or attitudes of their peers (3%) and only 2% of students reported giving up a sport due to costs.
- Almost all students (92% of primary, 94% of post-primary) reported owning a physical activity tracking device, a large increase from 2018 (53% of primary, 54% of post-primary). Apps and smart watches were the most owned and used activity tracking devices.

### Key Findings (Northern Ireland)

- Seventeen percent (17%) of students in Northern Ireland report participating in at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity a day (21% primary and 16% post-primary students). These proportions are higher than in 2018, when 13% reported being active daily (20% primary and 11% post-primary students).
- Forty-four percent (44%) of primary and 42% of post-primary school students report meeting the muscle strengthening guidelines. This was measured for the first time in 2022.
- Seventy-three percent (73%) of primary and 71% of post-primary school students reported participating in community sport at least once a week, compared to 65% and 49% respectively in 2018. The proportion of post-primary school students who reported never participating in community sport decreased from 47% in 2018 to 16% in 2022.
- Ninety-two percent (92%) of primary and 76% of post-primary school students reported participating in school sport at least once a week. This represented an increase at both primary (65%) and post-primary school (58%) levels since 2018.
- Eight percent (8%) of primary and 20% of post-primary school students reported meeting the Physical Education guidelines of at least 120 minutes/week. In 2018, 40% of post-primary students reported meeting the guidelines and this was not reported for primary school students.
- Forty percent (40%) of primary and 18% of post-primary school students reported active travel to or from school. This represents an increase at primary school level (36%) and the proportions remain unchanged for post-primary school students since 2018.

### Summary of findings for Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland:

The proportion of students meeting the National Physical Activity Guidelines in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland has increased since 2018. Fifteen percent (15%) of students in the Republic of Ireland and 17% of students in Northern Ireland reported 60 minutes of daily moderate-to-vigorous physical activity in 2022, an increase from 13% in both jurisdictions in 2018. Table 1.1 summarises the key similarities and differences between 2018 and 2022 for the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Table 1.1. 2018 and 2022 comparison for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland

Outcome	ROI		NI	
	2018	2022	2018	2022
<b>PHYSICAL ACTIVITY</b>				
Participating in daily physical activity (%)	13	15	13	17
Primary school students participating in daily physical activity (%)	17	23	20	21
Post-primary school students participating in daily physical activity (%)	10	12	11	16
Primary school meeting the muscle strengthening guidelines (%)	-	48	-	44
Post-primary school meeting the muscle strengthening guidelines (%)	-	41	-	42
<b>COMMUNITY SPORT</b>				
Primary school participation in community sport at least once a week (%)	80	76	65	73
Post-primary school participation in community sport at least once a week (%)	58	74	49	71
<b>SCHOOL SPORT</b>				
Primary school students participating in school sport at least once a week (%)	70	91	65	92
Post-primary school students participating in school sport at least once a week (%)	63	72	58	76
<b>PHYSICAL EDUCATION</b>				
Average weekly PE for primary schools (minutes)	-	85	-	61
Average weekly PE for post-primary schools (minutes)	-	73	-	73
<b>ACTIVE TRAVEL</b>				
Primary school students engaging in active travel (%)	42	43	36	40
Post-primary school students engaging in active travel (%)	40	35	18	18

## SECTION 2 Introduction

# 2

### 2.1 Background

The Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study 2022 (CSPPA 2022) is an All-Island research and monitoring system that follows on from CSPPA in 2018 [1] and 2010 [2]. CSPPA is jointly funded by Sport Ireland, Healthy Ireland and Sport Northern Ireland, with support from the Departments of Health and Education in the Republic of Ireland (ROI). This All-Island study surveyed 8,881 students (primary n = 1,758 and post-primary n = 7,123) to examine participation in physical activity, community sport, school sport, Physical Education (PE) and, active travel as well as information about contemporary issues in physical activity and sport participation. CSPPA 2022 is a multi-centre study undertaken by the University of Limerick (lead university), Dublin City University, University College Cork, and Ulster University, thus bringing together expertise from across the island of Ireland in sport, physical activity and PE.

Adhering to the CSPPA methodology, CSPPA 2022 used self-reported questionnaires to assess participation levels of physical activity, sport, PE and active travel. Unlike CSPPA 2018, where researchers completed data collection within schools, COVID-19 restrictions limited the accessibility of schools for in-person visits in 2022. Consequently, the questionnaires were completed online in classrooms, supervised by teachers and coordinated by a trained CSPPA ambassador assigned to each school. School administrators were also asked to complete a questionnaire on school sports participation, facilities and resources.

The aims of CSPPA 2022 were to assess the levels of participation of children and young people in sport, physical activity, PE and active travel in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) and Northern Ireland (NI). It also sought to examine the correlates of physical activity and sport participation through self-report methods and provide a comparison, where possible, between CSPPA 2010 and CSPPA 2018. The report aims to identify factors that enhance or inhibit participation levels of Irish and Northern Irish children in sport, physical activity and PE as well as explore some contemporary issues in sport and physical activity.



## 2.2 The Policy Context

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To improve public health and to prevent non-communicable diseases, the World Health Organisation (WHO) physical activity guidelines were updated in 2020 [3]. For children, these guidelines now recommend an average of 60 minutes daily of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (60mins MVPA/day), including muscle strengthening activity, while limiting sedentary or sitting behaviour [3]. Despite the evidence of benefits, 81% of children and adolescents globally do not meet physical activity recommendations [4].

The context of children's sport participation and physical activity across the island of Ireland is shaped by a range of policies and programmes that aim to promote healthy lifestyles and improve physical activity levels among young people. These include the Healthy Ireland Framework, Get Ireland Active, The National Physical Activity Plan [6], the National Sports Policy 2018-2027 [7] and in Northern Ireland, the Active Living: Sport and Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland [8]. The All-Island Physical Literacy Consensus Statement was launched recently by Sport Ireland and Sport Northern Ireland which provides a definition of physical literacy and aims to encourage lifelong participation in sport and physical activity [9].

PE policy and curriculum have changed substantially in the last decade, particularly at post-primary level in the Republic of Ireland. The Junior Cycle Wellbeing Curriculum, in place since 2017, crosses the three years of junior cycle and includes Physical Education, Social, Personal and Health Education and Civic, Social and Political Education. The Junior Cycle Wellbeing programme is allocated 400 hours of time-tabled learning for all students, with a minimum of 135 hours dedicated to PE [10] across the 3 years of the Junior Cycle. At Senior Cycle, the examinable Leaving Certificate Physical Education curriculum and the Senior Cycle Physical Education framework (non-examinable) were launched in 2018 on a pilot basis and expanded more widely in 2020. The DEIS (Delivering Equality of opportunity In Schools) programme is the Republic of Ireland's Department of Education's main policy response to educational disadvantage. 'DEIS schools' are schools that have the highest percentage of students at risk of educational disadvantage. The Department of Education identified 310 schools (273 primary and 37 post-primary) for inclusion in the DEIS programme from September 2022.

Overall, the policy context of children's sport participation and physical activity on the Island of Ireland is characterised by strong Government commitments, in both jurisdictions, to promoting healthy lifestyles and improving physical activity levels among young people.

## 2.3 COVID-19 Context

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The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant public health impact, with school closures and movement restrictions reducing children's sport participation and physical activity opportunities [11]. Challenges included teaching PE online, adhering to social distancing guidelines, and decreased access to community sports clubs, their facilities [12] and extended restrictions on indoor sports participation. During periods of high level COVID-19 restrictions, many schools had to temporarily repurpose their communal spaces, including PE halls, into classrooms to comply with the public health social distancing requirements. Moreover, many public facilities that previously would have been used by primary schools were not accessible during intervals in which the COVID-19 restrictions were in place [13]. The CSPPA field work was completed in March to June 2022. Readers of this report should keep in mind that some of the CSPPA 2022 methodologies (and corresponding results) were impacted by the necessary social restrictions in place during the COVID-19 pandemic. That said, CSPPA 2022 provides an important snapshot of children's sport and physical activity levels shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions were lifted.

## 2.4 Limitations

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CSPPA 2022 is a cross-sectional study that provides a snapshot of children's participation levels in physical activity, sport, PE and active transport as well as the contemporary issues in physical activity and sport participation. The results are based on self-report surveys which can result in some response bias. To minimise response bias, the CSPPA questions and methodologies are taken from measures which have been tested and validated with the target population, where they exist. Unlike previous iterations of CSPPA, where the researchers directly administered the surveys at each school, due to concerns regarding COVID-19 infection control, the surveys in this iteration were administered by the teachers. For some items in the survey, the effects of response bias may be stronger in the presence of their teacher than previously with researchers. Notwithstanding, the instruments selected for CSPPA 2022 were based on developmentally appropriate and psychometrically valid self-report instruments. Participants were instructed on the survey to answer honestly, and the survey was completed with anonymity and confidentiality guaranteed.

Comparisons are possible with CSPPA 2010 and 2018 because each iteration used representative samples, similar methods and consistent measures. Some differences between these previous iterations should be noted. Although efforts were made to use the same schools from 2010, and 2018 only 45% of schools in Republic of Ireland took part in all three studies. Furthermore, in 2018, 72% of the post-primary respondents were from 1st and 2nd year. Through real-time sample monitoring in 2022, a more balanced sample across the year groups than in 2018 were collected, as such, the composition of CSPPA 2022 sample is slightly different to that of 2018.

To reduce the volume of results reported, only differences that were deemed to be statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) were reported in the text of the report. In Northern Ireland, due to the low number ( $n = 14$ ) of students in the 12-13 age group at primary school level, it was not possible to test for age significance. Where statistical tests were not performed, point estimates were reported, and interpretation should be treated with caution. Comparisons to results published on the same items in 2010 or 2018 were not tested for statistical significance.

Margins of error are reported in figures to indicate the level of confidence on the estimates. This is the standard error of the estimate multiplied by 1.96 and halved. The margins of error are reported in the figures with the  $\pm$  in front of the number. For example, if the margin of error was 2.1%, the labelling of the figure would include ( $\pm 2.1$ ). Where there is a range of margin of errors across groups, e.g., Boys =  $\pm 1.4\%$  and girls =  $\pm 1.2\%$ , the largest value is reported ( $\pm < 1.4$ ). In 2018, there were some changes in the wording of the PE duration question from the 2010 item. In 2022, therefore, comparison of PE duration data can only be made with CSPPA 2010. The list of sports in community sport, school sport and PE were limited to 32 sports; 27 that were listed in CSPPA 2018 as well as 5 additional sports that were commonly reported under a free text field in 2018.

The findings regarding "other" gender should be interpreted with caution throughout the report. As with CSPPA 2018, students could self-report their gender as male, female, or other. Those reporting their gender as "other" were offered three different response options, "non-binary", 'other', and 'I'd rather not say'. There were low numbers of students who identify as other gender at both primary (ROI:  $n = 42$ , 3.6%, NI:  $n = 16$ , 2.6% of the unweighted samples) and post-primary (ROI:  $n = 174$ , 3.4%, NI:  $n = 70$ , 3.7% of the unweighted samples). Without data from the Department of Education and Skills (ROI) or the Department of Education (NI) on the 'other' gender group, it was not possible to assign weights to this element of the sample. Rather than omit this group, a weight of 1 was assigned.

The survey was only available in the English language and students whose reading ability was not above a typical 10-year-old may have experienced difficulty comprehending the questions.

Further details of the study methodology including sampling methods, weighting, sample profile and data analysis are provided in appendix 1.

## SECTION 3 Physical Activity

### 3.1 Key Findings



**15%**

of students reported meeting the physical activity guidelines of at least 60 minutes of daily moderate-to-vigorous physical activity



**11%**

of girls met the national physical activity guidelines compared to 19% of boys



**43%**

of students met the WHO muscle strengthening guidelines

- Fifteen percent (15%) of students reported meeting the **physical activity guidelines of at least 60 minutes of daily moderate-to-vigorous physical activity** (23% primary and 12% post-primary), an increase from 2018 when 13% met the guidelines (17% primary and 10% post-primary).
- Eleven percent (11%) of girls met the **national physical activity guidelines** compared to 19% of boys. This gender difference was evident in both primary (17% girls vs. 28% boys) and post-primary (9% girls vs. 15% boys) schools.
- Fewer primary school **children with disabilities** (15%) met the physical activity guidelines than those without disabilities (24%).
- More **primary school children from rural schools** (24%) met the physical activity guidelines than those from urban schools (18%).
- In post-primary school, 12% of **students from families of lower socio-economic status** met the physical activity guidelines compared to their more affluent peers (15%).
- Forty three percent (43%) of students met the **WHO muscle strengthening guidelines** (48% primary students and 41% post-primary students); however fewer girls (33%) met the muscle strengthening guidelines than boys (53%).

### 3.2 Introduction

Physical activity is defined in the National Physical Activity Plan as ‘any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles which causes energy expenditure greater than at rest and which is health enhancing’ [6]. This definition is deliberately broad in order to include all possible types of physical activity behaviour, such as active play, active transport, PE, active domestic chores, traditional active games and sport, as well as deliberate exercise. The current Department of Health National Physical Activity Guidelines are 60 minutes of daily moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) for children (aged 5 years or older) [6]. The 2016 National Physical Activity Plan has set a target of increasing the number of children undertaking 60 minutes of MVPA every day by 1% per year [6].



### 3.3 Participating in daily aerobic physical activity

23% of primary and 12% of post-primary students reported 60 minutes of daily physical activity, meeting the Department of Health physical activity guidelines for children. These proportions were similar to 2010 and represent an increase from 2018 (Figure 3.1). In the context of the policy objective of increasing physical activity by 1% per year, this was met for primary students, however, increases were closer to 0.5% per year for post-primary students.

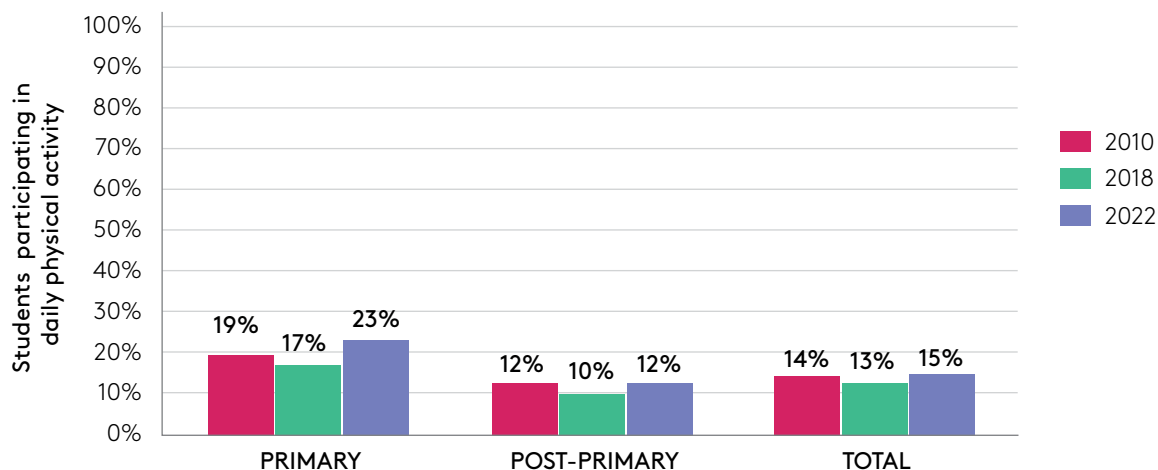


Figure 3.1. Percentage of students participating in 60 minutes of daily physical activity.

Almost all students reported at least one day a week of physical activity for 60 minutes. 78% of primary and 67% of post-primary students are physically active for 60 minutes on at least four days a week (Figure 3.2).

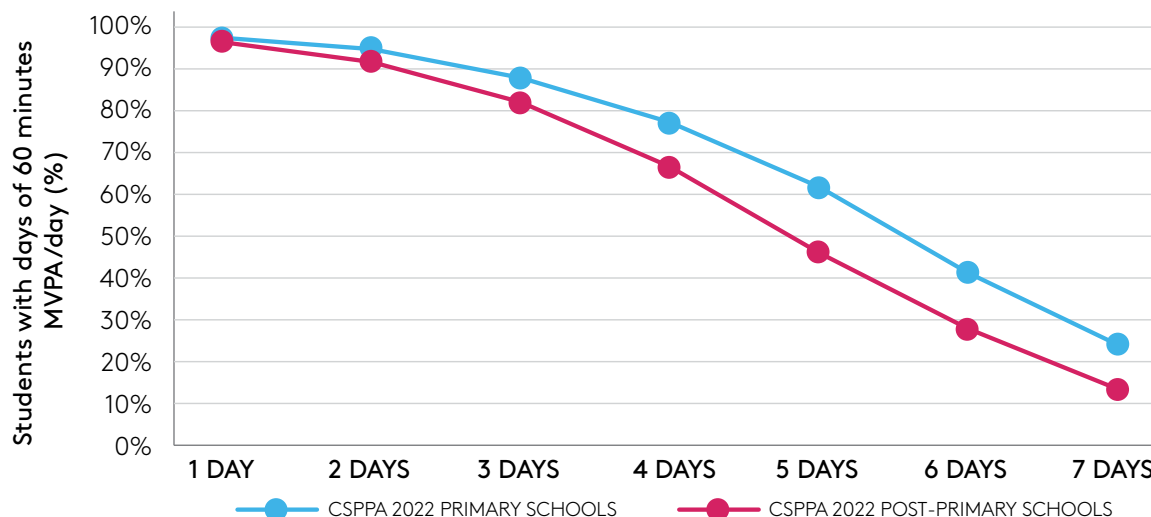


Figure 3.2. Percentage of students participating in 60 minutes of MVPA on 1-7 days per week.

More boys (19%) than girls (11%) reported meeting the national physical activity guidelines. Figures 3.3 highlights that differences in gender in 2022 were evident in both primary students (17% girls vs 28% boys) and post-primary students (9% girls vs 15% boys).

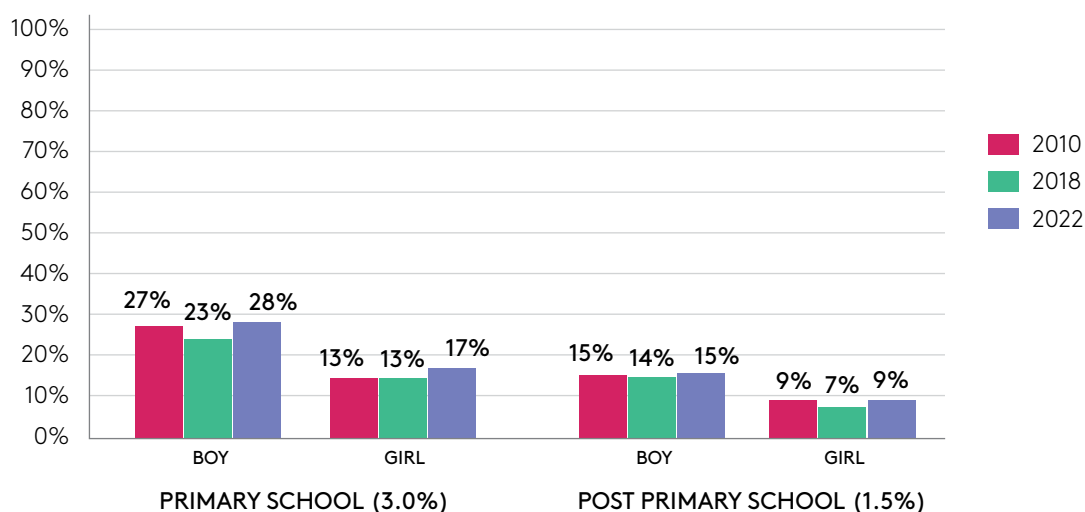


Figure 3.3. Percentage of primary and post-primary boys and girls who participated in 60 minutes of daily physical activity. Note: Margins of error for 2022 data are presented in parentheses.

At primary school level, a lower number of students in urban schools reported daily physical activity compared to their peers in rural schools (18% vs 24%). Irish primary students recorded higher levels of daily physical activity than students of other nationalities (24% vs 17%), see Table 3.1. Primary school students with disabilities (15%) recorded significantly lower levels of daily physical activity than students without disabilities (24%), a significant difference which was not evident in 2018.

Socio-economic differences in physical activity emerge at post-primary level. Fifteen percent (15%) of post-primary students from families with a high socio-economic status report meeting physical activity guidelines. This compares with 11% of students with medium socio-economic status and 12% with a low socio-economic status. This is somewhat mirrored by the finding that 13% of students in non-DEIS post-primary schools report daily physical activity compared to 10% of students in DEIS schools. Post-primary students reported less daily physical activity if they were obese (7%), overweight (10%) or underweight (11%) than healthy weight (13%).

More boys (19%) than girls (11%) reported meeting the national physical activity guidelines.

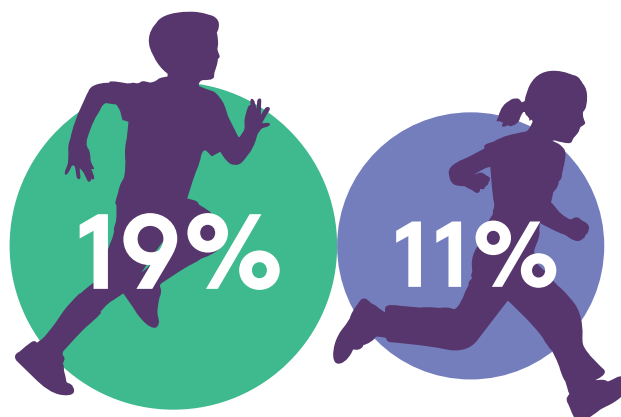


Table 3.1 Percentage of students who take part in 60 minutes of daily physical activity by demographic characteristics

	Primary (%)	Post-Primary (%)	Total (%)
<b>Gender</b>			
Boy	28	15	19
Girl	17	9	11
Other	19	14	15
<b>School Year</b>			
5th Class	21	-	21
6th Class	24	-	24
1st Year	-	20	20
2nd Year	-	13	13
3rd Year	-	10	10
4th Year	-	11	11
5th Year	-	10	10
6th Year	-	8	8
<b>Disability<sup>b</sup></b>			
No Disability	24	13	16
Disability	15	11	12
<b>SES<sup>c</sup></b>			
Low	21	12	14
Medium	22	11	15
High	26	15	18
<b>Nationality<sup>b</sup></b>			
Irish	24	12	16
Other nationalities	17	10	12
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
White Irish	-	13	13
Other ethnicity	-	10	10
<b>School Gender Status<sup>a</sup></b>			
Boys	26	14	16
Girls	14	9	10
Mixed	24	13	16
<b>DEIS Status<sup>c</sup></b>			
Non DEIS	22	13	15
DEIS	25	10	10
<b>Location<sup>b</sup></b>			
Rural	24	12	16
Urban	18	12	13
<b>BMI Category</b>			
Underweight	-	11	11
Healthy weight	-	13	13
Overweight	-	10	10
Obese	-	7	7

Note: a. Statistically significant for both primary and post-primary. b. statistically significant for only primary. c. statistically significant for only post-primary

### 3.4 Physical Activity Categories

In 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) updated their physical activity guidelines to state that children should achieve “at least an average of 60 minutes daily of moderate-to-vigorous intensity, mostly aerobic, physical activity, across the week” [3]. The new guidelines highlight that every move counts. To better understand the behaviour of children who move but do not meet the guidelines, children’s physical activity levels have been categorised as inactive (0-2 days), somewhat active (3-4 days), active (5-6 days), and daily active (7 days) [16]. Using these categories, we can see that 11% of primary and 17% of post-primary students reported being inactive (0-2 days/week), that is to say the 89% of primary and 83% of post-primary students do 60 minutes of physical activity on at least 3 or more days of a week. As depicted in Figure 3.4, although there is a gender difference between primary school boys and girls in achieving the national physical activity guidelines, there is only a small difference in the likelihood of primary school girls, boys and other genders being in the inactive category. This indicates that there is a need to encourage primary school girls in particular, not just to be physically active but also to incorporate physical activity into every day of the week.

Gender differences in inactivity levels emerge in post-primary school. Twice as many post-primary school girls (22%) were recorded as being inactive when compared to post-primary boys (11%), while 29% of post-primary students who identify as other genders were in the inactive category. The increased levels of inactivity amongst girls at post-primary school may in part be due to the onset of puberty [29]. A recent study of menstrual health, conducted by Healthy Ireland, reported that 54% of 15-24 year olds felt unable to play sport due to period-related symptoms [30].

High rates of inactivity were also reported among students in DEIS schools (19%), urban schools (21%), with low socio-economic status status (24%), identifying as other ethnicity (21%), or with disabilities (23%).

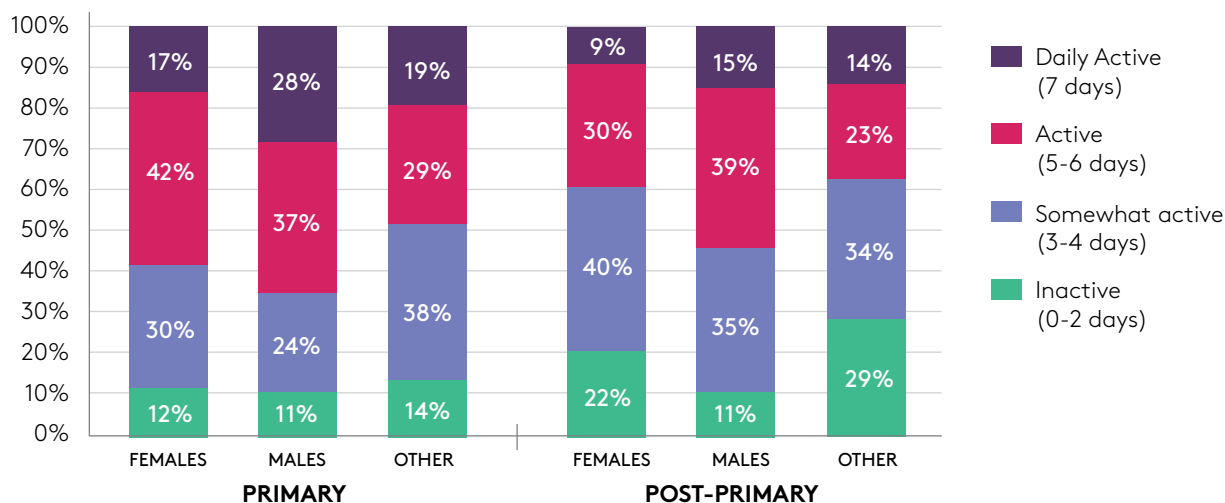


Figure 3.4. Percentage of each aerobic physical activity category by gender.

### 3.5 Vigorous-intensity aerobic activities and those that strengthen muscle

The WHO guidelines state that children and adolescents aged 5-17 years “should incorporate vigorous-intensity aerobic activities as well as those that strengthen muscle and bone, at least 3 days a week” [3]. The study participants responded to a question on the number of days in the last week where they did muscle strengthening exercises, such as push-ups, sit-ups, weightlifting or heavy yard work. Forty-three percent (43%) of students reported meeting the WHO muscle strengthening guidelines, 48% of primary and 41% of post-primary students. Gender differences were evident however, with significantly more boys (53%) than girls (33%) reporting that they meet the recommended muscle strengthening guidelines (Figure 3.6).

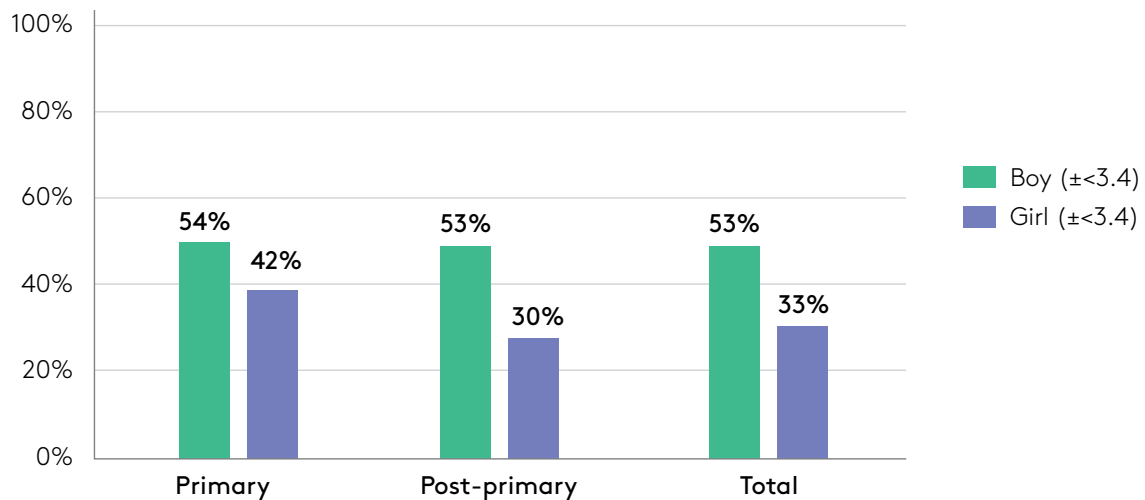


Figure 3.5. Percentage meeting the muscle strengthening guidelines

Note: Margins of error for 2022 data are presented in parentheses.



## SECTION 4 Overall Sport Participation

### 4.1 Key Findings



**96%**

of primary students reported participating in some form of community and/or school sport at least once a week



**78%**

of students from families of lower socio-economic status participate in sport



**76%**

of students from other ethnicities participate in sport

- ‘Overall sport’ participation is a combination of school and community sport. 96% of primary and 84% of post-primary students reported **participating in some form of community and/or school sport at least once a week**, an increase from 90% of primary and 76% of post-primary students in 2018.
- There was an increase in the **percentage of girls** at primary (97%) and post-primary (80%) participating in some form of sport at least once a week in 2022, compared to 2018 (89% at primary and 72% at post-primary).
- **Primary school girls’ overall weekly sports participation rate** (97%) is higher than boys (95%). However, due to a greater reduction in girls’ participation as they transition to post-primary school, post-primary boys’ participation rate (90%) is higher than girls (80%).
- There were significantly lower rates **overall community and school sport participation amongst students with disabilities** (primary: 92%, post-primary: 77%) compared to those without disabilities (primary: 97%; post-primary: 87%).
- Significant **socio-economic differences in overall community and school sport participation** were evident, particularly at post-primary level. Students from families of lower socio-economic status (78%) participate less in sport compared with those from medium (84%) and high socio-economic status (91%).
- **Students from other ethnicities** (post-primary: 76%) participated less in sport than their white Irish peers (post-primary: 87%).
- **Socio-economic differences** were greater in community sport than school sport, however gender differences were greater in post-primary school sport than community sport.

### 4.2 Participation in Overall Sport

Overall sport participation is a combination of school and community sport participation. A high proportion of students at primary (96%) and post-primary (84%) school level reported participating in some type of sport (school or community) at least once per week (Figure 4.1). There was an overall increase in the percentage of girls at primary (97%) and post-primary (80%) participating in sport at least once per week in 2022, compared to 2018 (89% at primary and 72% at post-primary) and 2010 (90% at primary and 79% at post-primary).

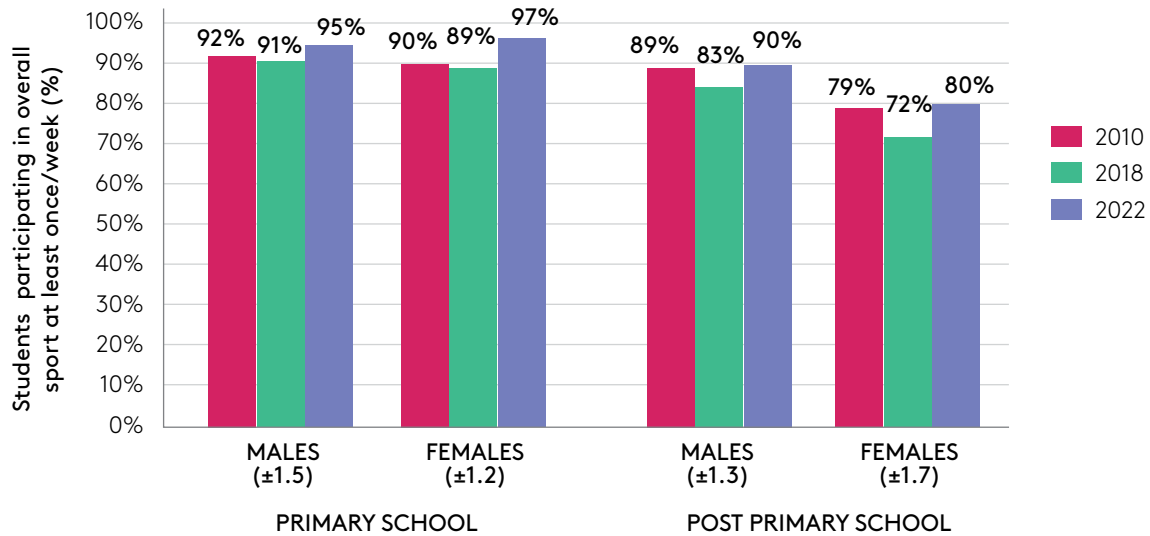


Figure 4.1. Percentage participating in overall sport at least once per week

Note: Margins of error for 2022 data are presented in parentheses.

There were significantly lower rates of sport participation amongst students with disabilities (primary: 92%, post-primary: 77%) compared to those without disabilities (primary: 97%; post-primary: 87%). Similarly, students from families of low socio-economic status (primary: 92%, post-primary: 78%) participate less often in sport than those from high socio-economic status (primary: 97%; post-primary: 91%). Additionally, students from other nationalities (primary: 91%, post-primary: 76%) had lower sports participation rates than Irish students (primary: 97%; post-primary: 86%). Students from other ethnicities (post-primary: 76%) participated less in sport than their white Irish peers (post-primary: 87%). There was also a trend towards decreased sport participation with increasing school year (the only exception was Transition Year). See Table 4.1.



There were significantly lower rates of sport participation amongst **students with disabilities** compared to those without disabilities.

Table 4.1. Participation in any sport at least once a week in school or community setting by demographic characteristics

	Primary (%)	Post-Primary (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Boy	95	90
Girl	97	80
Other	88	79
<b>School Year</b>		
5th Class	95	-
6th Class	96	-
1st Year	-	90
2nd Year	-	89
3rd Year	-	83
4th Year	-	88
5th Year	-	85
6th Year	-	71
<b>Disability<sup>a</sup></b>		
No Disability	97	87
Disability	92	77
<b>SES<sup>c</sup></b>		
Low	92	78
Medium	97	84
High	97	91
<b>Nationality<sup>a</sup></b>		
Irish	97	86
Other nationalities	91	76
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
White Irish	-	87
Other ethnicity	-	76

Note: a. Statistically significant for both primary and post-primary. b. statistically significant for only primary. c. statistically significant for only post-primary

Although 96% of primary students reported participating in school or community sports at least once a week, this decreased to 90% at the start of post-primary school and then down to 71% by the end of post-primary school. (Figure 4.2). Peaks in non-participation were observed in the examinable years with 17% of 3rd year students; and 29% of 6th year students reporting they did not participate in either school or community sport.



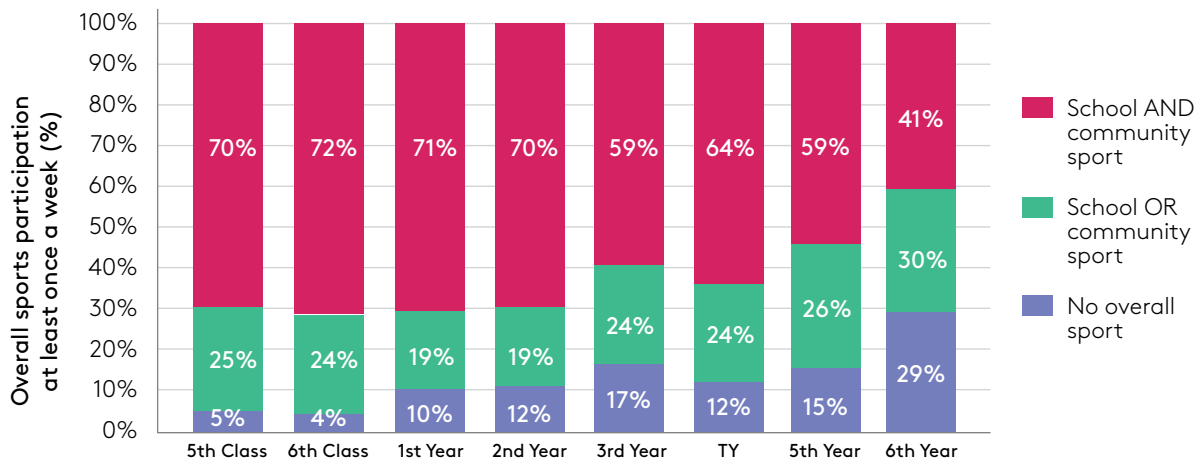
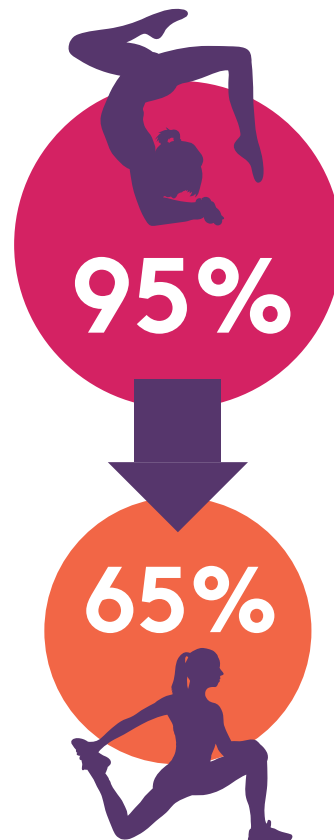


Figure 4.2. Percentage of overall sport by community sport and/or school sport at least once a week by year groups.

Socio-economic differences in sports participation rates were greater in community sport than school sport. The difference in community sport participation between low and high socio-economic status was 27 percentage points at primary and 21 percentage points at post-primary school level, greater than that found in school sport participation which was 3 percentage points and 11 percentage points at primary and post-primary level, respectively.

Gender differences, on the other hand, were greater in post-primary school sport than community sport. At primary school, boys’ participation in community sport (77%) was slightly higher than girls (75%) and girls’ participation rate in school sport (94%) was slightly higher than boys (89%). Girls’ community sport participation rate dropped from 75% to 69%, 11 percentage points lower than boys (80%), however, girls school sport participation rate dropped more from 94% at primary school to 65% at post primary school and was 14 percentage points lower than boys (79%).

Girls school sport participation rate dropped more than boys, from 94% at primary school to 65% at post primary school.



## SECTION 5 Community Sport

### 5.1 Key Findings



**36%**

of primary and post-primary students participated in community sport four or more times a week



**73%**

of post-primary school boys reported receiving coaching, compared to only 59% of girls



**77%**

of primary school children were members of a community sports club (63% post-primary)

- Seventy-six percent (76%) of primary school and 74% of post-primary school students reported **participating in community sport at least once a week**, an increase for post-primary students compared to 58% in 2018, but a decrease for primary students from 80% in 2018.
- Thirty-six percent (36%) of both primary and post-primary school students **participated in community sport four or more times a week**, an increase from 29% for primary and 23% for post primary in 2018.
- There was **no statistically significant difference** between boys' (77%) and girls' (75%) community sports participation rates at primary school however at post-primary school, boys (80%) recorded higher levels of community sport participation than girls (69%).
- The **gender gap**, the difference in rates of participation in community sports between boys and girls, has narrowed since 2018 at both primary (9% in 2018 vs. 2% in 2022) and post-primary school level (14% in 2018 vs. 11% in 2022).
- Students from both **rural** primary (78%) and post-primary (77%) schools participated in community sport more than students from **urban** primary (69%) and post-primary (68%) schools.
- Seventy-seven percent (77%) of primary school and 63% of post-primary school students were **members of a community sports club**. Fifty percent (50%) of post-primary boys and 45% of post-primary girls reported volunteering in sport in the last 7 days.
- Sixty-six percent (66%) of community sport participants in post-primary school reported receiving **coaching**, however, boys (73%) received more coaching than girls (59%). Only 18% of post-primary students reported being coached by a female while 79% reported being coached by a male.

### 5.2 Background

The publication of the National Sports Policy, 2018-2027 underlined the essential role of sport, and that of community sport, within the Republic of Ireland. Retaining and increasing adolescent participation in sport, particularly those from underserved and marginalised groups, has been prominent in both Irish research and policy doctrine for many years [1,2,6,7,17]. This CSPPA 2022 chapter provides evidence of the impact of these policies on sports participation. Furthermore, this is the first insight on community sports participation following COVID-19 restrictions. This chapter refers only to community sport i.e. in a sports club or community sport activity that is independent of the school setting. It examines club membership levels, community sports participation levels, the frequency of participation, and the range of sports and roles partaken in both a playing, and non-playing, capacity within these settings.

### 5.3 Frequency of Community Sport Participation

According to the students in CSPPA 2022, 75% of students participate in community sports at least once a week and 36% participated 4 days a week or more. The changes in participation from 2010 and 2018 can be seen in Table 5.1. Although there was an increase in the number of primary students who reported never participating in community sports from 7% in 2010 and 2018, to 12% in 2022, it is worth noting that this is counterbalanced by a large decrease in primary students who report never participating in school sport, which is described in the next chapter. Among post-primary students there was a large reduction in those never participating in community sport from 2010 (34%), 2018 (38%) to 2022 (16%).

Table 5.1. Percentage distribution of community sports participation by frequency

Frequency	Primary (%)			Post-Primary (%)		
	2010	2018	2022	2010	2018	2022
4 or more days a week	22	29	36	24	23	36
2-3 days a week	37	37	30	30	29	30
1 day a week	20	14	10	10	6	8
Less often	14	13	12	2	4	10
Never	7	7	12	34	38	16

The differing trends in frequency of community sport participation between boys and girls can be seen Figure 5.1 (primary school) and Figure 5.2 (post-primary school). An increase in participation of at least 4 times a week over the 12-year period was noted in both primary school boys and girls.

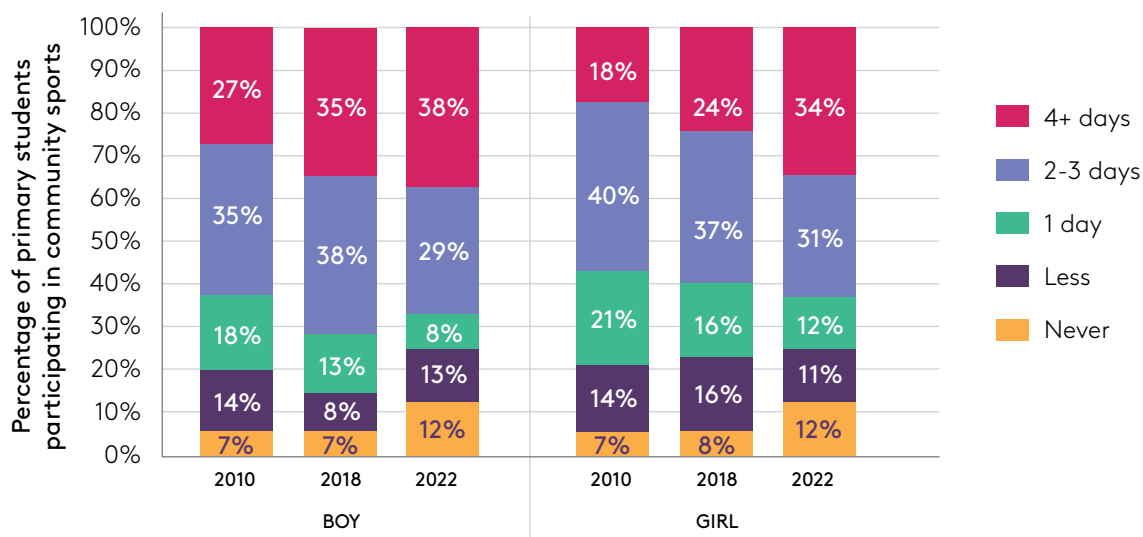


Figure 5.1 Primary students' participation levels in community sport.

There were also increases in participation of at least 4 times a week between 2018 and 2022 for post-primary school boys and girls.

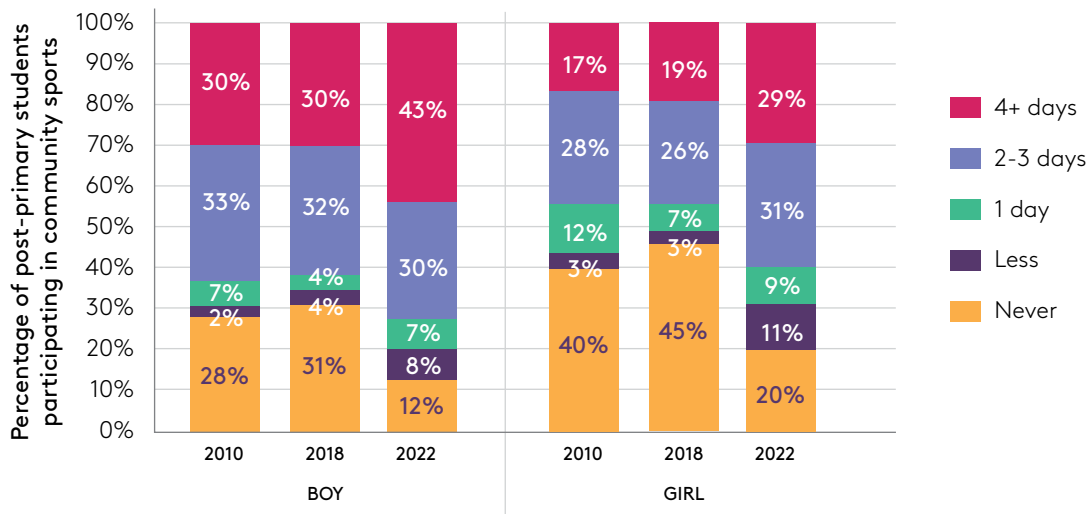


Figure 5.2. Post-primary students’ participation levels in community sport in CSPPA 2010, 2018 and 2022.

When we examine community sport participation (at least once a week) by year in post-primary school, rates go from a high of 80% of 1st years to a low of 60% for 6th years (Figure 5.3). Higher community sport participation was evident across all post-primary years, compared to previous CSPPA timepoints. Nonetheless, a significant age-related decline was still evident at post-primary level, as was the case with previous CSPPA time-points.

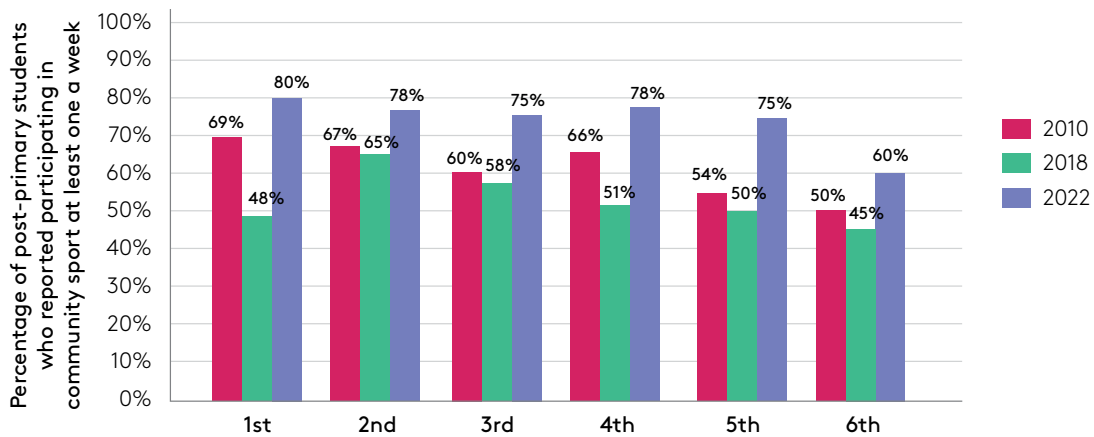


Figure 5.3. Post-primary community sport participation at least once a week by school year.

Three quarters (75%) of students reported that they were participating at least once a week in community sport. Participation in community sport was common amongst primary students (76%) and post-primary students (74%). At post-primary school 80% boys and 69% of girls participated in community sport.

Significant socio-economic differences were evident at both primary and post-primary school level. Primary school students from families of higher socio-economic status reported higher levels of participation in community sport than those from lower socio-economic status (82% vs 60%). The same socio-economic differences were also evident at post-primary school level (84% vs 64%).

Students with disabilities had lower levels of community sports participation at both primary (65%) and post-primary (63%) level, when compared to those with no disabilities at primary (79%) and post-primary (78%).

Eighty two percent of Irish primary school students (82%) participated in community sport compared to 54% of primary school students from other nationalities. This difference was also evident at post-primary level (76% Irish vs. 63% other nationality). Post-primary students who identified as white Irish ethnicity (78%) also had higher community sports participation rates than those who identified as another ethnicity (63%).

Students from both rural primary (78%) and post-primary (77%) schools were reported higher levels of participation in community sport than students from urban primary (69%) and post-primary (68%) schools.

**Table 5.2. Community sports participation at least once a week by demographic characteristics**

	Primary (%)		Post-Primary (%)	
	2018	2022	2018	2022
<b>Gender<sup>c</sup></b>				
Boy	86	77	66	80
Girl	77	75	52	69
Other	-	63	-	64
<b>Age Group<sup>c</sup></b>				
12-13y		77	67	79
14-15y			61	77
16-20y			50	70
<b>Disability<sup>a</sup></b>				
No disabilities	81	79	61	78
With disabilities	72	65	43	63
<b>SES<sup>a</sup></b>				
Low	75	60	47	64
Medium	-	80	-	74
High	82	82	65	84
<b>Nationality<sup>a</sup></b>				
Irish		81		76
Other nationalities		53		63
<b>Ethnicity<sup>c</sup></b>				
White Irish				78
Other ethnicity				62
<b>School Location<sup>a</sup></b>				
Rural	85	78	67	77
Urban	74	69	45	68

Note: a. Statistically significant for both primary and post-primary. b. statistically significant for only primary. c. statistically significant for only post-primary'

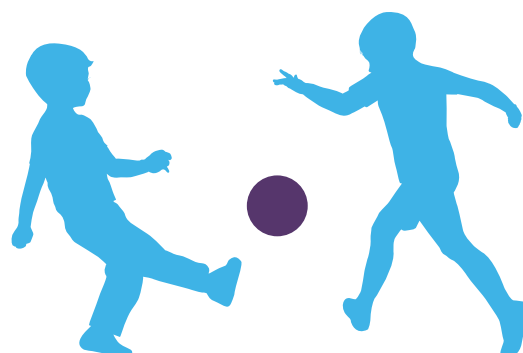
## 5.4 Range of sports participated in the community

There was an increase in participation in nearly all community sports/activities across both boys and girls in 2022 for both primary and post-primary students (Table 5.3).

Among primary students, soccer (56%), Gaelic football (47%), hurling (37%), swimming (36%) and rugby (25%) were reported as the five most popular community sports/activities for boys in primary school; compared to swimming (45%), Gaelic football (43%), camogie (40%), dance (32%) and athletics (29%) for primary school girls. Soccer remained the most popular sport for boys in 2018 (55%) and 2022 (56%). The number of girls who reported swimming doubled between 2018 (21%) and 2022 (45%).

In post-primary schools, soccer (41%), Gaelic football (38%), hurling (26%), swimming (26%) and weight training (25%) were reported as the five most popular community sports/activities for boys; while, swimming (34%), Gaelic football (33%), dance (25%), camogie (22%) and cycling (20%) were the five most popular activities for girls (Table 5.3). Like the primary school data, soccer was the most popular sport for boys in 2018 (43%) and 2022 (41%); and a large increase in swimming was reported among girls between 2018 (19%) and 2022 (34%).

**Soccer** was the most popular community sport/activity for **boys** in 2022 in both primary (56%) and post-primary schools (41%).



**Swimming** was the most popular community sport/activity for **girls** in 2022 in both primary (45%) and post-primary schools (34%).



Table 5.3. Percentage of primary and post-primary girls and boys who participated in specific sports in a community sports club or setting in the last 12 months.

Sport/Activity	Primary (%)			Post-Primary (%)		
	Boy	Girl	All	Boy	Girl	All
Gaelic Football	47	43	45	38	33	35
Swimming	36	45	40	26	34	30
Soccer	56	27	42	41	15	28
Camogie/Hurling	37	40	38	26	22	24
Cycling	21	24	23	19	20	20
Weight training	0	0	0	25	16	20
Athletics	23	29	26	17	18	17
Dance	5	32	18	4	25	14
Tennis	11	17	14	11	14	13
Basketball	17	19	18	14	13	13
Golf	19	14	16	17	8	12
Cross-country running	16	14	14	11	12	11
Rugby	25	14	20	16	6	11
Boxing	17	12	14	13	9	11
Horse riding	13	28	20	5	15	10
Adventure Activities	13	17	15	9	10	10
Martial arts	14	15	15	11	8	10
Gymnastics	5	23	14	4	16	10
Surfing	0	0	0	9	11	10
Badminton	7	12	9	6	7	6
Aerobics	6	11	8	6	7	6
Hockey	6	16	11	3	7	5
Volleyball	6	9	8	4	4	4
Baseball/rounders	6	8	7	5	5	5
Handball	8	7	7	7	4	6
Triathlon	7	7	7	3	3	3
Netball	5	6	5	2	1	2
Squash	0	0	0	3	3	3
Other Sport	7	9	8	4	4	4

## 5.5 Sport Club Membership

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The percentage of students who were members of a community sports club was greater among primary (77%) than post-primary (63%) students. There was little change from 2018 for primary students (75% in 2018) and post-primary students (67% in 2018). Boys, at both primary (79%) and post-primary (68%), reported higher levels of sports club membership than girls at primary (76%) and post-primary (60%). The socio-economic and demographic gradients observed in community sports participation were replicated and at times magnified in the sports club membership responses, with those from lower socio-economic status, those with disabilities, those of other nationalities and those of other ethnicities less likely to be members of sports clubs at both primary and post primary level. Further mirroring the trends in community sports participation, those from rural schools were more likely to be members of sports club than those from urban schools.

## 5.6 Sport Coaching

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Sixty six percent of post-primary students reported receiving sports coaching, with a significantly higher proportion of boys (73%) receiving coaching than girls (59%). Significant differences were found across several other categories. Students living in urban areas (58%) received less coaching that helped them improve, than those in rural areas (69%), while those with disabilities (54%) also received less coaching than those without disability (70%). A socio-economic gradient was also evident in relation to sport coaching, both in terms of socio-economic status (low socio-economic status = 52% vs. high socio-economic status = 75%) and school status (DEIS = 56% vs. non-DEIS = 68%). More Irish post-primary students (69%) received coaching compared to students of other nationalities (47%). The majority of students reported being coached by males (79%) compared to just 18% who reported being coached by a female, only 3% of post-primary boys reported being coached by a female.

## 5.7 Sports Spectatorship

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Attending a sports match as a spectator or supporter in the last 12 months was reported by 72% of the students. There were more students in primary schools (87%) than post-primary schools (67%) who reported spectatorship in the last 12 months.

As shown in Table 5.4, the top 5 sports were Gaelic football (35%), soccer (35%), basketball (25%), hurling (24%) and rugby (22%). More boys than girls reported they went to watch a soccer (38% vs 29%) and rugby (28% vs 21%) match whereas, more girls than boys reported watching camogie match (26% vs 15%) and dance competition (19% vs 12%). There was a decrease among students in primary to post-primary schools who reported attending swimming (22% vs 12%), rugby (29% to 22%) and camogie (25% to 18%).

**72%** of students reported attending a sports match as spectator or supporter in the last 12 months.





Table 5.4. Percentage of primary and post-primary girls and boys who spectated specific sports in the last 12 months.

Sport/Activity	Primary (%)			Post-Primary (%)		
	Boy	Girl	All	Boy	Girl	All
Gaelic football	36	35	35	36	35	35
Soccer	30	39	35	28	38	33
Basketball	23	23	23	27	24	25
Hurling	26	31	28	22	26	24
Rugby	24	35	29	19	26	22
Camogie	34	17	25	22	14	18
Athletics	23	19	21	18	16	17
Boxing	14	16	16	11	15	13
Cross-country running	16	13	14	14	12	13
Dance	20	9	15	18	7	12
Swimming	24	20	22	13	11	12
Tennis	20	12	16	11	10	11
Badminton	15	10	12	12	8	10
Hockey	20	13	17	12	8	10
Horse riding	17	13	15	11	8	10
Gymnastics	19	10	15	12	7	9
Volleyball	14	10	12	11	7	9
Martial arts	13	12	13	8	9	9
Handball	12	12	12	7	9	8
Triathlon	14	10	12	7	6	7
Squash	-	-	-	6	5	6
Netball	11	9	10	6	5	6

## 5.8 Community Sport Volunteering among Post-primary Students

For the first time, post-primary students were asked if they have supported their club by voluntary activities in the last week and in the last 12 months (Table 5.5). More boys (50%) reported volunteering in sports in the last week than girls (45%). A significant age-related decline was evident for volunteering in the previous week. Students from families of higher socio-economic status volunteered more than those of lower socio-economic status. This was evident in both 12 month and 7-day volunteering rates. White Irish students recorded higher levels of volunteerism than those from other ethnicities, particularly at post-primary level. A similar difference was also evident with nationality where Irish students recorded higher levels of volunteerism than students from other nationalities. Post-primary students with disabilities were seen to volunteer more than those with no disabilities.

Table 5.5. Percentage of post-primary students who volunteered in community sport in last 7 days and last 12 months

	Last 7 days (%)	Last 12 months (%)
<b>Gender<sup>c</sup></b>		
Boy	50	79
Girl	45	75
Other	50	79
<b>Age Group<sup>c</sup></b>		
12-13y	57	81
14-15y	53	77
16-20y	38	76
<b>Disability Status<sup>a</sup></b>		
No disabilities	46	77
With disabilities	54	78
<b>SES<sup>a</sup></b>		
Low	49	75
Medium	44	76
High	55	82
<b>Nationality<sup>a</sup></b>		
Irish	47	78
Other nationalities	52	71
<b>Ethnicity<sup>c</sup></b>		
White Irish	46	78
Other ethnicity	51	72

Note: a - differences in both Last 7 days and Last 12 months, b - differences in last 7 days, c - differences in last 12 months. \*, Other gender is not

## SECTION 6 School Sport

### 6.1 Key Findings



**91%**  
of primary students  
participated in school  
sport at least once a week



**75%**  
of post-primary students from  
rural schools participated in  
schools sports compared to  
66% of urban students



**38%**  
of primary schools had no  
on-site access to an indoor  
space for sports/PE

- Ninety-one percent (91%) of primary and 72% of post-primary school students reported **participating in school sport at least once a week**, an increase compared to 2018 for both primary (70%) and post-primary (63%) students.
- At primary school, **more girls** (94%) reported participation in school sport than boys (89%). However, this trend was reversed in post-primary school where boys school sports participation (79%) was higher than girls (65%). This is primarily due to a large drop in girls' school sport participation rate between primary and post-primary school.
- Post-primary students from **rural schools** (75%) reported higher levels of participation in school sport than their urban peers (66%). This difference is lower than 2018.
- **Game based sports**, particularly team sports, continue to be the most popular type of sports participated in both primary (81%) and post-primary school (60%).
- There was a substantial decrease in the proportion of post-primary **students competing in inter-school sport** (62% in 2018 vs. 47% in 2022). It is possible that inter-school sports competitions had not fully returned to pre-COVID levels at the time of the survey.
- Thirty-eight percent (38%) of primary schools and 15% of post-primary schools surveyed reported no **on-site access to an indoor space for sports/PE**.

### 6.2 Background

School sport refers to any sports activity that is engaged in within the school setting but is not part of the formal curriculum time, such as before school, at lunchtime or after school<sup>1</sup>. School sport is identified as an important contributor to overall physical activity in children. Ireland's National Physical Activity Plan [6] recognises school sport as an integral part of increasing physical activity levels in the population and highlights the need for the availability of a broad and varied selection of sports which children can participate in, in a school-setting, outside of curricular PE. Numerous actions laid out in Sport Ireland's Participation Plan [18] also identify the key role that school sport should play in increasing engagement in sport and physical activity. In addition, differences in participation rates between demographic and socio-economic groups which exist in community sport are often not as pronounced in school sport making it an attractive focus of any sport and physical activity promotion strategy that seeks equitable participation levels across social groups [2]. This chapter outlines participation levels in school sport, the range of sports participated in at primary and post-primary school, as well as perspectives of school management on school sport and the school environment.

<sup>1</sup> In the 2010 CSPPA report, school sport was referred to as "extra-curricular sport".

### 6.3 Participation in School Sport

In 2022, 91% of primary and 72% of post-primary students reported participating in school sport at least once a week. Compared to 2018, this was a 21-percentage point increase for primary (70%) and a 9-percentage point increase for post-primary (63%) students. The frequencies of school participation varied based on students' gender, nationality, disability and socio-economic status as well as school location.

Table 6.1 shows trends of school sport participation between 2010, 2018 and 2022. As mentioned in the previous chapter in community sport, at primary school there was a substantial decrease in the percentage of students who report never participating in school sport in 2022 (4%) compared to both 2018 (20%) and 2010 (24%). At post-primary school, there was also a decrease in the percentage of students who never participated in school sport, from 30% in 2018 to 21% in 2022. Likewise, there were substantial increases in the percentage of students who reported participating in school sport on four or more days per week in both primary (58%) and post-primary (31%) school from 28% (primary), and 21% (post-primary) in 2018.

**Table 6.1. Percentage distribution of school sport participation by frequency**

Frequency	Primary (%)			Post-Primary (%)		
	2010	2018	2022	2010	2018	2022
4 or more days a week	18	28	58	31	21	31
2-3 days a week	24	25	25	26	27	27
1 day a week	21	17	8	16	15	14
Less often	13	10	5	11	7	8
Never	24	20	4	16	30	21

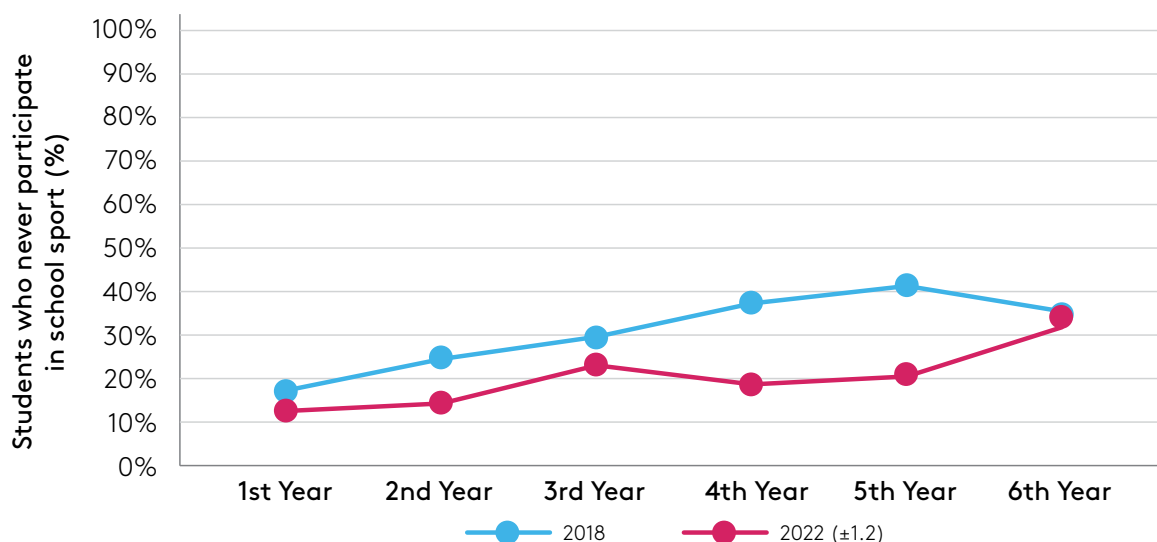


Figure 6.1. Percentage of post-primary students who never participate in school sport

Note: Margins of error for 2022 data are presented in parentheses.

Participation in school sport at least once per week has increased from 2018 to 2022 among primary students (91% in 2022, 72% in 2018) and post-primary students (72% in 2022, 63% in 2018). Rates of participation in school sport by individual and school related factors are presented in Table 6.2. Similar to 2018, more girls (94%) in primary school reported participation in school sport than boys (89%) however rates of school sport participation drop to 65% among post-primary girls, much lower than post-primary boys (79%).

Similarly, school sports participation is higher in all girls (95%) than all boys (89%) primary schools but there is a 35-percentage point drop in school sport participation in girls only schools between primary (95%) and post-primary (60%) level.

**Table 6.2. School sport participation at least once a week by demographic characteristics**

	Primary (%)		Post-Primary (%)	
	2018	2022	2018	2022
<b>Gender<sup>a</sup></b>				
Boy	67	89	70	79
Girl	72	94	57	65
Other	-	83	-	66
<b>Year Group<sup>b</sup></b>				
5th	-	90	-	-
6th	-	92	-	-
1st Year	-	-	-	83
2nd Year	-	-	-	81
3rd Year	-	-	-	69
4th Year	-	-	-	75
5th Year	-	-	-	70
6th Year	-	-	-	53
<b>Disability<sup>a</sup></b>				
No disabilities	71	93	65	74
With disabilities	65	86	52	66
<b>SES<sup>a</sup></b>				
Low	70	88	56	67
Medium	-	93	-	71
High	71	91	66	78
<b>Nationality<sup>a</sup></b>				
Irish	-	92	-	73
Other nationalities	-	88	-	66
<b>Ethnicity<sup>c</sup></b>				
White Irish	-	-	-	74
Other ethnicity	-	-	-	65
<b>School DEIS<sup>b</sup></b>				
Non-DEIS	64	91	58	72
DEIS	72	96	64	74
<b>School Location <sup>a</sup></b>				
Rural	70	92	69	75
Urban	70	89	54	66

Note: a. Statistically significant for both primary and post-primary. b. statistically significant for only primary. c. statistically significant for only post-primary

## 6.4 Range of Sports Played in School

The range of school sports participated in primary and post-primary school before and after school in CSPPA 2022 is presented in Table 6.3.

In primary school, soccer was the most commonly played school sport (54% boys, 36% girls) followed by Gaelic football for boys (38%) and basketball for girls (33%). Ten percent more boys played rugby than girls (20% vs 10%), although 9% more girls played hockey than boys (13% vs 4%). Since 2010, soccer, Gaelic football, basketball and camogie/hurling have consistently been among the top five most popular school sports.

At post-primary school, the most played sport amongst boys was soccer (46%) and girls was Gaelic football (24%). Almost three times the number of boys (46%) reported playing soccer than girls (17%). The same difference was also evident with rugby (5% girls vs. 16% boys). In contrast, more than twice as many girls (10%) participated in dance than boys (4%). Cycling was included for the first time and 11% of post-primary students reported cycling as part of a school sport activity.

**Cycling** was included for the first time as a school sport in post-primary schools with 11% of post-primary students participating.



**Table 6.3. Percentage of primary and post-primary girls and boys who participated in specific sports at school, outside of PE, in the last 12 months.**

Sport/Activity	Primary (%)			Post-Primary (%)		
	Boy	Girl	All	Boy	Girl	All
Soccer	54	36	45	46	17	31
Gaelic football	38	32	35	32	24	28
Basketball	32	33	33	31	22	26
Camogie/Hurling	21	23	22	18	12	15
Athletics	23	22	22	16	14	15
Cycling	16	17	16	12	10	11
Cross-country running	9	9	9	11	10	11
Badminton	8	6	7	9	11	10
Baseball/rounders	17	19	17	11	9	10
Rugby	20	10	15	16	5	10
Swimming	19	14	17	9	8	9
Adventure activities	11	12	11	10	9	10
Tennis	6	12	9	10	7	9
Volleyball	9	13	11	6	10	8
Weight training	-	-	-	11	5	8
Dance	8	15	12	4	10	7
Handball	7	8	8	11	4	7
Hockey	4	13	8	4	7	5
Boxing	5	4	5	7	3	5
Gymnastics	3	7	5	4	5	5
Aerobics/exercise class	6	6	6	4	3	4
Golf	5	4	4	6	2	4
Surfing	-	-	-	4	5	4
Martial arts	3	3	3	3	3	3
Netball	3	2	3	2	2	2
Horse riding	2	2	2	2	2	2
Squash	-	-	-	3	1	2
Triathlon	3	2	3	2	<1	1
Other sport	5	7	6	2	2	2

Table 6.4 depicts the way in which the six strands of the PE curriculum match to the provision of extra-curricular school sport at school. At primary school, there is a 4% increase in outdoor and adventure and 3% increase aquatics strands in 2022 compared to 2018. Fewer students reported gymnastics (3%) and dance (4%) at primary school in 2022 compared to 2018. At post-primary level, there is a substantial increase in athletics from 11% in 2018 to 31% in 2022 and in aquatics from 4% in 2018 to 11% in 2022. The need for broad provision of opportunities for all children and the link from PE to sport within the school setting is paramount.

**Table 6.4. Participation in school sport by PE strand**

PE Strand	Primary (%)			Post-Primary (%)		
	2010	2018	2022	2010	2018	2022
Athletics	16	23	24	13	11	31
Outdoor & Adventure	6	7	11	10	6	10
Dance	11	16	12	5	5	7
Aquatics	12	14	17	4	4	11
Gymnastics	6	8	5	5	2	5
Games	50	75	81	35	56	60
Unallocated <sup>2</sup>	8	7	30	9	6	22

## 6.5 School Sport Support

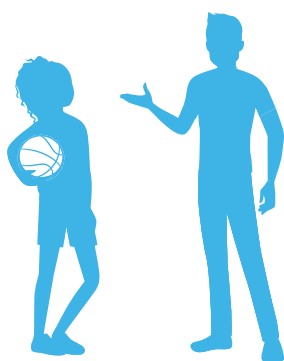
The following sections combine the student and school management perspectives on school sport support. The response rate for the management survey was 58% among primary and post-primary schools, with a total of 68 responses (primary n = 22, post-primary n = 44).

### 6.5.1 School Ethos of Sport in Schools

The majority of principals surveyed felt that school sport was important to the ethos of their school, with most describing it as 'very important' (88% primary, 85% post-primary), or 'fairly important' (12% primary, 13% post-primary). Just 2% of post-primary principals felt that school sport was not important to the ethos of their school.

### 6.5.2 School Sport Coaching

Over half of primary students (58%) and post-primary students (54%) reported that they received some form of coaching in school sports to help them get better. This represents a slight decrease from 2018 for primary students (61%), but an increase for post-primary (43%). More boys received coaching to help them improve (73%) compared to girls (59%). Of those people who provided coaching to help students get better, there was a decrease in teachers (23% in 2022, 26% in 2018) at primary school, and a 3% increase in coaches (28%) among post-primary students (Figure 6.2).



**58%** of primary students and **54%** of post-primary students reported that they received some form of coaching in schools sports.

<sup>2</sup> Unallocated reflects activities that did not fit comfortably into one of the six strands e.g. weight training, martial arts, boxing, wrestling, gym and exercise activities; or unspecified.



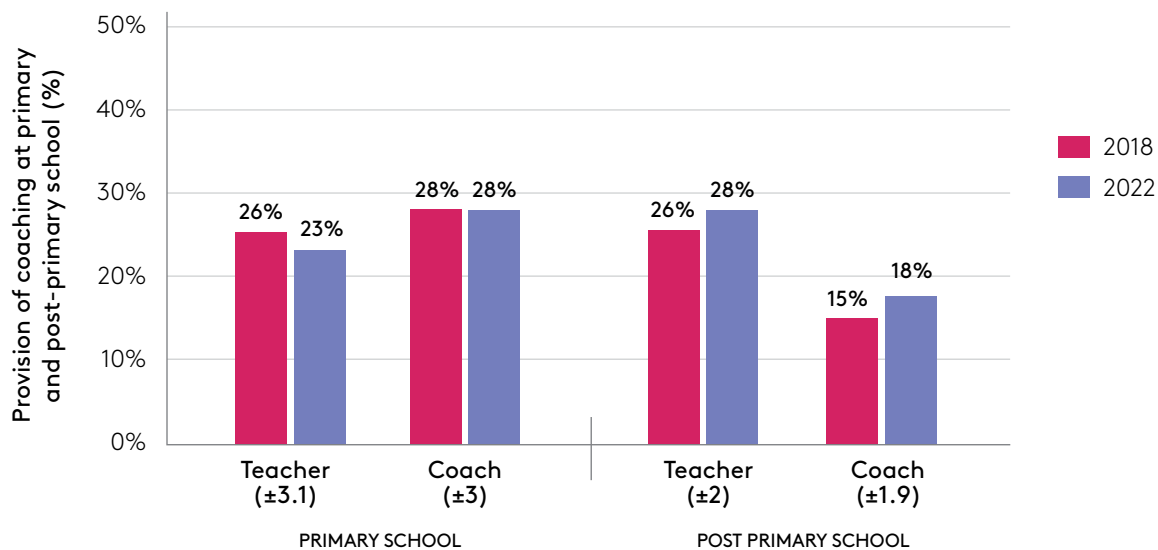


Figure 6.2. Providers of coaching in the last 12 months for school sport.

Note: Margins of error for 2022 data are presented in parentheses.

Of the principals surveyed, 71% of primary school and 59% of post-primary school principals reported that they get help from local sports clubs or organisations for coaching or for access to facilities. This marks a decrease in reported support from local clubs and organisations compared to 2010 for primary schools (90%) and post-primary schools (80%). This could reflect improved human resources and physical facilities available within schools. Considering the increase in school sport participation in 2022 compared to 2010, it does not appear to have had a negative impact on participation.

### 6.5.3 School Sport Competitions

Inter-school sport refers to sports competitions between schools. Students in post-primary schools were asked to report their experiences of school sport competitions. School management were also asked about the types of inter-school competitions their school were involved in the last year. Nearly half of the post-primary students (47%) reported representing their school in inter-school competition at least once since the start of the school year, 2021-2022, lower than the data reported in CSPA 2018 (62%). COVID-19 restrictions were still in place between September 2021 and January 2022, which may explain the decrease. According to school management, in primary schools, the most common inter-school sports events were Gaelic football, Camogie, Athletics, Hurling and Soccer (Figure 6.3). There has been an increase from 34% of primary schools with inter-school camogie competitions in 2010 to 59% in 2022. Also increases were noted for athletics competitions from 45% in 2010 to 58% in 2022.

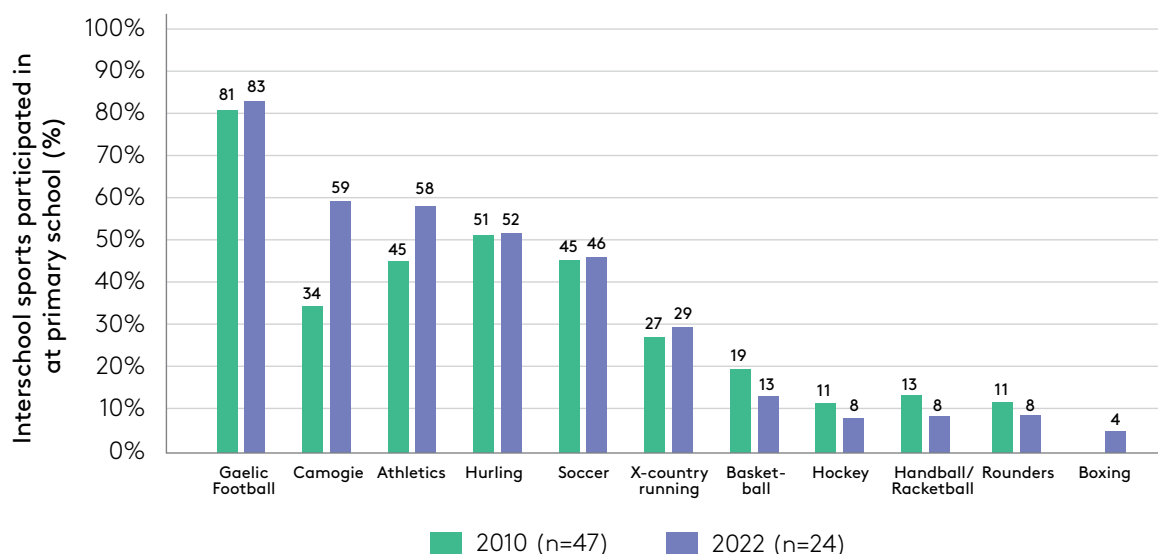


Figure 6.3. Percentage of primary schools participating in top 10 most popular inter-school competitions

The top five post-primary inter-school competitions remained the same in 2010 and 2022 (Figure 6.4). A noticeable increase in hurling and camogie competitions were reported despite all other sport competitions appearing to have a small decrease between 2010 and 2022. This might be due to the COVID-19 restrictions.

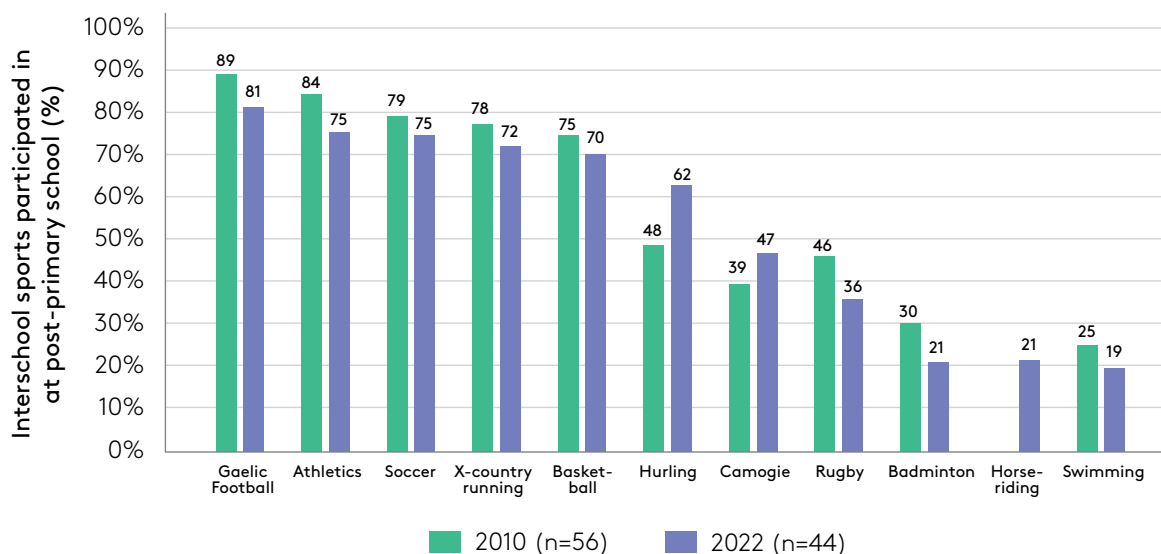


Figure 6.4. Percentage of post-primary schools participating in top 10 most popular inter-school competitions.

At post-primary level, 47% of students reported participating in inter-school competitions in 2022. Students in exam years (46% in 3rd year and 38% in 6th year), those with disabilities (38%), those classified as low socio-economic status (37%), and those from other nationalities (25%) reported the lowest rates of inter-school sport participation.

## 6.6 School Sport Facilities

Of the CSPPA 2022 schools, 38% of primary and 15% of post-primary schools reported that there were no indoor spaces for sports or PE on-site in the school. The availability of different types of sports facilities in and outside of primary schools as reported by school principals is shown in Figure 6.5. Basketball courts and multipurpose floor spaces (i.e., space used for multiple purposes such as school assemblies, school plays, etc.) were the most commonly available on-site facilities in primary school, with GAA pitches the most commonly available off-site facilities.

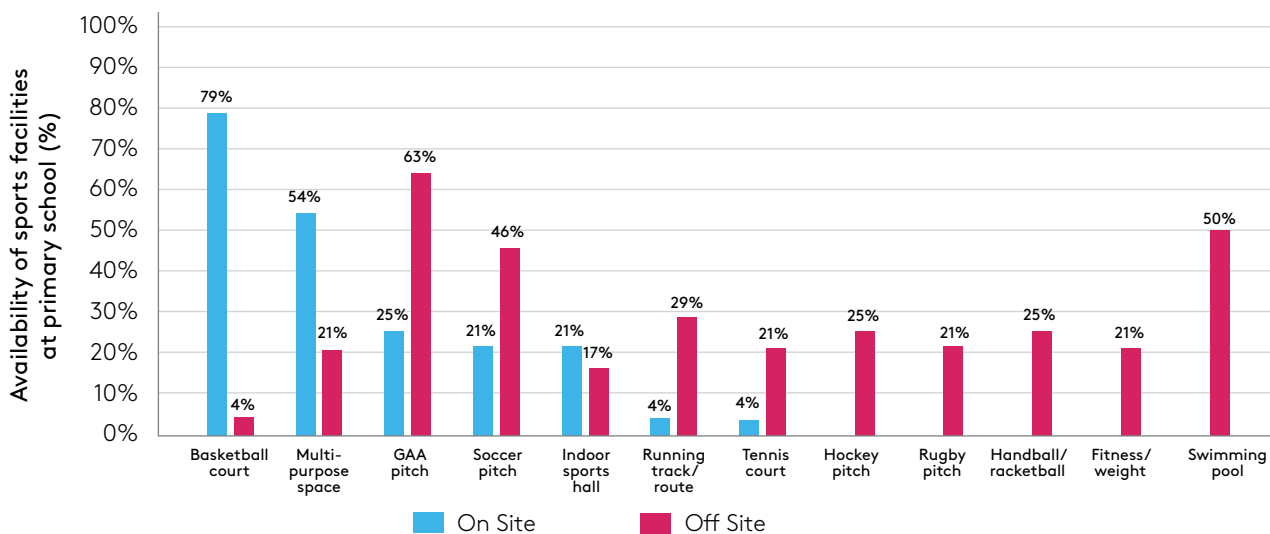


Figure 6.5. Availability of sports facilities at primary school

Figure 6.6 shows that over three quarters of post-primary school principals reported having on-site access to basketball courts (79%), indoor sports halls (77%) and just over half with onsite GAA pitches (51%). The most commonly available off-site sports facilities for post-primary schools were swimming pools (45%), running tracks/routes (40%) and GAA pitches (38%). In contrast to primary schools, where less than a quarter have access to a sports hall, the majority (88%) of post-primary principals reported access to an indoor sports hall either on- or off-site.

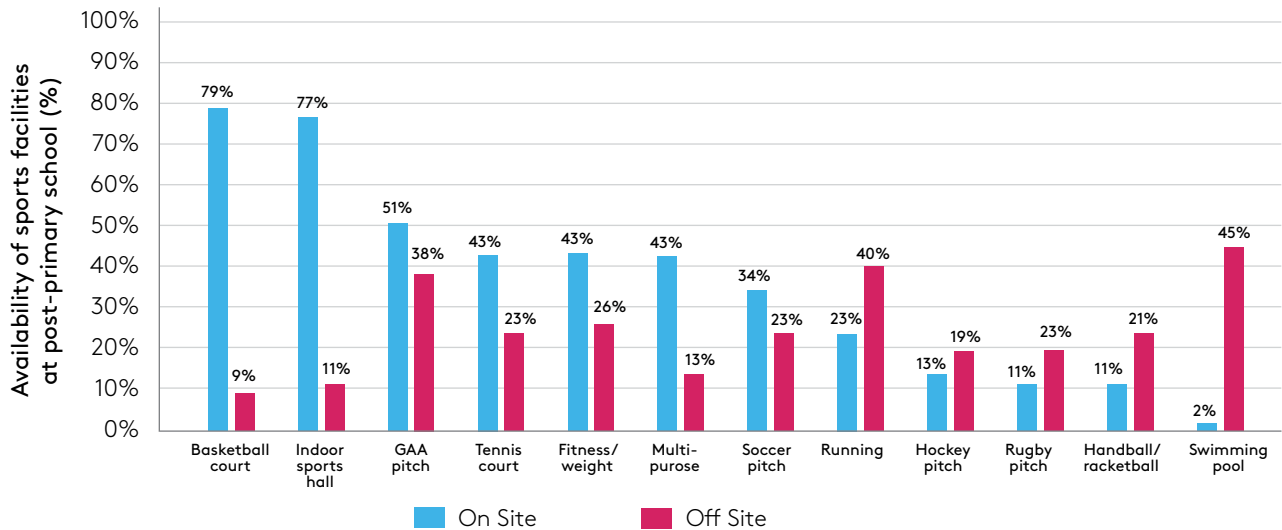


Figure 6.6. Availability of sports facilities at post-primary school

Facilities likely play a significant role in determining which type of PE and school sport activities are offered in school. When asked about the perceived adequacy of available sports facilities, there were distinct differences between responses from primary and post-primary principals. Only 13% of primary school principals deemed their sports facilities very adequate, whereas 26% of post-primary principals believed the sports facilities for their schools were very adequate (Figure 6.7). Although a large proportion of primary (42%) and post-primary (34%) school principals deemed their school sports facilities as not at all adequate, this has improved since 2010 when 49% of primary and 41% of post-primary principals felt their facilities were not adequate.

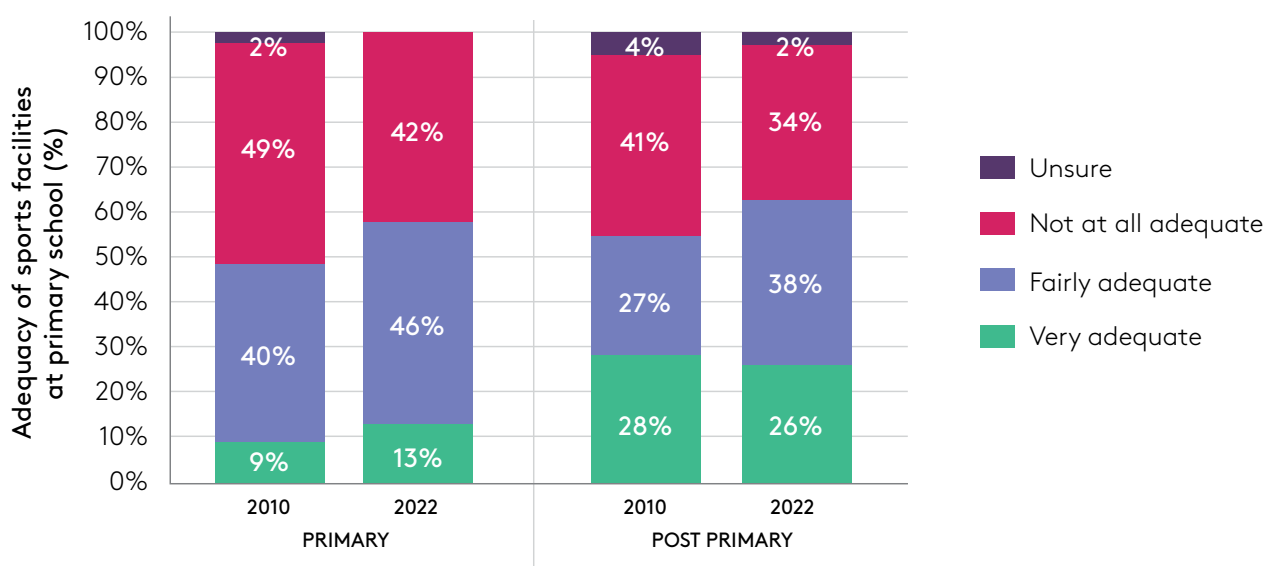


Figure 6.7. Adequacy of sports facilities at primary (n=24) and post-primary (n=44) school

## SECTION 7 Physical Education

### 7.1 Key Findings



**75%**

of primary students reported receiving the Department of Education's recommended amount of PE



**28%**

participation in the aquatics strand of primary PE (down from 43% in 2018)



**9%**

of post-primary school students reported that they were "non-swimmers"

- Primary students reported an **average of 85 minutes of PE per week**, almost double the 46 minutes reported in 2010.
- Post-primary students reported an **average of 73 minutes of PE per week**, which represents a slight decline on the 77 minutes reported in 2010.
- **Primary school girls reported more minutes of PE** per week (90 minutes) than primary school boys (80 minutes), however this trend reversed at post-primary school where boys reported more minutes of PE (75 minutes) than post-primary girls (71 minutes).
- At both primary and post-primary levels, **students attending DEIS schools reported more minutes of PE** (118 and 78 minutes respectively) than non-DEIS schools (81 and 72 minutes respectively).
- Seventy-five percent (75%) of primary students and 72% of **post-primary students reported receiving the Department of Education's recommended amount of PE** per week.
- **Activities from the games strand**, particularly invasion games, continue to dominate the content of PE classes, with other strands notably less prevalent. Most notably, participation in the aquatics strand of primary PE appears to be in decline from 50% in 2010 to 43% in 2018 to 28% in 2022.
- Eight percent (8%) of primary and 9% of post-primary students reported that they were "**non swimmers**", however 3% of primary and 4% of post primary students from families of high socio-economic status reported they were non-swimmers in comparison to 15% and 17% of their respective peers from families of low socio-economic status.

### 7.2 Background

Physical Education (PE) is provided within the school curriculum at both primary and post-primary school and is recognised as an essential part of an individual's education. High quality PE has the potential to develop children's physical literacy by improving their movement competence, their movement confidence, their motivation to be physically active and their knowledge and understanding of the benefits of physical activity. Recent Department of Education curriculum development recommendations have focused on positioning PE within the broad context of lifelong health and wellbeing.

At primary level, schools currently follow the 1999 Primary School Education Curriculum. More recently, the Primary Curriculum Framework was launched by the Minister on the 9th of March 2023. This Framework places increased emphasis on existing areas such as PE and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). As the full redevelopment of the curriculum progresses, new curriculum specifications will be developed by the National Council for Curriculum

and Assessment (NCCA) for the five curriculum areas, with Wellbeing as one of these areas. These specifications will be available for the 2025/2026 school year. Current primary school curriculum guidelines recommend that students receive a minimum of 60 minutes timetabled PE per week. The primary school PE curriculum is divided into six strands: outdoor and adventure activities, aquatics, athletics, games, dance and gymnastics. The curriculum is delivered by generalist primary teachers.

At post-primary school, PE is taught by specialist teachers and there are a variety of curriculum options. Since 2017 PE has become a component of the Wellbeing area of learning. A new Junior Cycle PE specification will be rolled out for all first-year students from September 2023. For 1st years entering post-primary school, the minimum recommended allocation of PE time is 135 hours spread out across 1st, 2nd and 3rd year. This equates to approximately 80 minutes of PE per week over the first three years.

The Senior Cycle (SCPE) framework builds on student's prior learning in PE, structures around six curriculum models; health-related physical activity; sport education; contemporary issues in physical activity; adventure education; personal and social responsibility; and teaching games for understanding. The Department of Education recommends a minimum of a double period of PE per week to support learning.

In 2018, examinable Leaving Certificate Physical Education (LCPE), was introduced on a phased basis, and was rolled out nationally in September 2020. There are now approximately 330 schools offering LCPE – almost half of post-primary schools in the Republic of Ireland. Of the five suggested class periods a week for LCPE, a double period is recommended to facilitate active participation in physical activity. This chapter outlines participation rates in PE as well as the content and the structure of PE classes across both primary and post-primary schools.

### 7.3 Minutes of Physical Education

At primary school, students received an average of 85 minutes of PE each week, a large increase on the reported 46 minutes per week in 2010. Post-primary students reported an average 73 minutes of PE per week, this is a slight decrease on the 77 minutes reported in 2010. Figure 7.1 shows the mean minutes of PE received by each class/grade in 2010 and 2022. There is a trend towards increased mean weekly minutes of PE for 5th and 6th class in primary school. The picture is more mixed in post-primary school. 4th years had the largest decrease out of all school years (minus 16 minutes per week), while 6th years had a 7 minute increase in comparison to the 2010 data. The results point to a slight decline in minutes of PE in post-primary school but a more even distribution of PE minutes across year groups, especially in 6th year.

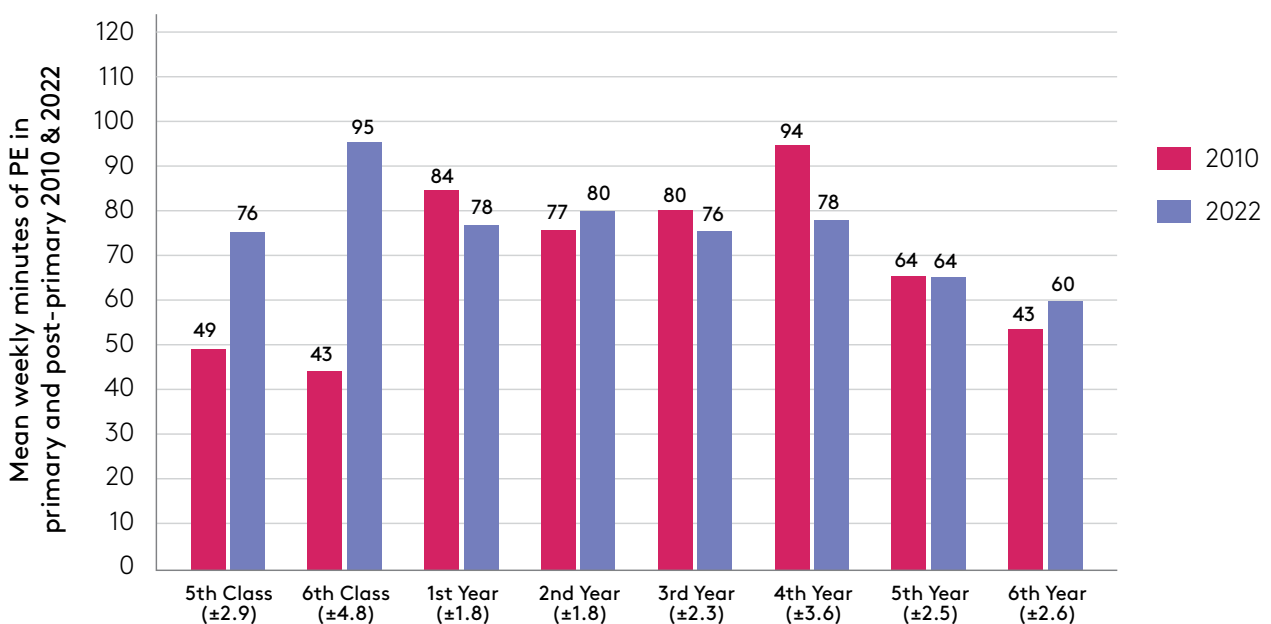


Figure 7.1. Mean weekly minutes of PE.

Note: Margins of error for 2022 data are presented in parentheses.

The minutes of PE received by students differed across most demographic categories (Table 7.1). Primary school girls (90 mins) received more minutes of PE than boys (80 mins), while the reverse was true for post-primary school (boys = 75 mins vs. girls = 71 mins). Across both primary and post-primary settings, DEIS schools provided more minutes than non-DEIS schools (primary: 118 vs. 81; post-primary 78 vs. 72 mins). In post-primary school, white Irish students received more minutes than students from other ethnicities (74 vs. 69 mins). Analysis by school gender showed that all girls' schools provided the most minutes of PE in the primary sector (91 mins), but the least minutes in the post-primary sector (67 minutes) out of all school types. Rural primary schools provided significantly more PE (89 mins) than urban primary schools (75 mins). Although students with disabilities report slightly lower minutes of PE than those without disabilities, the differences were not statistically significant.

Table 7.1. Average minutes of PE per week by demographic characteristics

	Primary (mins/wk)	Post-primary (mins/wk)
<b>Gender<sup>a</sup></b>		
Boy	80	75
Girl	90	71
Other	89	69
<b>Disability Status</b>		
No disabilities	86	73
With disabilities	81	71
<b>Nationality</b>		
Irish	85	73
Other nationalities	87	71
<b>Ethnicity<sup>c</sup></b>		
White Irish	-	74
Other ethnicity	-	69
<b>School gender status<sup>a</sup></b>		
Boys	73	70
Girls	91	67
Mixed	86	76
<b>School SES<sup>a</sup></b>		
Non-DEIS	81	72
DEIS	118	78
<b>School Location<sup>a</sup></b>		
Rural	89	72
Urban	75	74
<b>School Size<sup>a</sup></b>		
Large	89	73
Medium	78	75
Small	86	70

Note: a. Statistically significant for both primary and post-primary. b. statistically significant for only primary. c. statistically significant for only post-primary

## 7.4 Meeting the Physical Education Recommendations

At primary school, 75% of students reported meeting the recommendations of 60 minutes of PE per week. At post-primary level, 72% meet recommendations for their year. The recommendations for junior cycle are approximately 80 mins/week of PE, whereas the senior cycle recommendations are for a double period of PE per week. Both criteria were used in CSPPA 2022. Students attending DEIS schools, at both primary (88%) and post-primary (75%) level, met the respective PE recommendations more than their non-DEIS primary (73%) and post-primary (71%) peers.

## 7.5 Physical Education classes

Table 7.2 shows the type of PE class (single, double, or triple) received by post-primary students in 2010, 2018 and 2022. In 2022, the majority (61%) of post-primary students reported receiving a double class of PE at least once per week, with more boys (66%) than girls (58%) receiving double classes.

Table 7.2. Type of PE class at post-primary school by gender

	Single (%)			Double (%)			Triple (%)		
	2010	2018	2022	2010	2018	2022	2010	2018	2022
Boy	18	42	43	80	66	66	7	10	4
Girl	34	51	46	65	63	58	3	3	2
All	27	47	45	72	64	61	5	6	4

## 7.6 Range of Activities in Physical Education

Table 7.3 shows the range of activities reported in PE for primary and post-primary school students over the previous year. The most frequently reported activities in primary PE for girls were basketball (68%), baseball/rounders (67%), Gaelic football (54%), soccer (52%) and athletics (46%). The most frequently reported activities among boys in primary PE were soccer (73%), basketball (57%), baseball/rounders (56%), Gaelic football (52%) and athletics (45%). There was a decrease in the variety of activities from 2018 to 2022 with a large decline in Gymnastics (25% vs 16%), Swimming (43% vs 28%), and Dance (41% vs 33%). It must be considered that this decline in the range of activities reported may be due to limitations placed on sports participation, especially indoor sports, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The most frequently reported activities in PE for post-primary school girls were basketball (71%), badminton (68%), baseball/rounders (63%), soccer (56%) and athletics (53%). There was no change in the most frequently reported activities for post-primary school girls between 2018 and 2022. For post-primary school boys, the most frequently reported activities in PE were the same as those for girls, although in a slightly different order; soccer (72%), basketball (72%), badminton (55%), baseball/rounders (54%) and athletics (50%). Contrary to the findings in primary school there was an increase in the variety of activities reported in PE at post-primary school.

**Table 7.3. Percentage of primary and post-primary girls and boys who participated in specific sports and physical activities during PE in the last 12 months.**

Sport/Activity	Primary (%)			Post-Primary (%)		
	Boy	Girl	All	Boy	Girl	All
Basketball	57	68	63	72	71	71
Soccer	73	52	62	72	56	64
Badminton	20	19	19	55	68	61
Baseball/rounders	56	67	61	54	63	58
Athletics	45	46	46	50	53	52
Volleyball	14	15	14	31	47	39
Gaelic football	52	54	52	37	35	36
Gymnastics	16	17	16	27	37	32
Tennis	12	26	18	28	34	31
Handball	18	16	17	36	27	31
Hockey	28	33	30	24	30	27
Dance	27	38	33	13	39	26
Rugby	30	25	28	25	22	24
Adventure Activities	14	22	19	18	31	24
Aerobics	13	12	13	20	17	18
Cross-country running	13	17	15	17	17	17
Weight training	-	-	-	21	11	16
Camogie/Hurling	29	33	31	16	14	15
Swimming	27	30	28	12	9	11
Netball	7	9	8	9	13	11
Boxing	6	4	5	11	10	10
Cycling	20	18	19	6	9	8
Squash	-	-	-	7	6	6
Martial arts	2	4	3	3	6	5
Surfing	-	-	-	4	6	5
Golf	4	4	4	5	4	4
Triathlon	5	5	5	3	2	3
Horse riding	1	2	2	2	2	2
Other Sport	7	9	8	3	3	3



Similar to previous years, in 2022 the content of PE lessons was dominated by activities from the games strand at both primary and post-primary level (Table 7.4). At post-primary school, 8 out of the top 10 activities were from the games strand, with athletics again at number 5, and gymnastics at number 8. The recommendation in CSPPA 2018 [1] to examine teacher training, confidence and the existence of barriers to teaching specific strands of the PE curriculum remains imperative, as many of the PE strands are still being neglected at both primary and post-primary school.

Notably, activities in the PE aquatics strand at primary school continued to decline from 50% in 2010, 43% in 2018, to 28% in 2022. As previously stated, the decline in 2022 may be due to COVID-19 related restrictions however monitoring of the level of delivery of aquatics PE strand in primary school may be warranted in the short term. Interestingly post-primary students reported an increase in aquatics activities in PE from 2018 (9%) to 2022 (14%).

**Table 7.4. Percentage who participated in each PE strand over the last 12 months**

Strand	Primary (%)			Post-Primary (%)		
	2010	2018	2022	2010	2018	2022
<b>Athletics</b>	50	56	52	47	46	54
<b>Outdoor and Adventure</b>	14	20	19	26	17	24
<b>Dance</b>	43	41	33	24	24	26
<b>Aquatics</b>	50	43	28	15	9	14
<b>Gymnastics</b>	30	25	16	28	31	32
<b>Games</b>	99	98	100	83	93	100
<b>Unallocated<sup>3</sup></b>	34	12	37	36	28	41

## 7.7 Post-primary school management perceptions of Physical Education

According to the school management survey, 83% of post-primary school management believe that the amount of PE undertaken in their school for Junior Cycle students is “about right”, with just 17% believing it is “too little”. Of those that responded that there was too little PE time, 13% cited a lack of adequate PE or sports facilities, while 13% also cited a lack of interest among the students as reasons.

At Senior Cycle, 76% of school management respondents stated they believe the amount of PE was about right, and 24% too little. Of those principals that believed there is too little PE time for Senior Cycle students in their school, almost a third (27%) stated that it was due to time pressure on students from schoolwork. Lack of adequate sport or PE facilities (9%) and lack of interest among students (9%) were also cited as contributing factors.

<sup>3</sup> Unallocated reflects where activities did not fit comfortably into the six Physical Education strands e.g., weight training, martial arts, boxing, wrestling, aerobics, gym and exercise activities; or were not specified.

## 7.8 Perceived swimming ability

Figure 7.2 show the changes in perceived swimming ability amongst primary and post-primary students from 2010, 2018 and 2022. The proportion of primary students who perceived themselves as beginners increased from 12% in 2010, 16% in 2018, to 19% in 2022, whereas competitive swimmers reduced from 18% in 2010, 13% in 2018, to 11% in 2022. In post-primary school, there was little change the perceived swimming ability between 2018 and 2022, although a 3% reduction in the proportion of non-swimmers (8% in 2022 vs. 12% in 2018) is encouraging.

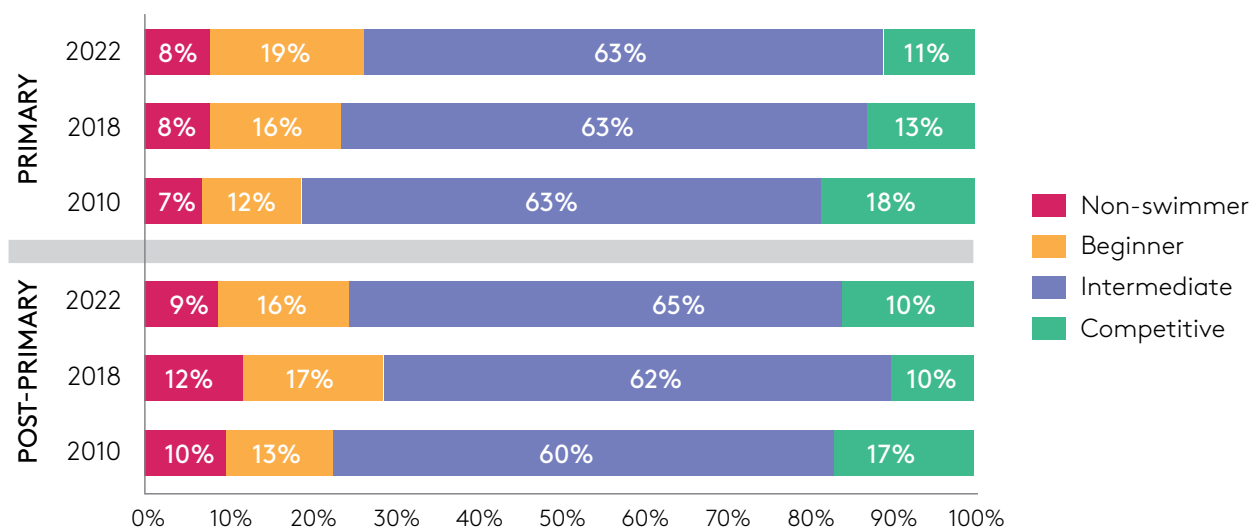


Figure 7.2. Perceived swimming ability of primary and post-primary students.

Perceived swimming ability differed significantly across demographic groups. Table 7.5. presents the prevalence of non-swimmers by demographic characteristic of the respondents. An important finding is the large socio-economic gradient in perceived swimming ability. Three percent (3%) of primary and 4% of post primary students from families of higher socio-economic status reported they were non-swimmers in comparison to 15% and 17% of their respective peers from families of lower socio-economic status.

There were also significant differences in the prevalence of non-swimmers between those with disabilities (14% primary and 12% post-primary) and those without disabilities (7% primary and 7% post-primary), and those from urban (11% primary and 12% post-primary) and rural (7% primary and 8% post-primary) schools. The prevalence of non-swimmers amongst Irish students was significantly lower than students of other nationalities at both primary (7% vs 14%) and post-primary (8% vs. 12%) levels. A similar difference was observed for ethnicity at post-primary level, where there were less non-swimmers amongst white Irish students (7%) compared to students from other ethnicities (12%).



There is a large socio-economic gradient in perceived swimming ability.

Table 7.5. Percentage of non-swimmers by demographic characteristics

	Primary (%)	Post-primary (%)
<b>Gender<sup>c</sup></b>		
Boy	9	8
Girl	7	10
Other	5	12
<b>Disability Status<sup>a</sup></b>		
No disabilities	7	7
With disabilities	14	12
<b>SES<sup>a</sup></b>		
High	3	4
Medium	7	7
Low	15	17
<b>School Location<sup>a</sup></b>		
Rural	7	8
Urban	11	12
<b>School SES<sup>b</sup></b>		
Non-DEIS	7	10
DEIS	12	9
<b>Nationality<sup>a</sup></b>		
Irish	7	8
Other nationalities	14	12
<b>Ethnicity<sup>c</sup></b>		
White Irish	-	7
Other ethnicity	-	12

Note: a. Statistically significant for both primary and post-primary. b. statistically significant for only primary. c. statistically significant for only post-primary

## 7.9 Enjoyment of Physical Education

Post-primary students were asked questions about their enjoyment in PE (Figure 7.3). For most, getting exercise (83%) and being in a gym or playing field environment (75%), is something that they enjoy a lot. Approximately half reported enjoying breaking a sweat (53%) or learning something new about health and fitness (48%) during PE. The least enjoyable part of PE was changing clothes with 30% of students reporting that they disliked this a lot. This suggests the need for evaluation of the impact of formal school uniform policies on physical activity and the potentially positive effects of wearing the PE uniform to school when timetabled for this subject.

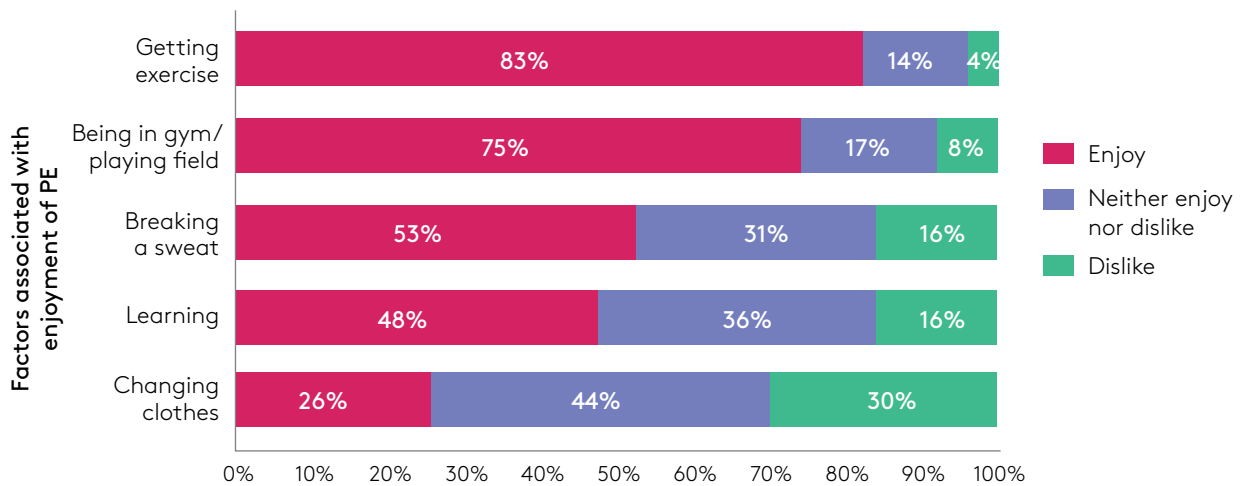


Figure 7.3. Factors associated with enjoyment of PE for post-primary students.

## SECTION 8 Active Travel

### 8.1 Key Findings



**37%**

of all students reported active travelling to or from school



**23%**

of post-primary students reported walking to school (30% from school)



**45%**

of primary school girls reported active travelling to or from school (37% in post-primary)

- Overall, fewer students reported **active travelling to or from school** in 2022 (37%) than in 2018 (42%).
- **Primary students** reported similar rates of active travel to or from school (43%) compared to 2018 (42%).
- **Post-primary** rates of active travel to or from school in 2022 (35%) was 5 percentage points lower, compared to 2018 (40%).
- Post-primary rates of **walking to/from school** were lower in 2022 compared to 2018 (to school: 23% vs 28%; and from school 30% vs 36%). Post-primary rates of **cycling to/from school** however increased from 2% in 2018 to 4% in 2022.
- Post-primary students reported higher rates of **travelling to school by car** in 2022 compared to 2018 (to school: 48% vs 40%; from school 38% vs 32%) while **travel to school by bus** was lower among post-primary students in 2022 compared to 2018 (to school: 24% vs 27%; from school 26% vs 29%).
- Overall, **more girls than boys active travel to or from school** (primary: girls 45% vs. boys 42%; post-primary: girls 37% vs. boys 33%).
- Students living in **urban environments, with lower socio-economic status and from other nationalities** reported higher levels of active travel both to and from school.

### 8.2 Active Travel

Active travel is when a journey is made by being physically active, such as walking, cycling, as well as scooting. Taking public transport is considered as mixed mode, as often students need to walk to the bus or train station to and from school. Journeys by car are often from door to door and are the least active mode of transport to and from school. Students who take part in active travel to and from school are more likely to report sufficient PA levels [22]. By participating in active travel, there are both environmental and economic benefits. Active travel is identified as one of the most practical and sustainable ways to increase physical activity levels of the population in the National Physical Activity Plan. It is also an important behaviour in helping Ireland reduce its carbon emissions and meet the objectives of the Governments Climate Action Plan 2023.

### 8.3 Active Travel

Overall, fewer students reported active travel in 2022 (37%) than in 2018 (42%). The proportion of primary students who reported active travel remained unchanged from 2018 (43%), however less post-primary students reported active travel in 2022 (35%) compared to 2018 (40%).

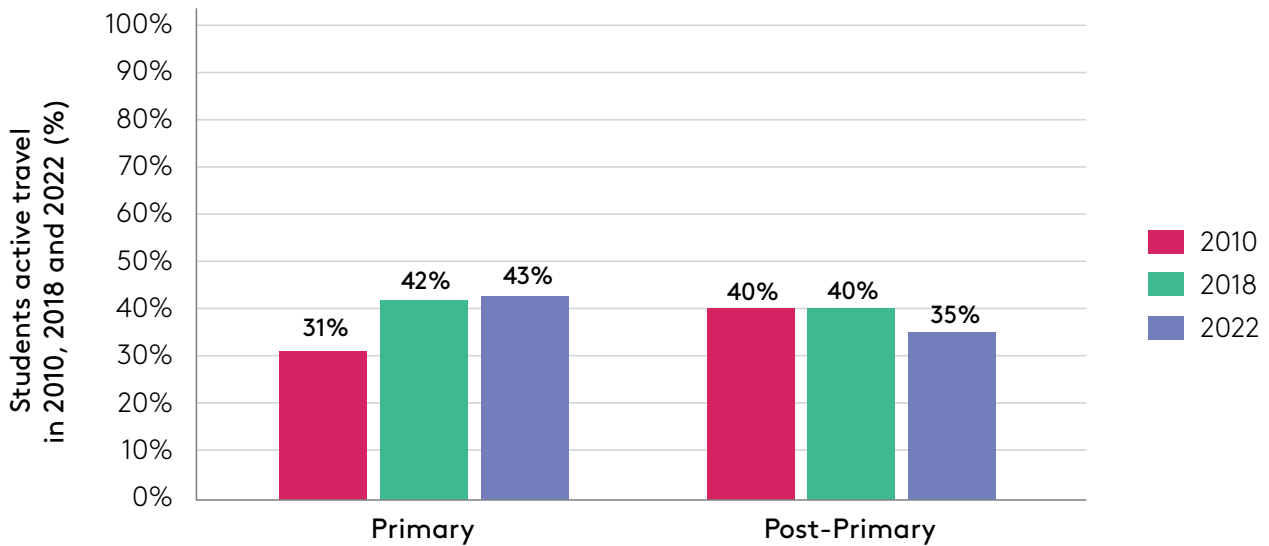


Figure 8.1. Percentage of students who active travel.

The modes of travel to and from school among primary and post-primary students are shown in Figure 8.2 and 8.3. When compared with 2018, fewer primary students reported walking to school (30% in 2018, 23% in 2022) but similar percentages reported walking home from school (35% in 2018, 36% in 2022). The same percentage of primary students reported cycling to and from school in both 2018 and 2022 (3%). Fewer post-primary students reported walking to (23%) or from (30%) school in 2022 than in 2018 (28% to and 36% from). The percentage of post-primary students cycling to and from school (4%) doubled since 2018 (2%). More post-primary students reported being driven to and from school by car in 2022 than in 2018 (48% vs 40% to school, 38% vs 32% from school). There was also a decrease in post-primary students reporting travel by bus; 24% travelled to school and 26% from school by bus in 2022 compared to 27% to school and 29% from school in 2018. However, there was a 2 and 3 percentage point increase in bus use amongst primary students, for travelling to and from school, respectively.

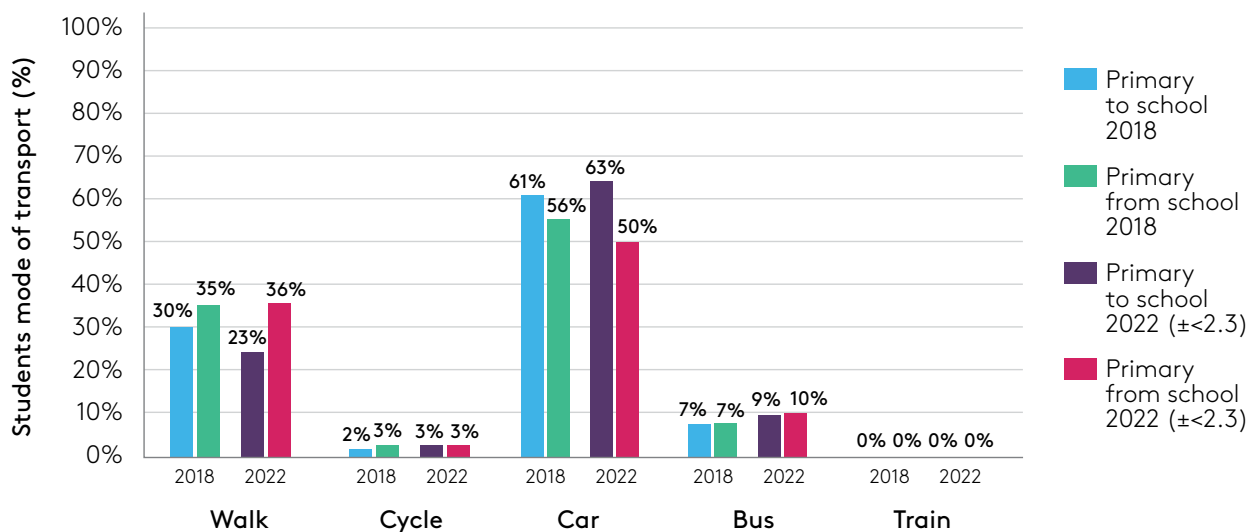


Figure 8.2. Primary students' modes of transport to and from school. Note: Margins of error for 2022 data are presented in parentheses.

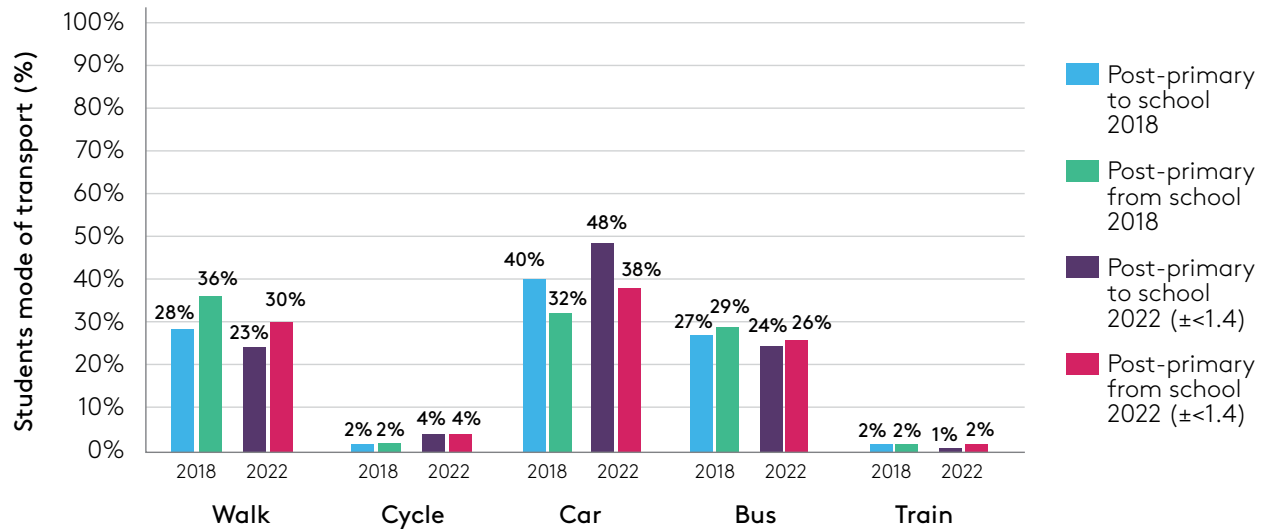


Figure 8.3. Post-primary students' modes of transport to and from school.

Note: Margins of error for 2022 data are presented in parentheses.

Active travel varied by different factors in both primary and post-primary schools. Active travel was lower among students from rural schools (primary: 32%, post-primary: 24%) in comparison to students from urban schools (primary: 75%; post-primary 60%). This is in keeping with previous CSPA findings, reflecting the negative impact of greater distance [16] and poorer infrastructure for walking and cycling in rural environments. Irish students (primary: 40%, post-primary: 31%) were significantly less likely to engage in active travel than their peers from other nationalities (primary: 60%, post-primary 54%). More students from families of low socio-economic status than high socio-economic status reported active travel (primary: low SES: 50%, high SES: 46%; post-primary, low SES: 48%, high SES: 31%). Rates of active travel decreased with age.



Table 8.1 Active travel to or from school by demographic characteristics

	Primary (%)	Post-primary (%)
<b>Gender<sup>c</sup></b>		
Boy	42	33
Girl	45	37
Other	52	45
<b>Disability Status<sup>a</sup></b>		
No disabilities	43	34
With disabilities	44	38
<b>SES<sup>a</sup></b>		
Low	50	48
Medium	40	31
High	46	31
<b>School gender status <sup>a</sup></b>		
Boys	67	33
Girls	56	40
Mixed	35	34
<b>School size<sup>c</sup></b>		
Small	32	43
Medium	35	24
Large	68	39
<b>Nationality<sup>a</sup></b>		
Irish	40	31
Other nationalities	60	54
<b>Ethnicity<sup>c</sup></b>		
White Irish		30
Other ethnicity		51
<b>DEIS status<sup>b</sup></b>		
Non DEIS	45	35
DEIS	29	36
<b>School location<sup>a</sup></b>		
Rural	32	24
Urban	73	60

Note: a. Statistically significant for both primary and post-primary. b. statistically significant for only primary. c. statistically significant for only post-primary



## SECTION 9

# Contemporary Issues in Physical Activity

## 9.1 Key Findings



**53%**

of students reported that COVID-19 measures had a positive impact on their overall health



**15%**

of post-primary students reported "keeping fit" as the reason for participating in sport



**94%**

of post-primary students reported owning a physical activity tracking device

- More students perceived that **COVID-19 measures** had a positive rather than negative impact on their overall health (53% positive vs 18% negative), fitness levels (50% positive vs 22% negative) and physical activity (51% positive vs 26% negative).
- The **most common reasons for post-primary students to participate in sport** were the importance of "keeping fit" (15%), and "something to do" (12%) followed by the influence of parents (father 8%, mother 3%) and friends (8%).
- The **most common reasons why post-primary students gave up a sport** were a lack of interest (18%), sport being too time consuming (13%) and schoolwork (11%). Fewer students report giving up a sport due to the quality of their coaches (4%) or attitudes of their peers (3%) and only 2% of students reported giving up a sport due to costs.
- Almost all students (92% of primary, 94% of post-primary) reported **owning a physical activity tracking device**, a large increase from 2018 (53% of primary, 54% of post-primary). Apps and smart watches were the most owned and used activity tracking devices.

## 9.2 Background

Identifying and addressing the factors that contribute to children and adolescents' choice to participate in, or to avoid, sport and physical activity is vital to achieving the objectives of the National Sports Policy and the National Physical Activity Plan. This chapter presents information on separate contemporary issues in sport and physical activity, including, the perceived impact of COVID-19 measures on the overall health and physical activity of students, their reasons for participating in sport, their reasons for dropping out of sport and their usage of physical activity tracking devices.

### 9.3 Perceived impact of COVID-19 measures on Physical Activity, Health, and Fitness

A sub-sample of post-primary students (n=2,344) were asked to rate their perceptions of the impact of COVID-19 measures on a range of issues from overall health to their levels of physical activity. Perhaps surprisingly, the perceived impact of COVID-19 restrictions was more positive than negative on overall physical activity (51% positive vs 26% negative), fitness levels (50% positive vs 22% negative) and overall health (53% positive vs 18% negative). The 31% who perceived a negative impact on community sport were counterbalanced by the 42% who perceived a positive impact whilst the 34% who perceived a negative impact on school sport were almost matched by the 35% who perceived a positive impact.

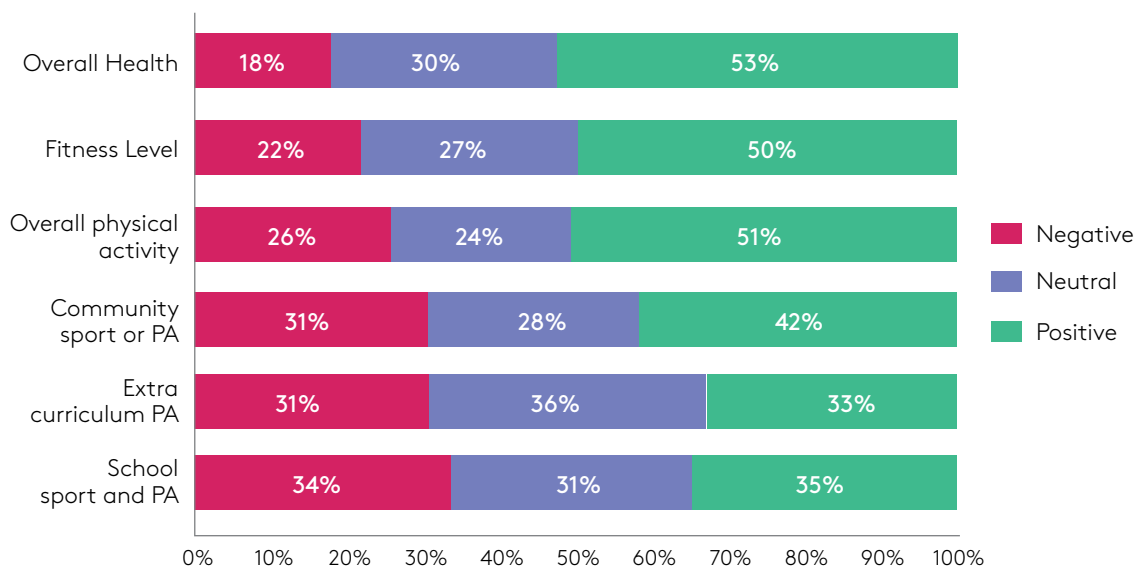
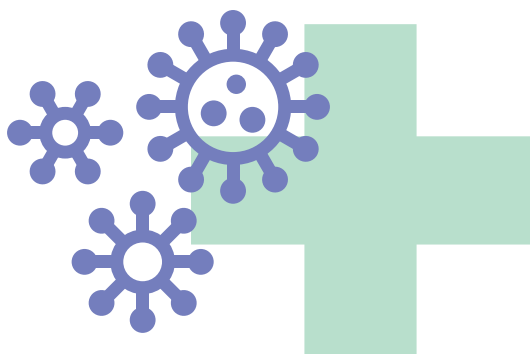


Figure 9.1. Post-primary students perceived impact of COVID-19 measures on sport, physical activity (PA), health and fitness.

Note: Margins of error no more than  $\pm 1.6\%$ .

### 9.4 Reasons for Participating in Sport

Post-primary students who reported being a member of a sport club (Chapter 4), reported “to keep fit” as the most important reason they took up sport (Table 9.1). The importance of “keeping fit” (15%), and “something to do” (12%) were the most common reasons given by students. The influence of parents (father 8%, mother 3%) and friends (8%) were also common reasons given. The importance of gender specific role models was highlighted with fathers reported by 10% of boys compared to 5% of girls and mothers reported by 4% of girls compared to 2% of boys. The relatively small role of media (TV/Video 1%) and school (1%) in children’s reasons for playing sport is perhaps surprising. Further research on the influence of media and school on children’s motivations to play sport should be considered.



The perceived **impact of COVID-19 restrictions** was more positive than negative on overall physical activity.

Table 9.1. Range of reasons for sport participation among post-primary students

	Boy (%)	Girl (%)	Total (%)
To keep fit	15	15	15
Something to do	13	11	12
Because of my father	10	5	8
Because of my friends	7	9	8
Seemed interesting	7	8	7
I thought I would be good	6	6	6
To learn new skills	4	5	4
Seemed challenging	3	3	3
To practice skills	3	3	3
Because of my mother	2	4	3
Saw it on the TV/Video etc.	2	1	1
Because of school	1	1	1

## 9.5 Sport and Physical Activity Dropout

Dropping out of sport is common during school years and is critical area of concern for Irish sport and physical activity policy. A sub-sample of post-primary students (n = 1,530) were asked if they had given up or stopped participating any sport or physical activity in the last five years. It should be noted that understanding the phenomenon of drop out is complex, for example in some cases, stopping one sport may give the opportunity to participate more regularly in another sport rather than drop-out of participation altogether [31]. Overall, 71% of post-primary students reported they had stopped playing one or more sports in the last five years. Sports that students stopped playing are reported in Table 9.2. The five sports students reported stopping most were soccer (21%), swimming (19%), dance (17%), hurling or camogie (17%) and Gaelic football (13%). These sports are also amongst the most popular sports in primary school and so are likely to have a higher number of children stopping as participation reduces in teenage years.

**71%** of post-primary students reported they had stopped playing one or more sports in the last five years.



Table 9.2. Sports which post-primary students had stopped playing in the last 5 years

	Boy (%)	Girl (%)	Total (%)
Soccer	34	10	21
Swimming	18	21	19
Dance	1	29	17
Camogie/Hurling	19	15	17
Gaelic football	15	11	13
Basketball	10	12	11
Athletics	9	11	10
Martial arts	10	9	9
Gymnastics	2	15	9
Rugby	15	3	8
Tennis	8	6	7
GAA Unspecified	7	6	7
Horse riding/Equestrian	3	6	5
Boxing	4	4	4
Hockey	1	5	3
Volleyball	0	5	3
Badminton	2	2	2
Weight training	1	2	2
Cross country running	1	1	1
Rowing	1	2	1

Students who reported stopping a sport were asked to select their top three reasons for stopping. Table 9.3 describes the most common reasons for stopping a sport among post-primary students. Lack of interest (18%) and sport being too time consuming (13%) were the most commonly reported reasons for stopping. School work commitments were reported by 11% of the students, although it was reported more frequently among girls (13%) than boys (9%). Interestingly school managers also cited time pressure to do school-work and lack of interest from students most frequently as factors that they believed negatively influenced levels of PE participation, as reported in chapter 6. Fewer students reported stopping a sport due to the quality of their coaches (4%) or attitudes of their peers (3%). Only 2% of students reported stopping sport due to perceived high costs ('too expensive').

Table 9.3. Top reasons for stopping sport among post-primary students

	Boy (%)	Girl (%)	Total (%)
Lack of interest	20	17	18
Takes up too much time	14	14	13
School work commitments	9	13	11
Not good enough	8	6	7
Training was boring	8	6	7
Started another sport	7	6	6
Injury	6	6	6
Unfriendly coaches	3	4	4
Friends had stopped	3	3	3
Unfriendly players (my age)	2	3	3
Too expensive	1	4	2
Not strong enough	3	1	2

## 9.6 Usage of Activity Tracking Devices

All students were asked questions about ownership and usage of physical activity tracking devices. Most students (primary = 92%, post-primary = 94%) reported owning a physical activity device, a large increase from 2018 (primary = 53%, post-primary = 54%). Usage levels of these devices, however, were much lower than actual device ownership. In terms of usage, smart watches (39%) and apps (38%) were the most common among primary students (Figure 9.2). Apps (42%) and smart watches (31%) were also most commonly used by post-primary students (Figure 9.3).

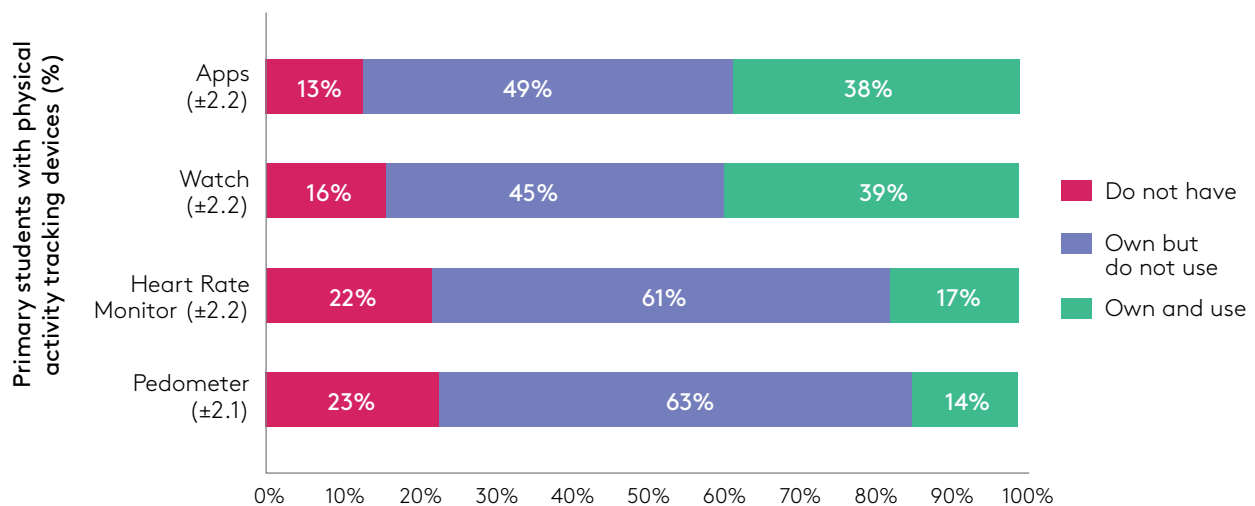


Figure 9.2. Ownership and usage of physical activity trackers among primary students.

Note: Margins of error for 2022 data are presented in parentheses.

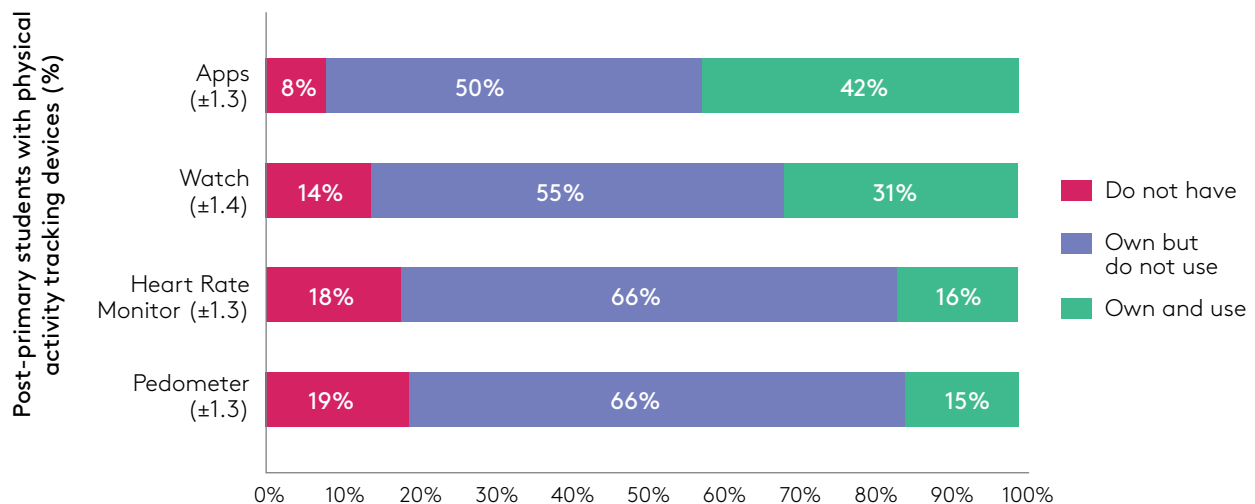


Figure 9.3. Ownership and usage of activity trackers among post-primary students.

Note: Margins of error for 2022 data are presented in parentheses.

### Homework

In CSPPA 2022, students reported the amount of time spent on homework using electronic and non-electronic modes. Responses to these homework times were combined and dichotomised split into two categories of under or over 2hr/day of homework. Twenty seven percent of students in post-primary reported doing more than 2hr/day of homework. Figure 9.4 shows that significantly more girls than boys (34% vs 20%) reported doing more than 2hr/day of homework.

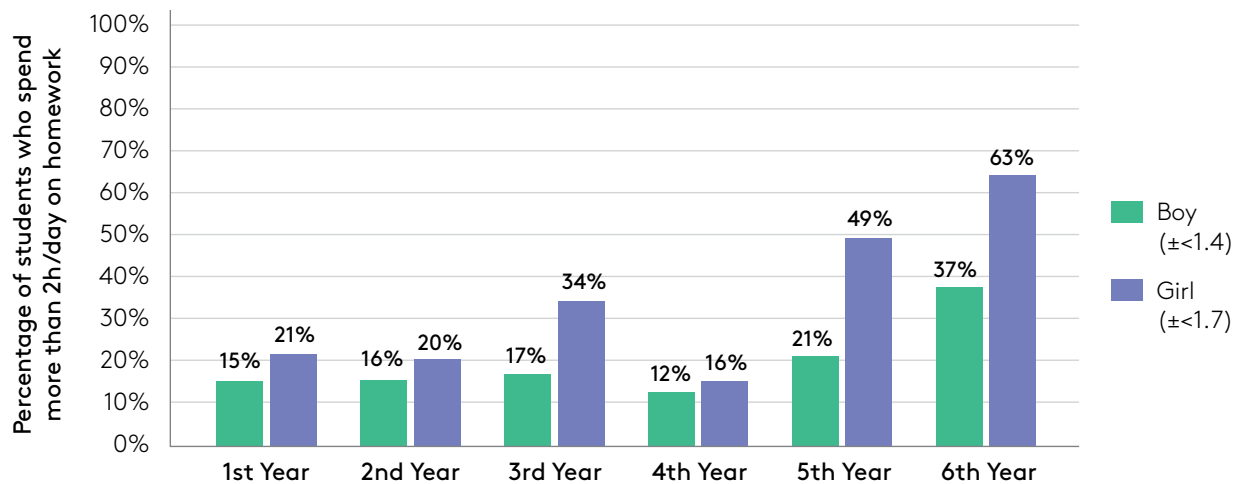
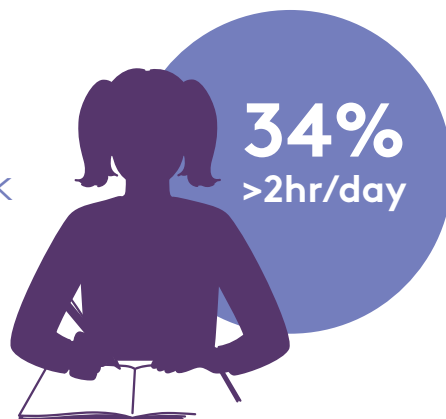


Figure 9.4. Post-primary students who reported spending more than 2hr/day on homework.

Note: Margins of error for 2022 data are presented in parentheses.

**34%** of girls reported doing more than 2hr/day of homework in post-primary school compared to 20% of boys.



### Sedentary Behaviour

Sedentary behaviour is defined as any waking behaviour with an energy expenditure of no more than 1.5 Metabolic Equivalent of Task (MET) [32]. Action 28 of the National Physical Activity Plan: Get Ireland Active [6] highlights the importance of developing national guidelines on sedentary behaviour however, due to a lack of appropriate evidence internationally, definitive sedentary behaviour guidelines remain elusive.

Measurement of sedentary behaviour, using accelerometry, was not possible in CSPPA 2022. However, estimates of time spent in different types of sedentary behaviour were collected using a modified version the Health Behaviours of School aged Children (HBSC) screen time instrument.

Figure 9.5 shows the percentage of students who reported more than two hours per day watching television, playing video games or using their mobile phones for social media purposes. Data shows that boys are engaging more in video gaming than girls, particularly among primary school students. TV viewing is highest among post-primary girls, and the use of phones for social media doubles from primary to post-primary. Given the well documented links between sedentary behaviour and long-term health outcomes such as cardiovascular health, future research should capture the true extent and nature of sedentary behaviour in young people.

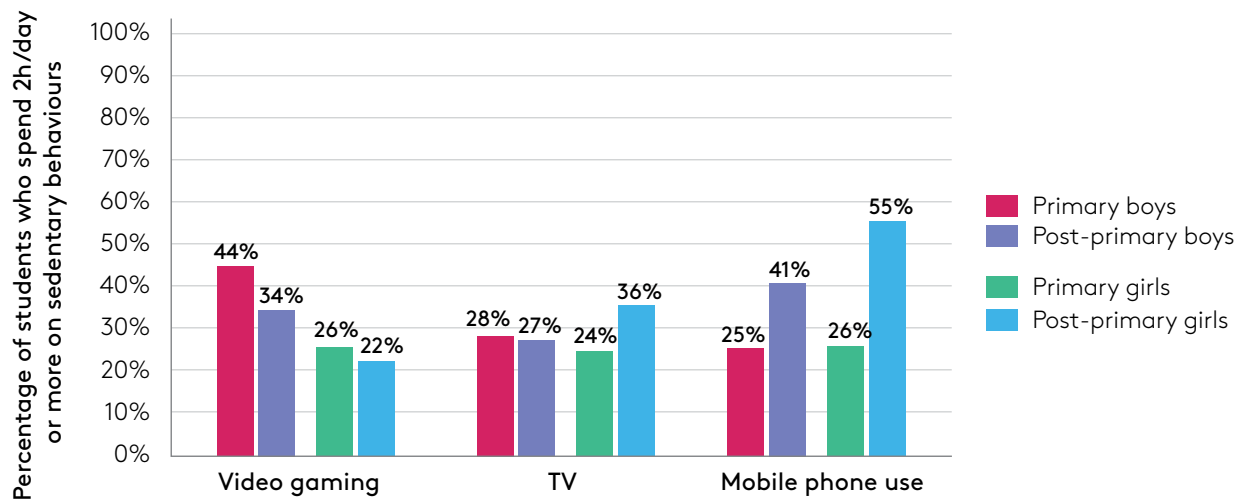


Figure 9.5. Percentage of boys and girls who spend 2h/day or more on sedentary behaviours in primary and post-primary schools

## SECTION 10 Northern Ireland

### 10.1 Key Findings



**17%**

of students in NI report participating in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity a day



**73%**

of primary students reported participating in community sport at least once a week



**18%**

of post-primary students reported active travel to or from school

- Seventeen percent (17%) of students in Northern Ireland report **participating in at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity a day** (21% primary and 16% post-primary students). These proportions are higher than in 2018, when 13% reported being active daily (20% primary and 11% post-primary students).
- Forty-four percent (44%) of primary and 42% of post-primary school students report **meeting the muscle strengthening guidelines**. This was measured for the first time in 2022.
- Seventy-three percent (73%) of primary and 71% of post-primary school students reported **participating in community sport at least once a week**, compared to 65% and 49% respectively in 2018. The proportion of post-primary school students who reported never participating in community sport decreased from 47% in 2018 to 16% in 2022.
- Ninety-two percent (92%) of primary and 76% of post-primary school students reported **participating in school sport at least once a week**. This represented an increase at both primary (65%) and post-primary school (58%) levels since 2018.
- Eight percent (8%) of primary and 20% of post-primary school students reported **meeting the Physical Education guidelines of at least 120 minutes/week**. In 2018, 40% of post-primary students reported meeting the guidelines and this was not reported for primary school students.
- Forty percent (40%) of primary and 18% of post-primary school students reported **active travel to or from school**. This represents an increase at primary school level (36%) and the proportions remain unchanged for post-primary school students since 2018.

### 10.2 Background

Northern Ireland was included in the CSPPA study for the first time in 2018, which allowed for the self-reported participation rates in physical activity, sport, and PE to be explored on an All-Island basis and a comparison to be made between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. This chapter examines the reported participation rates of primary and post-primary school students in physical activity (including muscle strengthening exercises), sport (community and school), and PE in Northern Ireland in 2022. In addition, the self-reported swimming ability, active travel and sedentary behaviour of students is explored. Finally, a comparison is made between the two jurisdictions across the main research themes.



### Physical Activity and Sport Policy

The Department for Communities published a new sport and physical activity strategy for Northern Ireland in March 2022. The key priorities of the Active Living Strategy are to ‘get more people, more active, more of the time’ [8]. One of the goals which specifically relates to children and adolescents is “ensuring that sport and physical activity is inclusive, safe, diverse, shared, fun and offers equality of opportunity to participate for all, and that children and young people are given the best start in life through a wider choice of sport and physical activity and more suitable offerings” [8].

In addition to this main strategy, there are a number of policies which encompass physical activity objectives in Northern Ireland, such as ‘Healthy Child, Healthy Future: A Framework for the Universal Child Health Promotion Programme in Northern Ireland’ which focuses on encouraging a healthy diet and increasing physical activity [26]. This policy is currently being updated. The All-Island Physical Literacy Consensus Statement was launched recently by Sport Ireland and Sport Northern Ireland which provides a definition of physical literacy and aims to encourage lifelong participation in sport and physical activity [9].

In the area of active transport, ‘Changing Gear: A Bicycle Strategy for Northern Ireland’ provides specific targets for increases in cycling by 2025, including that 20% of all journeys less than one mile be cycled, 10% of all journeys between one and two miles be cycled, and 5% of all journeys between two and five miles be cycled, with further percentage increases in cycling set out for 2040 [27].

As part of this strategy, the “Belfast Cycling Network” was published in 2021 with the aim of setting out plans for developing the cycling infrastructure for Belfast. In addition, the “Planning for the Future of Transport – Time for Change” was published in 2021 and aims to increase the percentage of journeys made by walking, wheeling, cycling or public transport [28]. The publication of the Active Living strategy presents an opportunity for all departments involved in promoting physical activity to work more closely together in the promotion of physical activity and in monitoring and evaluating physical activity policies.

### Physical Education

PE is a compulsory part of the Northern Ireland curriculum for all students at every key stage, from age four to 16. Schools determine how much time is devoted to PE in the curriculum, but departmental guidance recommends that they provide students with a minimum of two hours curricular PE per week at both primary and post-primary level. Although not classed as a policy or strategy, it is an important piece of guidance that has a direct effect on access and quality of delivered physical activity and sport for children and adolescents.

## 10.3 Physical Activity

At primary school level, 21% of students reported being physically active daily and at post-primary school level, 16% of students reported being physically active daily (Figure 10.1). Self-reported physical activity levels increased from 20% at primary school level, 11% at post-primary level and from 13% overall since 2018. Approximately 1% of primary school students and 2% of post-primary school students report less than 60 minutes of physical activity on any day of the week.

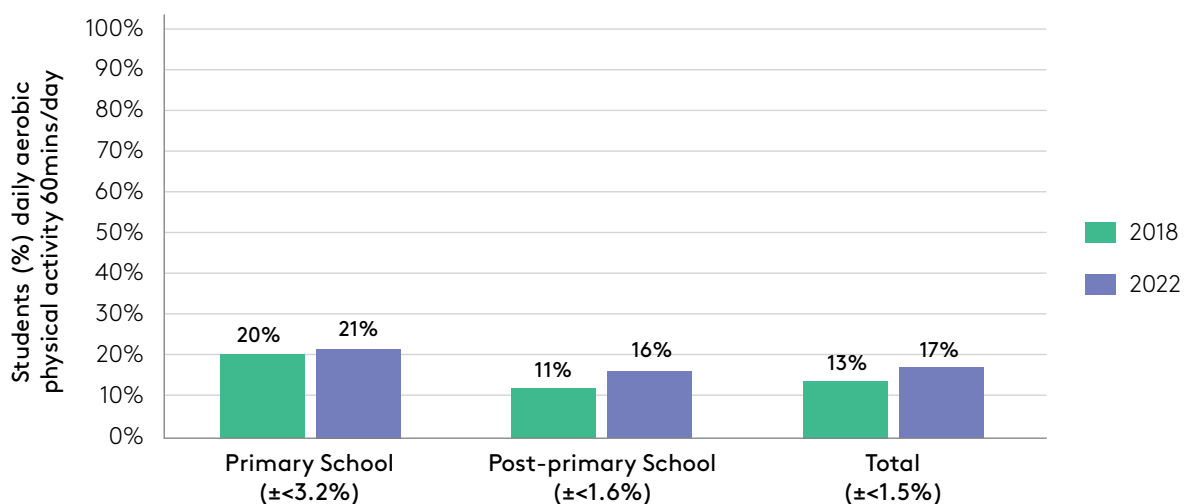


Figure 10.1. Percentage of primary and post-primary students who met the physical activity guidelines (60minutes MVPA/day).

Note: Margins of error for 2022 data are presented in parentheses.

The proportion of students taking part in 60 minutes of daily aerobic physical activity by gender is presented in Figure 10.2. For both primary and post-primary level, a greater percentage of boys participated in 60 minutes of physical activity on a daily basis compared to girls. Reported daily physical activity levels for primary school girls decreased from 19% in 2018 to 16% in 2022. Levels of physical activity were higher for boys at both school levels and for girls at post-primary level in 2022 compared to 2018. The greatest difference was in post-primary boys which increased from 14% to 22%.

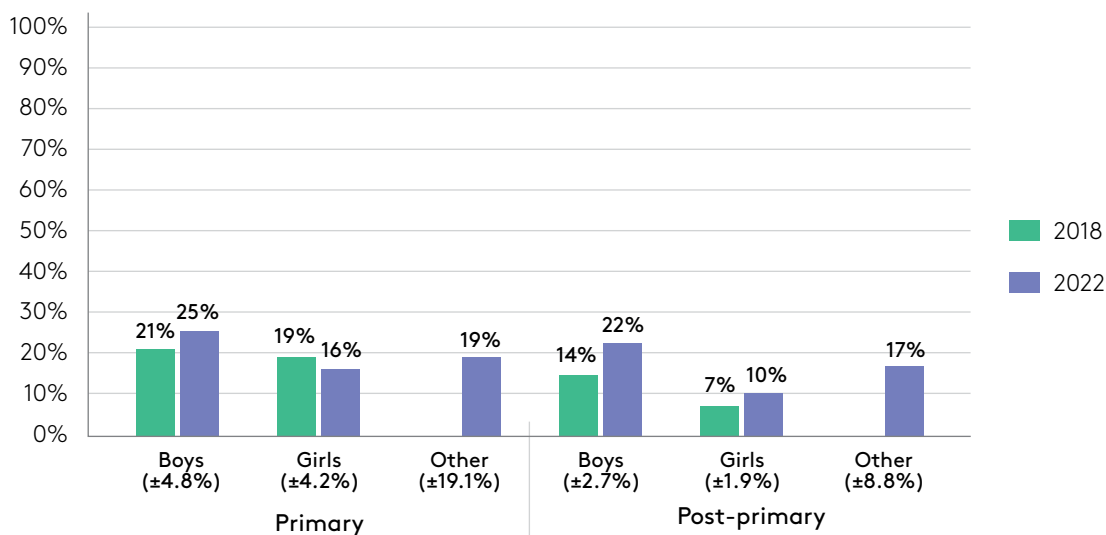


Figure 10.2. Percentage of primary and post-primary boys and girls who participated in 60 minutes of daily physical activity. Note: Margins of error for 2022 data are presented in parentheses.

As the World Health Organisation (WHO) physical activity guidelines were updated in 2020 to recommend “an average of 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity a day” [3], the levels of physical activity were examined using the following categories: low active (0-2 days), somewhat active (3-4 days), active (5-6 days) and daily active (7 days) [16]. The greatest proportion of primary school children reported being active (34%) and the greatest proportion of post-primary school students reported being somewhat active (35%) as presented in Figure 9.3. Overall, 55% of primary and 48% of post-primary students were active or daily active.

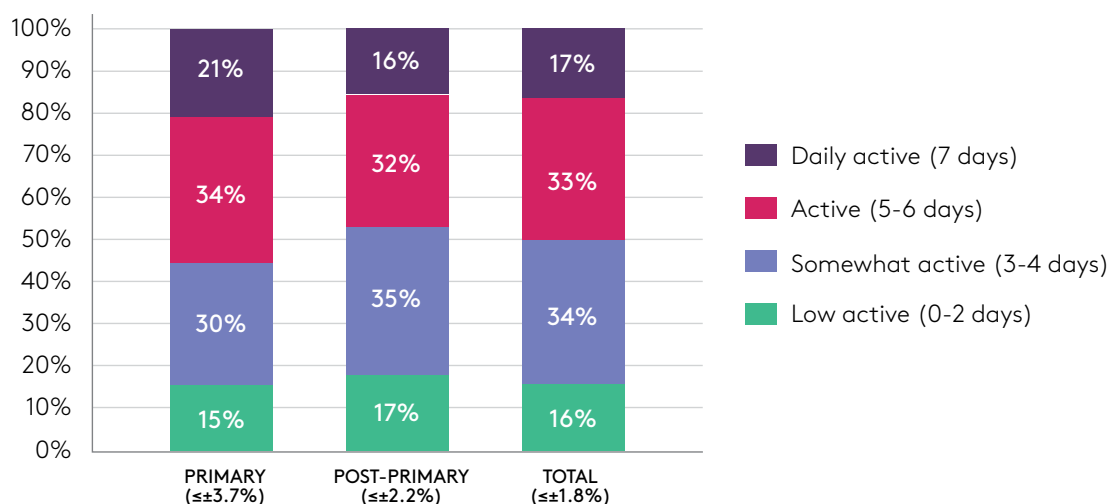


Figure 10.3. Percentage of primary and post-primary school students participating in 60 minutes of physical activity per week.

At primary school level, self-reported physical activity levels only differed by gender, with boys the most physically active. At post-primary level, self-reported daily physical activity levels differed significantly by gender, school location, disability status, socio-economic status, percentage of free school meals and age group (Table 10.1).

Table 10.1. Percentage of students who take part in 60 minutes of daily physical activity by demographic characteristics

	Primary (%)	Post-primary (%)
<b>Gender<sup>a</sup></b>		
Boy	25	22
Girl	16	10
Other	19	17
<b>Age<sup>c</sup></b>		
10–11	21	33
12–13	7	20
14–15		16
16–20		10
<b>Disability<sup>c</sup></b>		
No disabilities	23	17
With disabilities	16	13
<b>SES<sup>c</sup></b>		
High	27	25
Medium	20	13
Low	19	12
<b>School Location<sup>c</sup></b>		
Rural	21	13
Urban	21	17
<b>Free school meals (%)<sup>c</sup></b>		
Low	19	18
Medium	23	11
High	14	-
<b>Nationality</b>		
Northern Irish, Irish or British	22	16
Other nationality	16	15
<b>BMI Category</b>		
Underweight		14
Healthy Weight		17
Overweight		11
Obese		11

Note: a Statistically significant for both primary and post-primary. b statistically significant for primary only. c statistically significant for post-primary only.

### Muscle Strengthening

The WHO physical activity guidelines include a recommendation for children and adolescents to incorporate activities that strengthen muscle and bone on at least three days per week [3]. Overall, 44% of primary and 42% of post-primary school students participated in muscle strengthening activities on at least three days per week. At both primary and post-primary level, there was a significant difference in meeting the guidelines by gender, with a greater percentage of boys meeting the guidelines. Over half of boys in primary and post-primary school meet the guidelines, as presented in Figure 10.4.

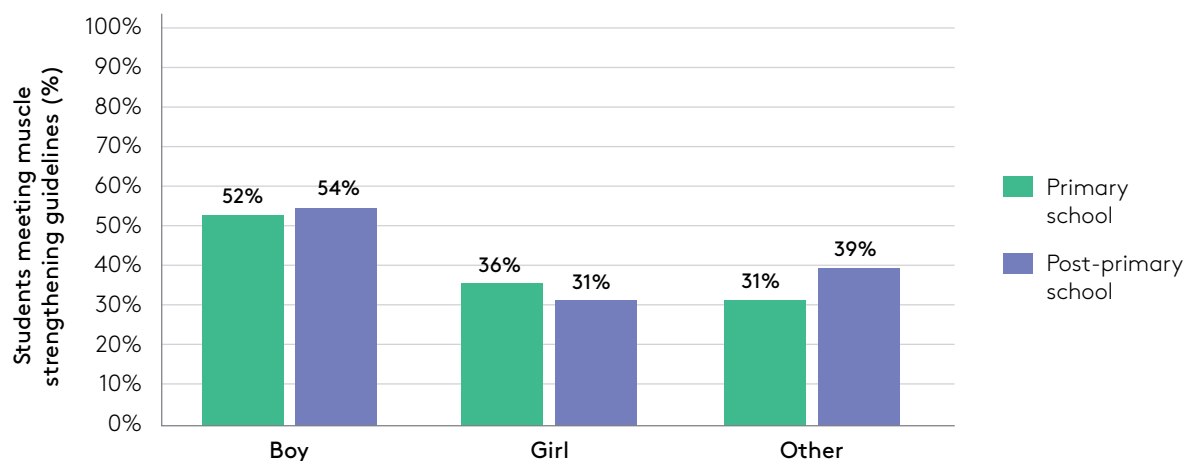


Figure 10.4. Percentage of students meeting the WHO muscle strengthening guidelines

Note: the margins of error are as follows: primary school boys ( $\pm 5.4$ ), girls ( $\pm 5.5$ ), other ( $\pm 22.7$ ), post-primary boys ( $\pm 3.0$ ), girls ( $\pm 3.2$ ), other ( $\pm 11.4$ ).

At both primary and post-primary school level, meeting the WHO muscle strengthening guidelines differed significantly by socio-economic status, with those of a higher affluence reporting a higher percentage meeting the guidelines. There was also an age-related difference at post-primary level, with a smaller percentage of students in the 16–20-year-old category meeting the guidelines (35%). In addition, 35% of primary and 30% of post-primary school students who participated in daily physical activity met the muscle strengthening guidelines.

## 10.4 Community Sport

Overall, self-reported participation in community sport was higher in 2022 than in 2018, as presented in Table 10.2. There has been an increase in the proportion of students who report participating in community sport on four or more days a week from 13% in 2018 to 25% in 2022 at primary school level and from 18% to 33% at post-primary school level. The proportion of post-primary school students who report never participating in community sport changed from 47% in 2018 to 16% in 2022; however, the proportion of primary school students who report never participating in community sport remains unchanged (14%).

Table 10.2. Percentage distribution of community sports participation by frequency

Frequency	Primary (%)		Post-primary (%)	
	2018	2022	2018	2022
<b>4 or more days a week</b>	13	25	18	33
<b>2-3 days a week</b>	31	32	22	29
<b>1 day a week</b>	21	16	8	10
<b>Less often</b>	21	13	5	13
<b>Never</b>	14	14	47	16

Note: Due to rounding, the total is over 100%.

Over 70% of primary (73%) and post-primary students (71%) report participating in community sport at least once per week. The figures have increased from 65% at primary school level and from 49% at post-primary school level since 2018 (Figure 10.5).

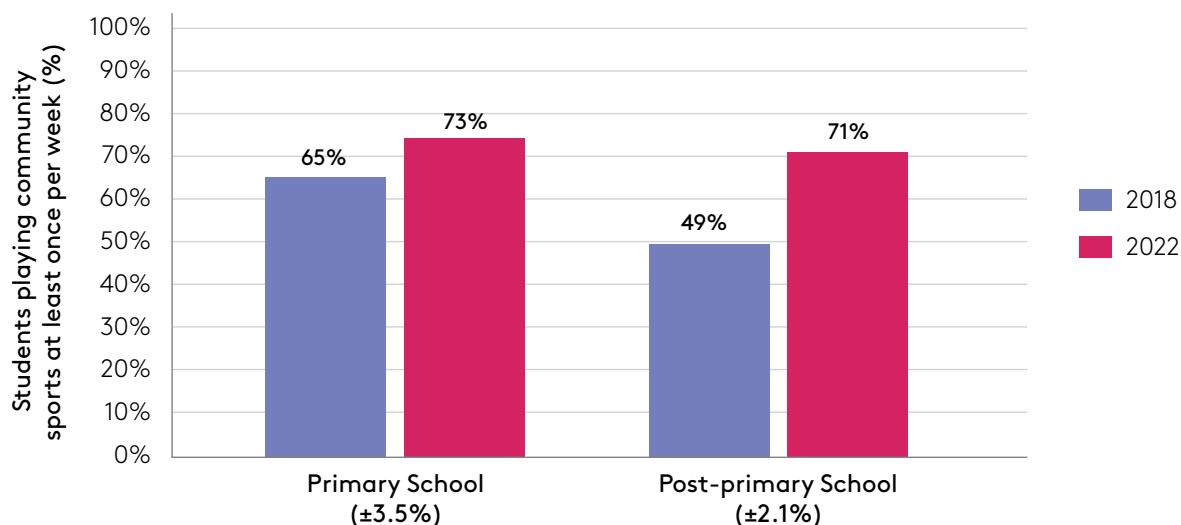


Figure 10.5. Percentage of primary and post-primary students playing community sport at least once a week.

Note: Margins of error for 2022 data are presented in parentheses.

Figure 10.6 presents the proportion of students playing community sport at least once per week by gender. There was no significant difference in community sport participation by gender at primary school level. At post-primary level, a significantly higher percentage of boys (73%) reported participating in community sports at least once a week than girls (70%) or students who identify as other (50%).

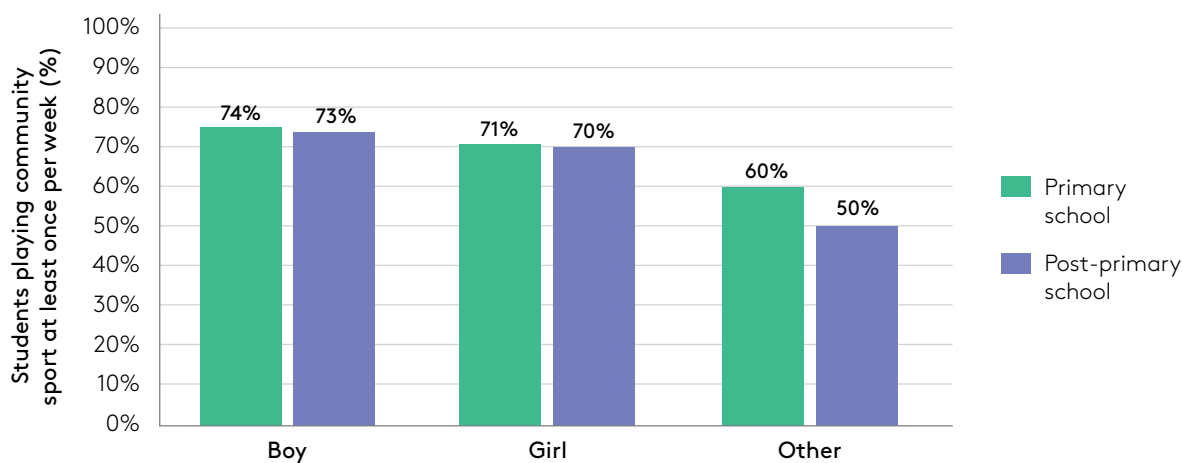


Figure 10.6. Percentage of students playing community sport at least once per week by gender.

Note: the margins of error are as follows: primary school boys (±4.9), girls (±5.1), other (±24.8), post-primary boys (±2.9), girls (±3.0), other (±12.1).

Table 10.3 presents the reported participation rates in community sport among primary and post-primary students by demographic characteristics. There was an age-related decline in reported community sport participation at post-primary level. At primary and post-primary school level, reported participation in community sport differed significantly by disability status (primary: no disabilities = 77% vs with disabilities = 61%, post-primary: no disabilities = 73% vs with disabilities = 66%) and ethnicity (primary: Northern Irish, Irish or British = 75% vs other nationalities = 60%, post-primary: Northern Irish, Irish or British = 72% vs other nationalities = 62%).

**Table 10.3. Participation rates in community sport at least once a week by demographic characteristics**

	Primary (%)	Post-primary (%)
<b>Gender<sup>c</sup></b>		
Boy	74	73
Girl	71	70
Other	60	50
<b>Age<sup>c</sup></b>		
10–11	73	86
12–13	47	77
14–15	-	72
16–20	-	60
<b>Disability<sup>a</sup></b>		
No disabilities	77	73
With disabilities	61	66
<b>SES<sup>a</sup></b>		
High	86	84
Medium	73	71
Low	57	60
<b>Nationality<sup>a</sup></b>		
Northern Irish, Irish or British	75	72
Other nationality	60	62

Note: a Statistically significant for both primary and post-primary. b statistically significant for primary only. c statistically significant for post-primary only.

Similar to 2018, it is evident that the most commonly reported community sports at primary and school level are soccer (37%) and swimming (36%) (Table 10.4). Gaelic football (30%) was the third most commonly reported sport in 2022. Soccer (57%), swimming (34%), Gaelic football (30%) and cycling (29%) were the most commonly reported sports for boys. Swimming (36%), dance (36%), Gaelic football (30%) and gymnastics (30%) were the most commonly reported sports for primary school girls.

Table 10.4. Percentage of primary and post-primary girls and boys who participated in specific sports in a community sports club or setting in the last 12 months.

Sport/activity	Primary (%)			Post-primary (%)		
	Boy	Girl	All	Boy	Girl	All
Swimming	34	36	36	27	36	31
Soccer	52	23	37	36	17	26
Gaelic football	30	30	30	27	24	25
Cycling	29	28	29	25	23	24
Weight training	0	0	0	26	13	19
Camogie/Hurling	17	26	21	13	23	18
Tennis	21	18	20	15	16	16
Dance	6	36	21	5	25	15
Athletics	19	21	19	15	15	15
Adventure activities	12	15	14	13	16	15
Golf	26	15	20	15	12	14
Gymnastics	9	30	19	6	21	14
Cross-country running	13	10	12	13	13	13
Boxing	23	9	17	15	9	12
Hockey	13	13	13	7	16	12
Rugby	20	6	12	17	7	12
Martial arts	24	13	19	13	9	11
Basketball	22	15	18	13	10	11
Horse riding	9	21	15	5	17	11
Surfing	0	0	0	8	13	11
Badminton	14	14	14	9	10	9
Baseball/rounders	14	15	14	6	9	8
Aerobics/exercise class	9	12	10	6	8	7
Netball	6	10	8	2	12	7
Volleyball	12	10	11	4	7	6
Squash	0	0	0	7	4	6
Handball	9	6	8	5	5	5
Triathlon	6	6	6	4	4	4
Other sport	10	10	10	5	5	5

At post-primary school level, swimming (31%), soccer (26%), Gaelic football (25%) and cycling (24%) were the most commonly reported sports which students participate in the community. Soccer (36%), swimming (27%), Gaelic football (27%), weight training (26%) and cycling (25%) were the five most commonly reported sports for post-primary boys. Swimming (36%), dance (25%), Gaelic football (24%), camogie (23%) and cycling (23%) were the top five sports for post-primary school girls.

## 10.5 School Sport

Overall, 92% of primary and 76% of post-primary school students reported participating in school sport at least once a week (Table 10.5). Participation in school sport on four or more days a week increased from 26% in 2018 to 58% in 2022 for primary and from 16% to 35% for post-primary school students. There has been a decrease in the percentage of primary (from 23% in 2018 to 5% in 2022) and post-primary school students (from 36% in 2018 to 18% in 2022) who report never participating in school sport. These results are encouraging as they suggest that school sport participation is increasing.

Table 10.5. Frequency of school sport participation

Frequency (%)	Primary School		Post-primary School	
	2018	2022	2018	2022
<b>4 or more days a week</b>	26	58	16	35
<b>2-3 days a week</b>	25	28	27	30
<b>1 day a week</b>	14	6	14	12
<b>Less often</b>	12	3	6	6
<b>Never</b>	23	5	36	18

As seen in Figure 10.7, the proportion of primary and post-primary school boys and girls who report participating in school sport once a week has increased over the last four years. The greatest difference was in primary school boys, with the proportion increasing from 61% to 93%.

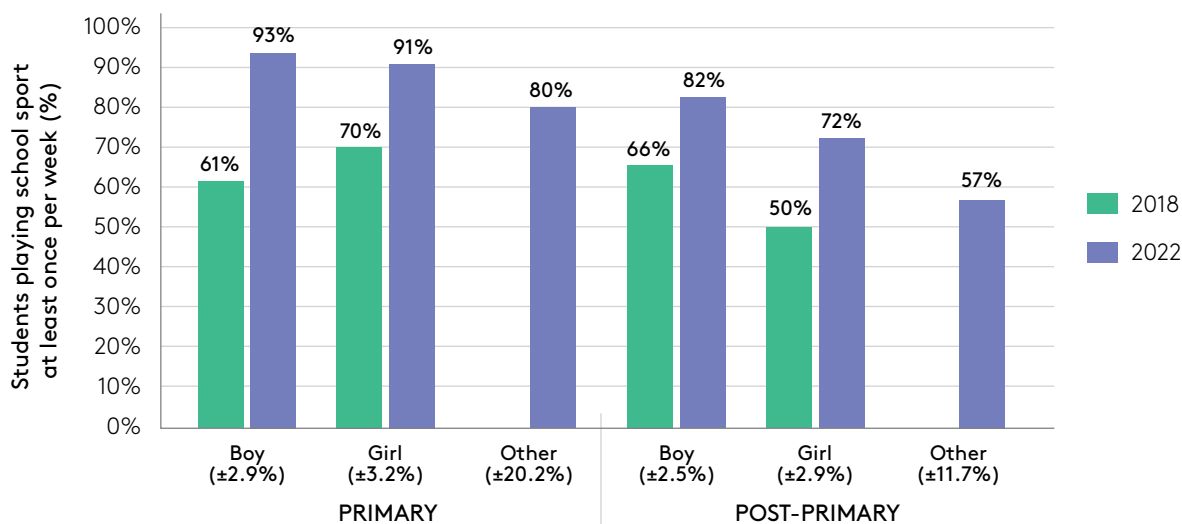


Figure 10.7 Percentage of students who participated in school sports at least once a week

Note: Margins of error for 2022 data are presented in parentheses.



Reported participation rates in school sport by demographic characteristics are provided in Table 10.6. At both primary and post-primary level, participation in school sport differed significantly by disability status, with a smaller proportion of children with functional difficulties participating in school sport (95% vs 84% at primary level and 78% vs 72% at post-primary level). For socio-economic status, there was a larger number of students from Year 13 and Year 14 who attended medium schools, which could potentially impact the results. At post-primary level, a higher percentage of students who attended a school in a rural area (80%) reported participating in school sport compared to children who attend a school in an urban area (75%). There was also an age-related decline in reported school sport participation from Year 8 (91%) through to Year 13 (49%).

**Table 10.6. School sport participation at least once a week by demographic characteristics**

	Primary (%)	Post-primary (%)
<b>Gender<sup>c</sup></b>		
Boy	93	82
Girl	91	72
Other	80	57
<b>Year Group<sup>c</sup></b>		
Primary 6	91	
Primary 7	93	
Year 8		91
Year 9		79
Year 10		80
Year 11		77
Year 12		78
Year 13		49
Year 14		59
<b>Disability<sup>a</sup></b>		
No disabilities	95	78
With disabilities	84	72
<b>SES<sup>c</sup></b>		
High	97	84
Medium	92	75
Low	88	73
<b>School Location<sup>c</sup></b>		
Rural	90	80
Urban	92	75
<b>Free school meals<sup>c</sup></b>		
Low	93	82
Medium	91	58
High	91	
<b>Nationality<sup>c</sup></b>		
Northern Irish, Irish or British	92	77
Other nationality	90	71

Note: a Statistically significant for both primary and post-primary. b statistically significant for primary only. c statistically significant for post-primary only.

Overall, soccer (47%), basketball (27%), Gaelic football (25%), swimming (24%) and athletics (20%) were the five most popular primary school sports in 2022 (Table 10.7). The top five sports were the same for both boys and girls, although in a different order.

Table 10.7. Percentage of primary and post-primary girls and boys who participated in specific sports at school, outside of PE, in the last 12 months.

Sport/activity	Primary (%)			Post-Primary (%)		
	Boy	Girl	All	Boy	Girl	All
Soccer	60	35	47	50	17	33
Gaelic football	21	29	25	22	18	20
Basketball	28	27	27	23	12	17
Athletics	18	23	20	17	15	15
Hockey	10	11	11	9	16	12
Tennis	9	13	11	12	13	12
Cross-country running	12	13	12	11	12	11
Netball	3	18	11	2	19	11
Camogie/Hurling	8	11	9	8	15	11
Rugby	11	8	9	17	5	10
Swimming	19	29	24	9	10	9
Baseball/rounders	16	21	18	8	10	9
Badminton	8	10	9	9	8	8
Cycling	8	18	13	7	7	7
Adventure activities	7	11	9	6	7	6
Handball	9	10	9	8	5	6
Weight training	0	0	0	9	4	6
Volleyball	5	12	8	5	5	5
Aerobics/exercise class	6	8	7	6	4	5
Dance	8	21	14	2	8	5
Gymnastics	6	16	11	3	5	4
Boxing	3	4	4	4	2	3
Golf	6	5	5	3	2	3
Martial arts	4	7	5	3	2	2
Horse riding	1	6	3	1	2	2
Triathlon	2	2	2	1	2	2
Squash	0	0	0	3	2	2
Surfing	0	0	0	1	2	1
Other	6	7	7	3	2	2

Soccer (33%) and Gaelic football (20%) were the two most commonly reported post-primary school sports in 2022 (Table 9.9). Soccer (50%), Gaelic football (22%), basketball (23%), athletics (17%) and rugby (17%) were the most popular with post-primary school boys. For post-primary school girls, netball (19%), Gaelic football (18%), soccer (17%), hockey (16%) and athletics (15%) were the most commonly reported sports.

In total, 49% of post-primary students reported that they participated in inter-school competitions. When looking at overall sports participation (school and community sport combined), 5% of the primary school sample and 15% of the post-primary school sample do not participate in any type of sport at least once a week.

## 10.6 Physical Education

Only 8% of primary and 20% of post-primary students received the recommended 120 minutes of PE per week. Approximately 31% of eligible students were studying PE at GCSE level and 30% were taking PE at A-level. Table 10.8 presents the average minutes of PE per week for each year group and the proportion meeting the PE guidelines. Year 8 reported the highest average number of minutes of PE a week (113 minutes). With the exception of Year 8, there was a decline in the average number of minutes and percentage meeting the guidelines for each year group from 2018 to 2022.

Table 10.8. Percentage of students meeting the PE guidelines and average minutes of PE

School Year	PE Minutes per week (Average (Median))		Meeting PE guidelines (%)	
	2018	2022	2018	2022
Primary 6		62 (60)		9
Primary 7		60 (60)		8
Year 8	102 (90)	113 (120)	31	52
Year 9	190 (160)	93 (90)	65	22
Year 10	125 (120)	83 (90)	52	25
Year 11	155 (105)	73 (77)	49	14
Year 12	127 (105)	64 (60)	35	7
Year 13	60 (0)	16 (0)	14	1
Year 14	46 (0)	16 (0)	17	2

Note: Data are presented as mean (median) values due to the skewedness of the data.

At primary school level, the proportion reporting meeting the PE guidelines differed significantly by disability status (10% vs 5%) and percentage of free school meals (12% vs 5%) (Table 10.9). At post-primary school level, the proportion reporting meeting the PE guidelines differed significantly by percentage of free school meals and nationality. There was a significant difference in meeting the guidelines by school location at post-primary level, with a higher percentage of students who attend rural schools meeting the guidelines (25% vs 19%).

Table 10.9. Percentage meeting the PE guidelines by demographic characteristics.

	Primary (%)	Post-primary (%)
<b>Gender<sup>c</sup></b>		
Boy	7	20
Girl	10	20
Other	0	27
<b>Disability<sup>b</sup></b>		
No disabilities	10	20
With disabilities	5	19
<b>School Gender Status<sup>c</sup></b>		
Boys	-	24
Girls	-	27
Mixed	8	20
<b>School Location<sup>c</sup></b>		
Rural	9	25
Urban	8	19
<b>Free school meals (%)<sup>a</sup></b>		
Low	12	25
Medium	5	6
High	0	
<b>Nationality<sup>c</sup></b>		
Northern Irish, Irish or British	9	19
Other nationality	8	25

Note: a Statistically significant for both primary and post-primary. b statistically significant for only primary. c statistically significant for only post-primary

A higher proportion of primary school students who met the PE guidelines also met the muscle strengthening guidelines (Table 10.10) [3]. At post-primary level, a higher proportion of students who met the PE guidelines also met the muscle strengthening guidelines and reported being active more often.

Table 10.10. Percentage meeting the PE guidelines by physical activity levels

	Primary (%)	Post-primary (%)
<b>Physical Activity level<sup>c</sup></b>		
Low active (0-2 days)	3	12
Somewhat active (3-4 days)	7	18
Active (5-6 days)	11	22
Daily active (7 days)	10	29
<b>Muscle strengthening guidelines<sup>a</sup></b>		
Not meeting the guidelines	6	17
Meeting guidelines	12	24

Note: a Statistically significant for both primary and post-primary. b statistically significant for primary only. c statistically significant for post-primary only.

The content of primary and post-primary school PE classes is presented in Table 10.11. Overall, the top five most common activities offered in 2022 were baseball/rounders (58%), swimming (53%), soccer (46%), athletics (42%) and basketball (33%). These activities were in the top five for both boys and girls. There were notable differences in the content of PE classes since 2018, with hockey and dance being replaced by athletics and basketball in the top five most frequently offered activities. The proportion of primary school children who participate in dance reduced from 51% in 2018 to 20% in 2022, with hockey participation also declining from 56% in 2018 to 27% in 2022. However, it should be noted that there was a higher number of Catholic Maintained primary schools in the 2022 sample compared to the 2018 sample, which could explain the large differences between 2018 and 2022.

Table 10.11. Percentage of primary and post-primary girls and boys who participated in specific sports and physical activities during PE in the last 12 months

Sport/activity	Primary (%)			Post-Primary (%)		
	Boy	Girl	All	Boy	Girl	All
Baseball/rounders	58	58	58	47	67	57
Swimming	50	56	53	21	17	18
Soccer	56	37	46	68	42	54
Athletics	43	41	42	51	57	53
Basketball	38	28	33	59	46	52
Hockey	29	24	27	21	41	31
Gaelic football	25	27	26	33	32	32
Gymnastics	23	24	24	10	34	22
Cross-country running	19	24	21	36	33	34
Dance	20	20	20	3	31	18
Handball	20	20	19	25	25	25
Rugby	21	18	19	39	13	26
Aerobics/exercise class	17	20	18	11	16	14
Netball	9	22	15	12	57	34
Tennis	16	12	14	31	45	38
Adventure activities	13	13	13	11	14	13
Camogie/Hurling	10	16	13	11	20	16
Badminton	11	9	10	36	47	42
Cycling	9	8	8	3	3	3
Boxing	8	6	7	3	5	4
Volleyball	5	8	7	17	28	23
Golf	6	4	5	3	2	2
Martial arts	3	6	4	2	2	2
Triathlon	4	3	3	2	2	2
Horse riding	2	2	2	1	1	1
Squash	0	0	0	4	4	4
Surfing	0	0	0	1	1	1
Weight training	0	0	0	14	8	11
Other	8	8	8	4	2	3

Overall, the most common activities offered in post-primary schools were baseball/rounders (57%), soccer (54%), athletics (53%), basketball (52%) and badminton (42%). Rugby replaced badminton in the top five for boys and netball replaced soccer in the top five activities for girls. The same five sports dominated the most frequently offered PE activities in 2022 and 2018. There were some notable differences, however, in reported participation levels in PE activities, with participation in baseball/rounders, netball and tennis increasing by more than 20% since 2018. Notably, netball was not included as a response in the 2018 questionnaire, which could explain the large difference.

### 10.6.1 Swimming ability

Figure 10.8 shows the self-reported swimming ability of primary school students. Overall, swimming ability is high for primary school students in Northern Ireland (Figure 10.8). However, the proportion of non-swimmers increased from 4% in 2018 to 7% in 2022, which could potentially be due to the COVID-19 lockdown and the restricted accessibility of swimming pools. There were slight increases in the percentages of beginners and intermediate swimmers and the percentage of competitive swimmers decreased from 21% in 2018 to 13% in 2022.

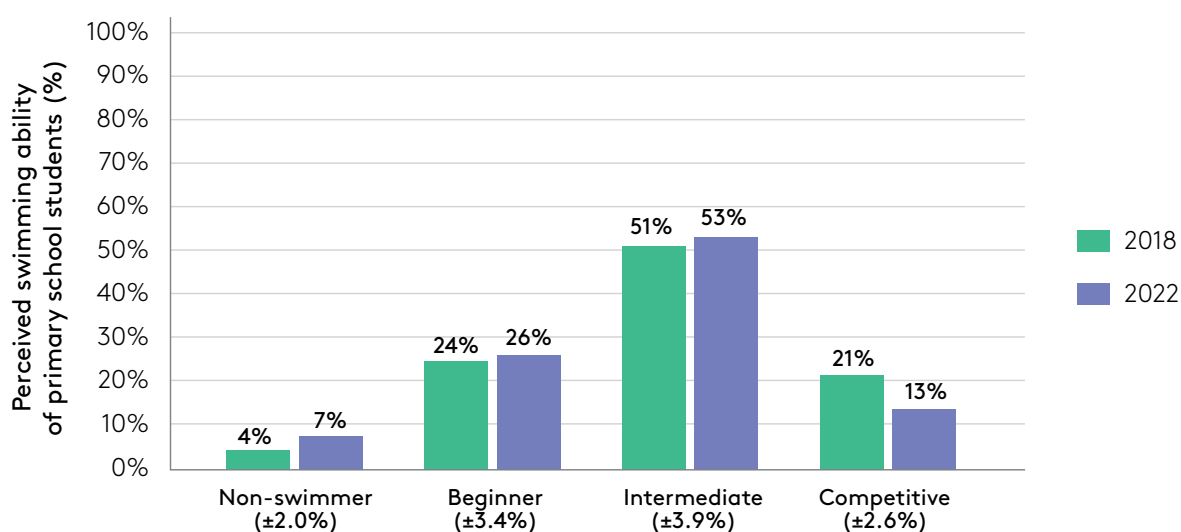


Figure 10.8 Perceived swimming ability of primary school students

Note: Margins of error for 2022 data are presented in parentheses.

Figure 10.9 shows the self-reported swimming ability of post-primary school students. The figures were relatively similar to 2018. The proportion of non-swimmers changed from 12% in 2018 to 9% in 2022 and the proportion of self-reported intermediate swimmers changed from 59% in 2018 to 63% in 2022.

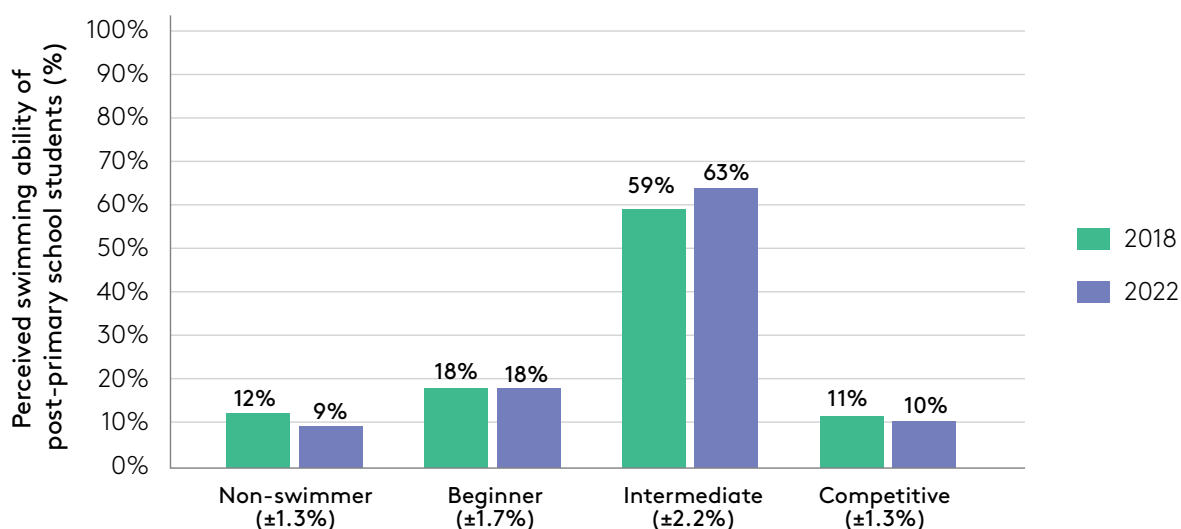


Figure 10.9 Perceived swimming ability of post-primary school students

Note: Margins of error for 2022 data are presented in parentheses.

The proportion of students who reported being 'non-swimmers' by demographic characteristics can be seen in Table 10.12.

Table 10.12 Percentage of non-swimmers by demographic characteristics

	Primary (%)	Post-primary (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Boy	6	8
Girl	8	10
Other	13	16
<b>Disability</b>		
No disabilities	5	7
With disabilities	12	13
<b>SES</b>		
High	2	6
Medium	7	7
Low	12	16
<b>School Location</b>		
Rural	10	10
Urban	7	9
<b>Free school meals (%)</b>		
Low	5	6
Medium	9	16
High	-	5
<b>Nationality</b>		
Northern Irish, Irish or British	6	9
Other nationality	13	9

## 10.7 Active Travel

Figure 10.10 presents the proportion of students who active travel to or from school in 2018 and 2022. In 2022 at primary school level, 40% of students reported active travel to or from school, compared to 18% of post-primary school students. Active travel to or from school increased from 36% in 2018 to 40% in 2022 for primary school students, whilst the figures remain unchanged for those at post-primary level. Over a fifth (22%) of primary students reported active travel both to and from school, compared to 10% of post-primary students. Post-primary students tend to live further away from schools and have longer distances to travel to school. These results are consistent with previous findings.

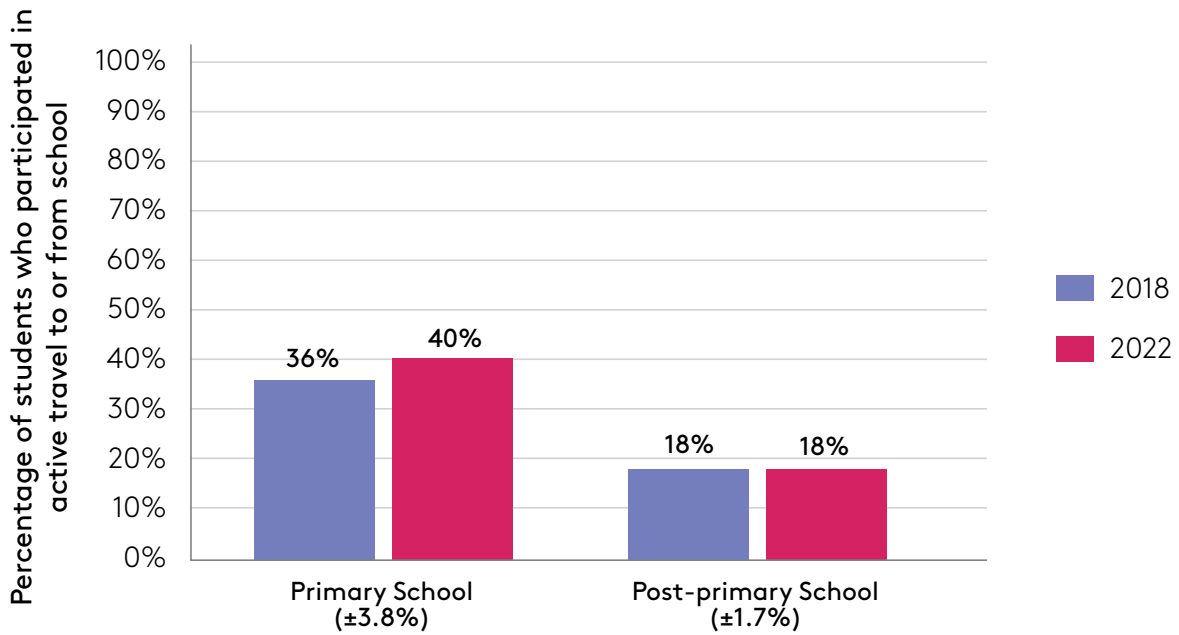


Figure 10.10 Proportion of students who active travel to or from school.

Note: Margins of error for 2022 data are presented in parentheses.

The mode of travel among students in 2022 is shown in Figure 10.11 and Figure 10.12. The car was the most commonly used mode of transport for primary school children, compared to the bus for the majority of post-primary school students. The proportion of those who walk to or from school remains unchanged (23% walk to primary school; 11% walk to, and 16% walk home, from post-primary school), with the exception of primary school children who walk home from school (32%), which increased from 26% in 2018. A very small proportion of students cycled to or from school (2% of primary school children and less than 1% of post-primary students), which has declined since 2018 (5% cycled to primary school, 4% cycled home from primary school and 1% cycled to or from post-primary school).

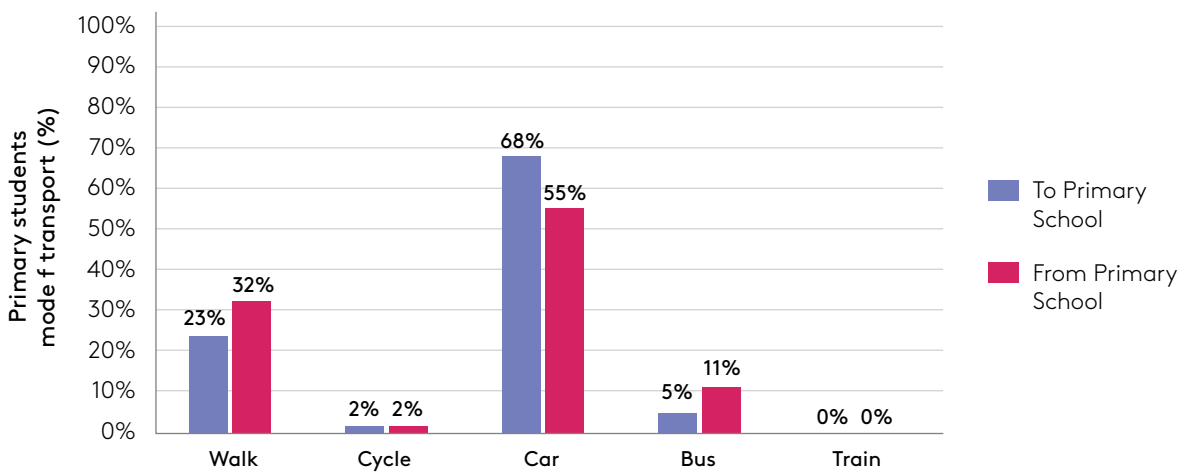


Figure 10.11 Modes of transport for primary school students travelling to or from school.

Note: The margins of error were all less than or equal to ±3.6%.



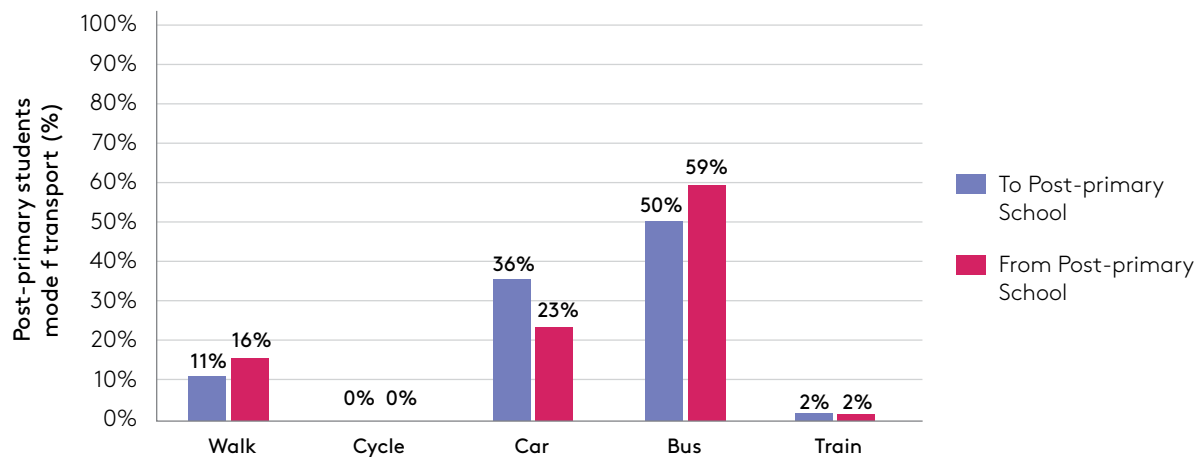


Figure 10.12 Modes of transport for post-primary school students travelling to or from school.

Note: The margins of error were all less than or equal to  $\pm 2.3\%$ .

Primary school students who attended an urban school (45%) were significantly more likely to actively travel to or from school, compared to students who attended a rural school (20%). However, there was no difference in active travel at post-primary level for this same category. Socioeconomic status was also associated with active travel at primary and post-primary level, with students from families of higher socio-economic status or attending schools with a lower percentage of free school meals being less likely to use active transport. A lower percentage of girls (15%) participated in active travel at post-primary level compared to boys (20%). Participating in active travel also differed significantly by nationality at post-primary level, with a higher percentage of students from other nationalities travelling via active transport (24% vs 17%).

## SECTION 11

# Summary of Findings and Recommendations

### 11.1 Summary of findings across Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland

**Physical Activity:** There was an increase in daily physical activity in Northern Ireland (17%) and the Republic of Ireland (15%) when compared with 2018 (13% in both jurisdictions). A slightly higher percentage of primary students in the Republic of Ireland met the muscle strengthening guidelines than their counterparts in Northern Ireland (48% vs 44%). There was little difference between both jurisdictions at post-primary level (Republic of Ireland = 41% vs Northern Ireland = 42%).

**Sport:** There was a 3% difference in reported community sports participation rates between Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland at both primary school (Republic of Ireland = 76% vs Northern Ireland = 73%) and post-primary school level (Republic of Ireland = 74% vs Northern Ireland = 71%). There were similar school sports participation rates at primary school level (Republic of Ireland = 91% vs Northern Ireland = 92%) and a difference of 4% at post-primary level (Republic of Ireland = 72% vs Northern Ireland = 76%). Northern Ireland had slightly higher levels of participation in school sport and the Republic of Ireland had slightly higher participation rates in community sport.

**Physical Education:** There is a large difference in reported average minutes of PE per week at primary school level between Republic of Ireland (85 minutes) and Northern Ireland (61 minutes). However, the average minutes of PE per week at post-primary level was the same in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland (73 minutes).

**Active Travel:** At primary school level, active travel rates were similar (Republic of Ireland = 43% vs Northern Ireland = 40%). However, at post-primary level, the Republic of Ireland rate of active travel was higher than the Northern Ireland rate (35% vs 18%).

Table 11.1 presents the comparison between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland on the key research themes.

Table 11.1. 2018 and 2022 comparison for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland

Outcome	ROI		NI	
	2018	2022	2018	2022
<b>PHYSICAL ACTIVITY</b>				
Participating in daily physical activity (%)	13	15	13	17
Primary school students participating in daily physical activity (%)	17	23	20	21
Post-primary school students participating in daily physical activity (%)	10	12	11	16
Primary school meeting the muscle strengthening guidelines (%)	-	48	-	44
Post-primary school meeting the muscle strengthening guidelines (%)	-	41	-	42
<b>COMMUNITY SPORT</b>				
Primary school participation in community sport at least once a week (%)	80	76	65	73
Post-primary school participation in community sport at least once a week (%)	58	74	49	71
<b>SCHOOL SPORT</b>				
Primary school students participating in school sport at least once a week (%)	70	91	65	92
Post-primary school students participating in school sport at least once a week (%)	63	72	58	76
<b>PHYSICAL EDUCATION</b>				
Average weekly PE for primary schools (minutes)	-	85	-	61
Average weekly PE for post-primary schools (minutes)	-	73	-	73
<b>ACTIVE TRAVEL</b>				
Primary school students engaging in active travel (%)	42	43	36	40
Post-primary school students engaging in active travel (%)	40	35	18	18

## 11.2 Recommendations

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The CSPPA 2022 figures should be used to report on the impact of sport and physical activity policy for children in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The CSPPA 2022 figures may also be used to update the baseline benchmarks for future policies. Government departments can use the CSPPA 2022 report and the Central Statistics Office population projections to set ambitious, yet realistic targets for children and young people. These targets can be specific to meeting physical activity guidelines, as well as sports participation, PE and active travel for 2023-2030. Progress on these targets should be monitored regularly through the CSPPA study every 2-4 years. This report should be used to:

- Acknowledge the progress made in physical activity, sport, PE and active school transport across the island of Ireland since CSPPA 2018 and 2010.
- Promote a systems approach, with broad cross-sectoral partnerships from national to local level to comprehensively address the inactivity challenge. Use the CSPPA framework (2018) to guide solution generation.
- Increase investment for physical activity and sport initiatives in schools and communities so that programmes are accessible to all, sustainable and adaptable to the societal changes.
- Support full implementation of the PE curriculum in all schools, to include time allocation, breadth of offering, adequate facilities and meaningful experiences for students. Quality teacher training should underpin this provision, and teachers should be supported on an ongoing basis with opportunities to engage in high quality continuing professional development related to PE and physical activity in schools.
- Develop and expand the Active School Flag programme, or similar, to facilitate a whole school approach to promote physical activity opportunities for the least active and most at risk children. Work with student volunteers through mentorship programmes to reinforce leadership skills and positive role models.
- Focus on preventing dropout for those already engaged in sport, especially teenage girls.
- Provide quality training and resources for coaches, parents and volunteers, on the importance of physical activity and how to encourage children to participate regularly to develop healthy, active lifestyles.
- Advocate for upstream solutions, i.e. full implementation of policies that directly or indirectly help children to be physically active. These include, but are not limited to quality PE, active transport infrastructure, public education campaigns focusing on children, sport and physical activity, urban design that supports sports clubs and green spaces close to residential locations as well as accessible and affordable physical activity facilities e.g. diverse sports facilities, swimming pools, dance studios etc.
- Increase the quality and accessibility of sports opportunities, equipment and facilities in school playgrounds.
- Encourage informed and responsible use of apps, watches and other activity tracking devices to motivate children to be more active. Ownership alone is inadequate to change behaviour.
- Conduct ongoing regular robust surveillance to monitor progress over time.
- Conduct robust, regular measures of physical literacy, fitness and health and provide feedback to children, young people, their parents and schools.

## Conclusion

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In conclusion, the findings from both jurisdictions highlight the importance of continued efforts to promote physical activity and reduce sedentary behaviour among children and adolescents. There is a clear need for sustained and coordinated efforts from multiple stakeholders including government, schools, health care professionals, sport development officers, and researchers to address these challenges. A multi-faceted response is required, including the implementation of evidence-based policies and programmes, the provision of a diversity of readily accessible facilities, the adequate provision of resources, supports and training for teachers, coaches and volunteers and the use of innovative technologies to facilitate and encourage physical activity.

In addition, it is important to address the inequalities by gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity and disability as well as the environmental factors that may be contributing to lower participation rates among certain groups. This requires a collaborative effort from all sectors to create a supportive environment for physical activity and promote equal access to resources and opportunities.

Overall, the findings provide valuable insights into the current state of sport and physical activity among children and adolescents in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland and highlight the need for continued investment in this important area to improve the health and wellbeing of future generations.

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# APPENDIX

## Study Methodology

### Study Methods

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CSPPA 2022 adhered to the cross-sectional methodology used in CSPPA 2010 and 2018. The Research Ethics Committee of the University of Limerick (EHSREC27\_11\_19), Dublin City University (DCUREC/2017/201) and Ulster University (REC/20/0005) granted ethical approval. The CSPPA questionnaire was a multi-section, self-report instrument; developmentally appropriate and validated for this population (for further information on the CSPPA questionnaire go to [www.CSPPA.ie](http://www.CSPPA.ie)). Questionnaires were completed in school using Qualtrics software on various platforms (tablets, computers, phones). Average time to completion was 37 minutes (range 17- 46 minutes). Some notable changes in CSPPA procedures included:

- Due to COVID-19 restrictions on researcher access to schools, survey administration was carried out by teachers in schools, trained in CSPPA protocols, rather than by researchers visiting the classes. These teachers became the school CSPPA Ambassadors and worked with other teachers in the school to organise data collection.
- A split-sample approach was used for some items on the survey. Half the post-primary students were randomly assigned to complete survey items on drop out from sports, while the other half of students completed items on role models and the impact of COVID 19 on sport participation and physical activity (reported in Chapter 9)
- CSPPA 2022 made use of the 3rd iteration of the Family Affluence Scale (FAS III) as a measure of socio-economic status (SES), whereas in 2018 the 2nd version (FAS II) was used and in 2010 parental employment status was used to measure socio-economic status.
- New items on sport volunteering and spectating were added.

Teachers were asked to assign a random number to each student in the class, and to note that number in a classroom administration survey. These numbers were not linked to student information in class registers but were used only for tracking the number of times the same student had to restart the survey or to remove the survey response if they decided to actively withdraw their participation.

The school management of each CSPPA school were also invited to complete a survey regarding their views on the contribution of sport and physical activity to the school environment, the level of support received, interschool competitions as well as the availability and the adequacy of school sport facilities.

### School Sample

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The sampling frame for CSPPA 2022 was based on the schools involved in CSPPA 2010 (ROI only) and CSPPA 2018 (both jurisdictions). Special schools, junior-only schools and colleges of further education were not included in the sampling frame. A systematic one stage cluster sampling method was used, i.e., a school was chosen at random, a year group in that school was chosen at random and then every child in that year group was invited to complete the survey. A sample of at least 3,000 students was required to account for design effects. The sample was over-recruited to allow for refusal of schools to participate. Schools were stratified by four criteria:

- School gender status: male, female or mixed.
- Socio-economic status: disadvantaged or non-disadvantaged (DEIS vs non-DEIS) for the Republic of Ireland; percentage of free school meals class (low, medium or high) for Northern Ireland.
- School location: urban or rural (categorised by population density around the school).
- Size: small, medium or large (based on total number of students). For the Republic of Ireland, school sizes were determined by creating tertiles using all primary or post-primary schools (tertile 1=small, tertile 2=medium and tertile 3=large). For Northern Ireland, the school size was supplied by the Department of Education, NI.

For the Republic of Ireland, all 123 schools which participated in 2010 and 2018 and were eligible, were invited to participate (n = 114). The nine schools that were ineligible had either closed or merged with larger schools in the area. The original 2010 sample was chosen at random to match a nationally representative profile. This procedure could allow for school-level trend analyses in the future.



A recruitment letter was sent to the eligible schools and followed up with a phone call within a week. Seventy-four (65%) of these schools participated in CSPPA 2022 (24 declined the invitation to participate and 16 could not be contacted). To ensure the samples were representative in terms of gender, socio-economic status, geographical location and size, an additional 12 new schools meeting the stratification criteria were recruited.

The sample for Northern Ireland was constructed similarly to that in the Republic of Ireland. Schools that were not within the age cohort, or targeted population of the study, were removed from the database. An equivalence sample was drawn up to reflect the Republic of Ireland sample. For CSPPA 2022, the 29 schools who participated in CSPPA 2018 were invited to participate. As Catholic Maintained schools were underrepresented in CSPPA 2018, an additional six Catholic Maintained schools were added to the sample. Therefore, thirty-five schools (20 post-primary and 15 primary schools) were contacted in the first instance; twenty schools declined to take part. A further twenty schools were invited to take part and four schools declined to take part. Therefore, in total, 55 schools were contacted and 24 refused to take part. Thirty-one (11 primary and 20 post-primary) schools in Northern Ireland participated in the survey.

Once a school was recruited, a single year group was randomly selected. This meant that all students in that year group were eligible and invited to participate in the study. In total, 153 schools (64 primary and 89 post-primary) in both jurisdictions participated in CSPPA 2022. This resulted in an unweighted sample of 8,881 students (primary n = 1,758 and post-primary n = 7,123).

## Participant Profile

Table 2.1 (Unweighted) Participant profile (n) for CSPPA 2022

	Republic of Ireland		Northern Ireland	
	Primary	Post-primary	Primary	Post-primary
All schools (n)	53	69	11	20
All students (n)	1,147	5,211	611	1,912
Average Age of Students (Years; Mean+SD)	11.5 (0.8)	14.7 (1.8)	10.3 (0.7)	14.1 (1.5)
<b>GENDER IDENTITY</b>				
Boy (n)	609	2,526	293	886
Girl (n)	496	2,511	302	956
Other (n)	42	174	16	70
<b>FAMILY AFFLUENCE SCALE (N)</b>				
High	269	1,014	111	411
Medium	637	2,584	364	890
Low	217	1,051	98	437

	Republic of Ireland		Northern Ireland	
	Primary	Post-primary	Primary	Post-primary
<b>NUMBER OF STUDENTS PER SCHOOL YEAR</b>				
5th class/Primary 6	605		324	
6th class/Primary 7	542		287	
1st year/Year 8		1,598		219
2nd year/Year 9		846		412
3rd year/Year 10		898		555
Year 11 (NI)				338
Transition year (4th)/Year 12		517		180
5th year/Year 13		1,000		114
6th year/Year 14		354		44
School Administrators	24	47		
<b>SCHOOL LOCATION</b>				
Rural	804	3,443	108	578
Urban	343	1,768	503	1,334
<b>DISABILITY STATUS</b>				
No disabilities	920	3,363	431	1,225
With disabilities	209	1,370	148	544
<b>NATIONALITY</b>				
Irish	950	3,852	505	1,579
Other Nationality	176	832	106	333

## Sample Weighting

The CSPPA 2022 data were weighted to avoid bias from the clustered data. Sample weights were applied to the data collected from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland separately to ensure reporting was representative of the population in each jurisdiction. Information for weighting was obtained from the Department of Education in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The weights were based on the proportion of boys and girls within a year group, and the proportion of students in year groups for the schools. There is no population data for students who identify as other than boy or girl, so respondents who identified themselves as other gender were given a weight of 1. The final weights were created for both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland and applied prior to data analyses. After applying the weights, the sample changed to 8,889 students.

## Data Analysis

The data analyses for CSPPA 2022 were based on the weighted sample for each jurisdiction. The numbers in the tables were rounded to the nearest whole number, hence some tables may sum to 99% or 101%. Chi-square tests of independence were carried out on differences of individual factors such as gender (boy, girl, other gender), age or year group, disability status (with or without disabilities), family socio-economic status (FAS low, medium, high), nationality (ROI: Irish or other nationalities; NI: Irish/Northern Irish/British, or other nationalities), and where applicable, ethnicity (White Irish or Other ethnicity). School-related factors were also statistically tested where possible on school gender status, school social economic status, and location (urban or rural).



