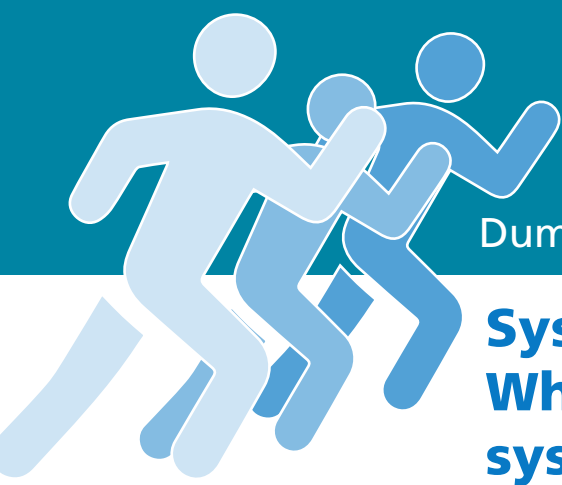




Dumfries and Galloway Physical Activity Survey

System Learning – What needs to change across the system – DGSPAS 2026

Findings from the Dumfries and Galloway Schools Physical Activity Survey (DGSPAS) 2026



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Why this briefing matters

These briefings use local evidence from the Dumfries and Galloway Schools Physical Activity Survey (2026) to support delivery of the Physical Activity Strategy 2025–2030.

They are designed to:

- provide clear evidence to support decision-making
- highlight where change is needed
- guide action across schools, health and communities

The findings show:

- activity levels are not improving in line with targets
- some groups are less active than others



Physical activity is influenced by multiple parts of the system, not a single service or intervention. The role of the system is to create the conditions that make participation in physical activity possible, easy and sustainable.

About this briefing

- Based on DGSPAS 2026 (P4–S6 pupils)
- Brings together findings across all themes
- No single part of the system can increase activity on its own. Participation is the result of how the whole system works together.



**No single part of
the system can
increase activity
on its own**

What do we mean by the system?

The system includes all the places, people and services that influence physical activity, including:

- schools and places of learning
- community sport and recreation
- transport and active travel
- environments and access
- communication and public education
- health and social care
- targeted support

1. Why this matters

Activity levels are shaped by:

- confidence and skills
- access to opportunities
- environments and safety
- daily routines

Improvements in one area alone are unlikely to be enough



Increasing activity requires coordinated action across the whole system

2. What the data shows

- **47.6% meet physical activity guidelines**
- **52% do not meet guidelines**
- **23.5% are very low active (<30 mins/day)**

Key patterns:

- Activity declines with age
- Confidence is lower among inactive pupils
- Despite generally positive attitudes, knowledge and motivation, participation remains below Physical Activity Strategy ambitions..
- Differences exist by gender and disability



No single factor explains inactivity
- patterns are consistent across multiple areas



Key insight

Pupils want to be active, but many pupils continue to face barriers to taking part consistently. The challenge is not simply to provide opportunities, but to create the conditions that enable sustained participation.

3. What this tells us about the system

This model shows how different parts of the system influence physical activity behaviour for children and young people.



Figure 3.1: Whole system influences on children and young people's physical activity

Places of learning (schools)

Schools provide strong opportunities through PE, active breaks and clubs. However, schools cannot deliver lasting behaviour change without support from families, communities, transport and local environments.



Schools are a key foundation, but cannot sustain activity alone

Sport and active recreation (community provision)

- Important for activity outside school
- Lower participation among least active groups



Provision exists, but participation remains lower among those who are least active.

Active travel and transport

- Positive attitudes to walking and cycling
- Perceptions of safety are generally positive, although access and participation remain challenges for some pupils.



Everyday movement represents an important opportunity to support physical activity.

Communication and public education

- Awareness and motivation are high
- Participation remains below Physical Activity Strategy ambitions.



Knowledge alone is not leading to increased activity. Awareness must be matched by accessible opportunities and supportive environments.

Active places and spaces

- Participation depends on:
- access to spaces
- perceived safety
- availability of facilities



Opportunities vary depending on local environment and access

Active health and social care (targeted support)

- Some pupils require additional support
- Barriers are greater for least active groups



Universal approaches alone are not enough

Confidence and experience (physical literacy)

- Confidence and competence are consistently lower among pupils in the very low activity group.
- This limits participation even where opportunities exist



Lower confidence is consistently associated with lower activity levels and participation.

4. Alignment with local policy and practice

Dumfries and Galloway Physical Activity Strategy 2025–2030

Outcome: Increase participation across the population

Action: Deliver coordinated system-wide change

Evidence from DGSPAS 2026:

- Low activity levels
- Decline with age
- Differences between groups
- Confidence and access barriers



Supports the need for joined-up action across the system

Dumfries and Galloway Best Investments (2025)

Supports priorities to:

- focus on prevention
- target least active populations
- align delivery across sectors



5. Implications for policy and practice

Shift from:

- isolated programmes
- to coordinated system-wide action focused on sustained participation

Prioritise:

- least active groups
- transition points (primary to secondary)

Strengthen:

- everyday movement (active travel, informal activity)
- confidence-building approaches

Improve:

- access to safe, suitable and age-relevant environments
- inclusivity of opportunities

Align action across:

- schools
- transport
- community services
- health and partners

6. Key messages

- Activity is shaped by multiple parts of the system
- No single intervention will increase activity on its own
- Confidence, access and opportunity all matter
- Coordinated action is needed to reach least active groups



References

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