Swim:ED

Building skills, breaking barriers

Impact Report 2025/26



> To keep our young people safe in, on, and around the water, it's not only important to give them swimming skills but also a broader water safety education. Understanding hazards, coping with risk, managing peer pressure, and being able to assess one's own competence are all vital components.
>
> We need to give our young people the skills, knowledge, training, and experience of repeatedly applying these in real-world environments for them to become water competent. This journey often starts with school swimming and it is the foundation on which we build.

Ashley Jones

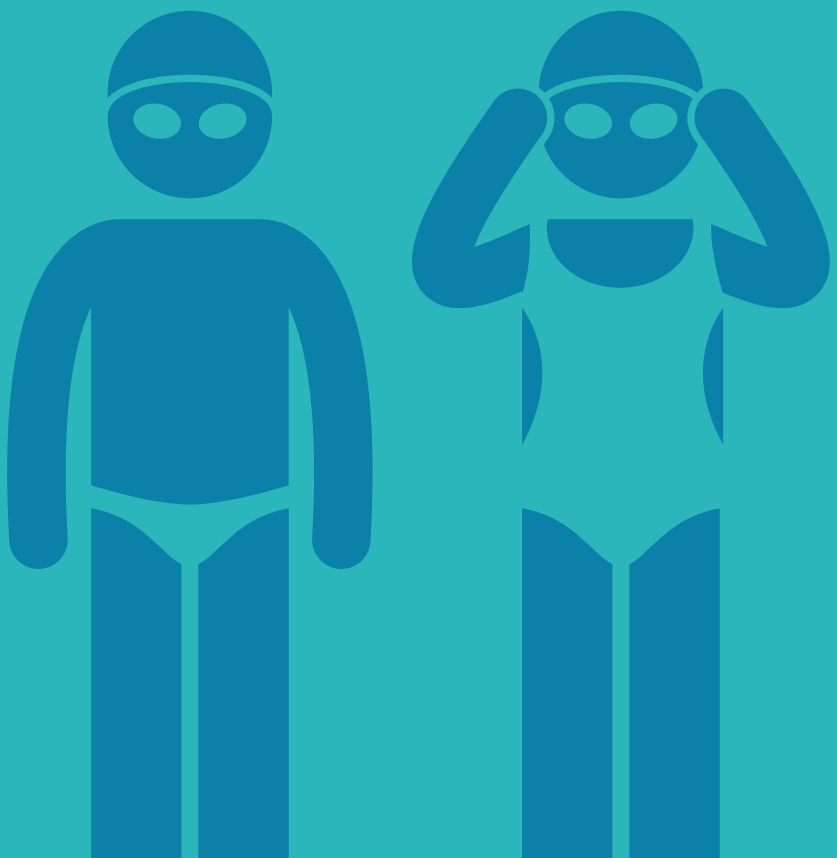
Head of Water Safety and Education

Royal Life Saving Society UK



A call to action for the UK's swim crisis

Across the UK, thousands of children are growing up without basic swimming and water safety knowledge. Widespread pool closures, declining staff numbers, and marked economic inequalities are fuelling the shortfall.





Since 1994, swimming and safe self-rescue have been core parts of the National Curriculum. By the time pupils leave primary school, they should be able to swim 25 metres unaided, demonstrate proficiency in a range of strokes, and understand how to protect themselves in and around water.

However, schools are struggling to meet their targets. In 2025, 27% of Year 7 pupils were unable to swim competently, confidently, and proficiently over a distance of at least 25 metres. Similarly, 30% could not perform safe self-rescue in different water-based situations.

While the figures show modest year-on-year improvement, they also point to a pressing need for action – and spotlight practical, systemic, and economic barriers limiting access to potentially life-saving skills.

Chief among these challenges is the steady loss of local pools. 'The Deep End' – a 2026 report from the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Swimming – uncovers the scale of Britain's pool crisis. More than 500 swimming pools have closed since 2010. Two-thirds of the remaining facilities are beyond their expected lifespan. And nearly a quarter of local authorities lack the swim space to support their community.

For many schools, this means complex travel logistics, higher administrative costs, and lost learning time. For many pupils, it means learning to swim in unsuitable facilities, within unrealistic timeframes. BBC research shows that most UK children receive just six weeks of 30-minute lessons during primary school – or three hours of swim tuition across four years.

The real-world repercussions contribute to around 33 children drowning in England each year – the equivalent of a full classroom. Breaking the cycle requires coordinated action from policymakers, schools, and industry experts to prioritise water safety, create equitable access for all pupils, and secure investment to revive Britain's ailing swim estate.

The APPG's Deep End report calls for a funded, long-term strategy for the UK's aquatic facilities. While we fully support their plan for a sustainable future, we recognise that children need change now. At Swim:ED, we provide immediate impact, with an innovative alternative to off-site lessons and safe, accessible swim spaces for every pupil.

This report shares our progress since 2023, connecting with more schools, supporting more communities, and championing a more inclusive approach to swim and water safety education.

27% of Year 7 pupils are unable to swim 25 metres unaided

30% cannot perform safe self-rescue

England has lost over 500 local pools since 2010

Around 33 children drown each year in England

In England, the average age of a public leisure facility is 55 years

Sources:
Sport England's 2024/25 Active Lives Children and Young People Survey
Royal Life Saving Society UK Child Drownings Report 2026
'The Deep End' All-Party Parliamentary Group Report
BBC Freedom of Information request to the Department for Education

Swimming access: The demographic divide

Access and inclusion problems run deeper than an ageing pool stock. In the UK, knowing how to swim often depends on your location, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background.

Based on Department for Education data, the BBC's research flags stark inequalities across swimming provision and proficiency. While 72% of Year 6 pupils in England could swim 25 metres unaided in 2024/25, attainment fell to just 55% in schools with a higher proportion of disadvantaged children.

Safe self-rescue statistics are equally concerning. Nationally, 70% of Year 6 leavers could float on their back for 60 seconds, swim to a floating object, and swim 15 metres to exit the water unaided. In schools with a higher uptake of free school meals, the figure drops to half.

These disparities also impact drowning risks. The Royal Life Saving Society UK Child Drownings Report 2026 reveals that children from deprived communities and minority groups are more likely to lose their lives in the water:

Black children drown at more than three times the rate of white children, and this gap is increasing.

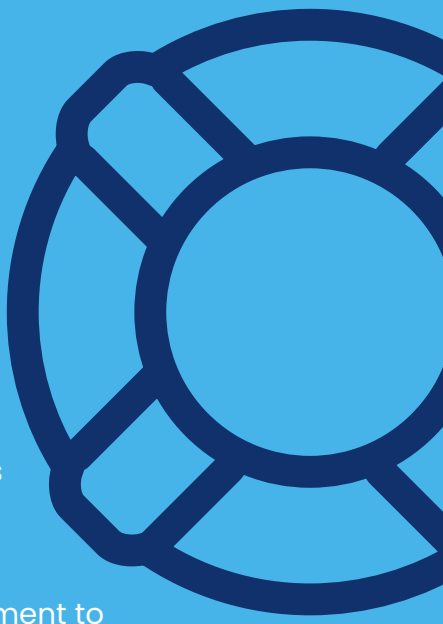
Children from the UK's most deprived communities are twice as likely to drown as those from the least deprived.

71% of children who drowned had been known to social care at some point in their lives.



A nationwide focus on water safety

Encouragingly, water safety now plays a more prominent role in the national conversation.



In May 2026, Baroness Sharron Davies and Lord Cryer highlighted in Parliament the critical issues of pool closures, local provision, and swimming's importance as a life skill, rather than a luxury.

The topic was further discussed during Prime Minister's Questions on 10 September, with Andy Burnham reiterating his backing for grassroots sport and leisure centre investment.

The Department for Education has also strengthened its commitment to water safety. From September 2026, new statutory guidance brings water safety more explicitly into Relationships, Sex, and Health Education (RSHE), including teaching the Water Safety Code and helping school-aged children to recognise water-related risks and develop essential lifesaving skills.

Swimming and water safety have long been compulsory elements of the primary PE curriculum. The new approach bolsters this existing provision by embedding age-appropriate water safety education within statutory RSHE requirements across primary and secondary education, ensuring children and young people develop the knowledge and skills they need to stay safe in and around water.

The National Water Safety and Swimming Competency Framework provides a strategic overview of the fundamental water safety skills, knowledge, and benchmarks for 3- to 18-year-olds. An accompanying National Water Safety Education Pathway brings the principles to life through age-appropriate classroom activities, resources, and lesson plans.

- Primary school children learn how to understand risk and follow the Water Safety Code.
- Secondary pupils are taught how to handle peer influence, stay safe in increasingly independent situations, and perform basic first-aid, lifesaving, and CPR skills.

Swim:ED programmes have always prioritised water safety skills and understanding as key outcomes, measuring proficiency beyond the ability to swim 25 metres. The new curriculum applies those standards on a national level, embedding water safety education into every school year – and equipping children and young people to navigate changing water hazards as they grow.

Sources:
Royal Life Saving Society UK Child Drownings Report 2026
BBC Freedom of Information request to the Department for Education

Bringing swimming and water safety to more schools

In 2023, Swim:ED launched our first pop-up pool – a simple answer to the stresses of traditional off-site swim and water safety lessons.

We bring the pool straight to the playground, providing a temporary, heated, purpose-built pool installed and managed directly on school grounds.

The comprehensive solution brings together secure, state-of-the-art swim facilities, experienced instructors, and bespoke swim curriculums, alongside targeted support to help schools succeed. Flexible timetables, tailored teaching plans, stringent safety protocols, and a user-friendly digital portal are all part of the partnership.

- Swim:ED's intensive, inclusive approach speeds and consolidates learning, so children quickly master new skills and put them to practical use.
- Over 5-7 disruption-free weeks, children get fifteen 45-minute sessions of specialised, small-group teaching with no more than ten classmates.
- Compared to standard off-site arrangements – typically involving weekly 25-minute lessons across ten weeks – schools report greater impact in significantly shorter timescales.



Three years on, we've helped 225 individual schools win back hours of classroom time, transform proficiency and performance, and create safe swim spaces where every pupil has the opportunity to thrive. We welcomed 70 new schools in 2024/25 and a further 96 in 2025/26.

225
operational schools since 2023

46,966
Swim:ED pupils since 2023

36
operational Swim:ED pools

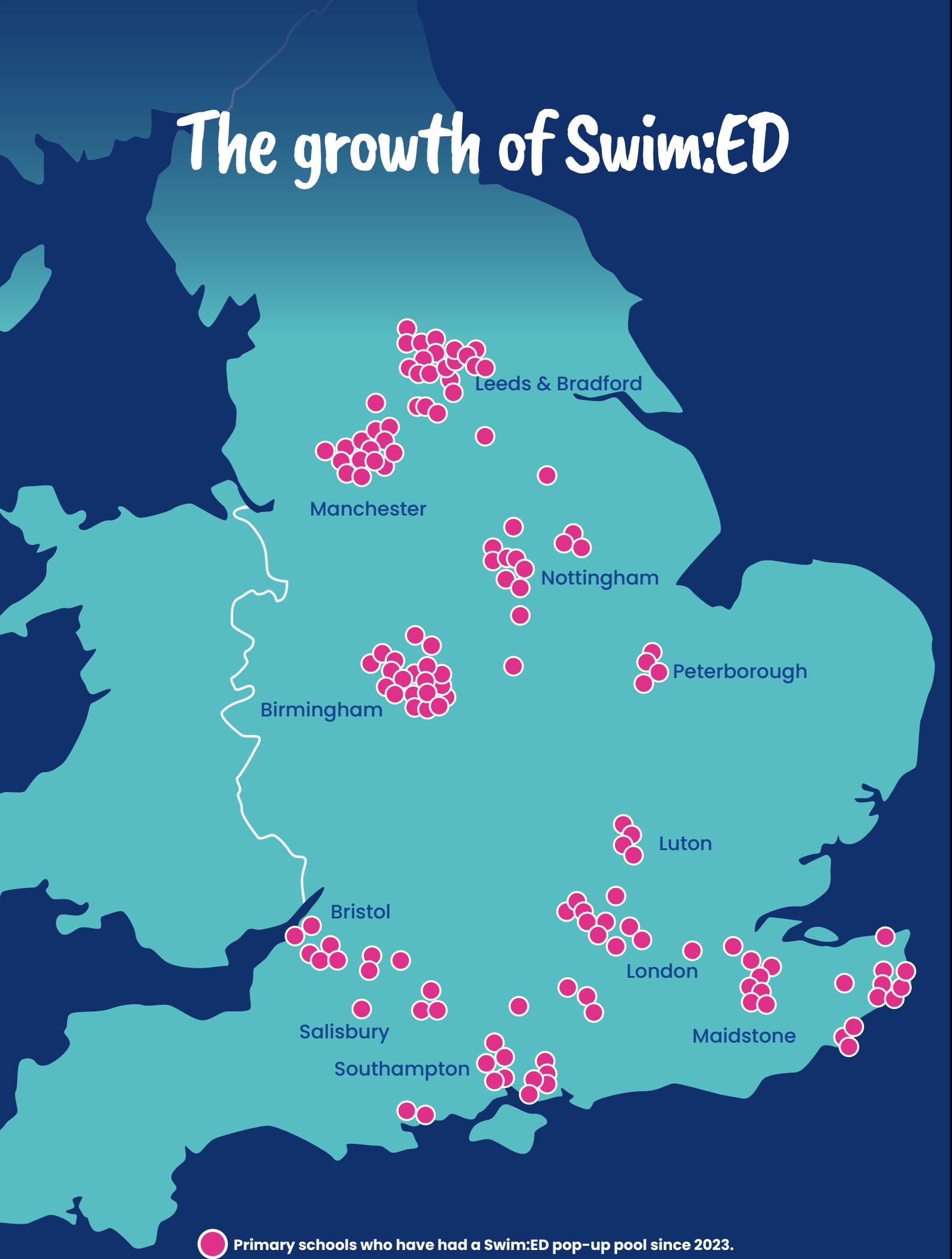
18
delivery partners

60
swimming teachers

28,451
programme delivery hours

72
lifeguards

The growth of Swim:ED



Broader reach, better results

2025/26 Year 6 Impact

The Swim:ED programme builds water confidence throughout primary school, using bespoke learning paths for pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2. We align with national curriculum requirements and measure progress against the government's key criteria for swimming and water safety.

This report measures milestones for Swim:ED's Year 6 leavers according to national curriculum and Swim England's assessment standards, detailing outcomes across four key areas:

1. **Swim competently, confidently, and proficiently over a distance of at least 25 metres.**
2. **Use a range of strokes effectively** (for example, front crawl, backstroke, and breaststroke).
3. **Perform safe self-rescue in different water-based situations.**
4. **Understand and explain water safety theory.**

The following pages show our achievements in the 2025/26 academic year.



84.8%

of Year 6 pupils achieved at least one of our four main goals

3,740

Year 6 pupils took part in Swim:ED in 2025/26 – **1,491 more than last year.**

24,175

children participated across all age groups – **an annual jump of 8,793.**

187 schools

worked with us **across the UK**.

Goal 1.

Swimming 25 metres unaided

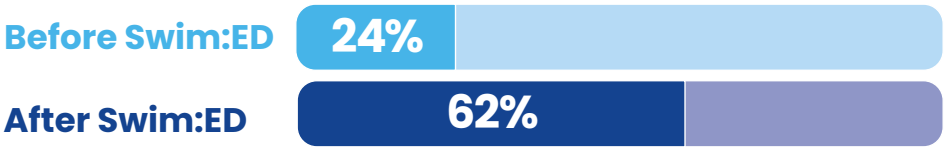
+ 157%

- ✔ Before Swim:ED, 24% of Year 6 children could swim 25 metres unaided.
- ✔ After the programme, the figure rose to 62% – a 157% increase.

Number of children able to swim 25m unaided



Percentage of children able to swim 25m unaided



Goal 2.

Mastering multiple strokes

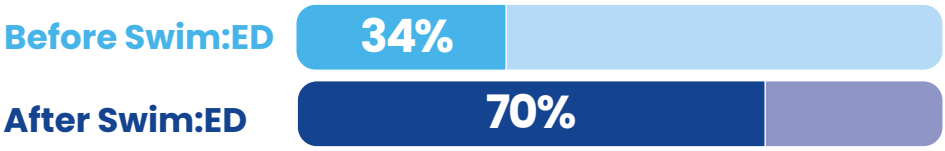
+ 105%

- ✔ Thanks to Swim:ED, 70% of children could perform a range of strokes.
- ✔ Pupils showed a 105% improvement following the programme.

Number of children who mastered multiple strokes



Percentage of children who mastered multiple strokes



Goal 3.

Performing safe self-rescue

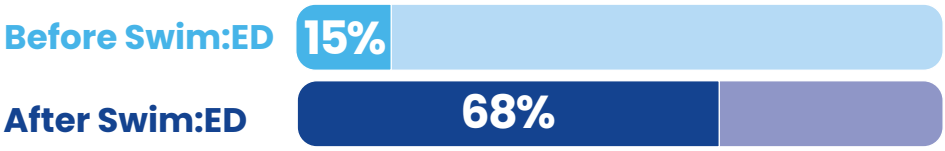
+ 351%

- ✔ After Swim:ED, 68% of pupils demonstrated safe self-rescue skills – up from 15%.
- ✔ That's a 351% improvement rate.

Number of children able to demonstrate self-rescue skills



Percentage of children able to demonstrate self-rescue skills



Goal 4.

Understanding water safety theory

+ 388%

- ✔ Following Swim:ED, 89% of pupils could explain water safety fundamentals.
- ✔ Numbers rose from 18% prior to the programme – an uplift of 388%.

Number of children able to explain water safety



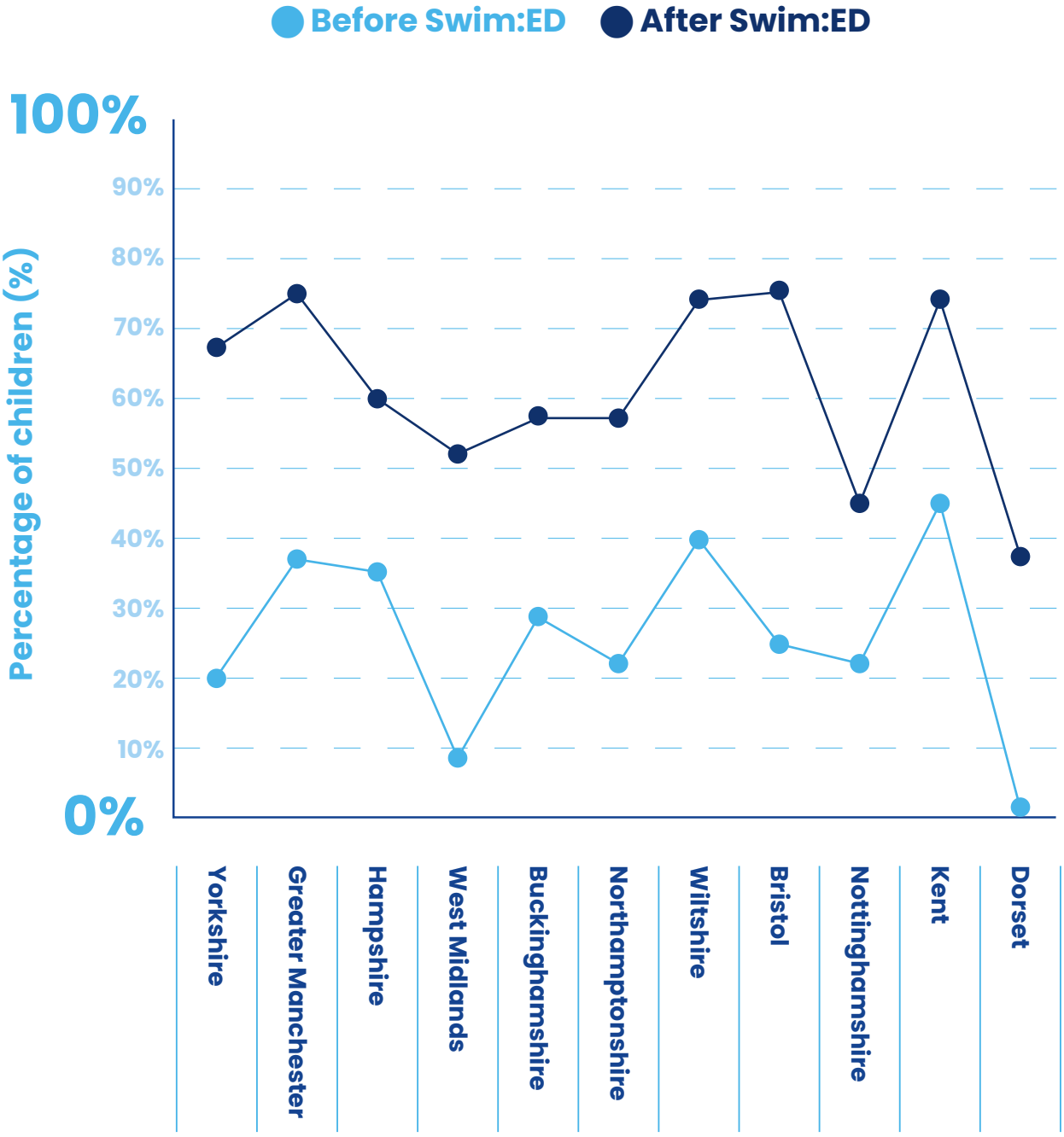
Percentage of children able to explain water safety



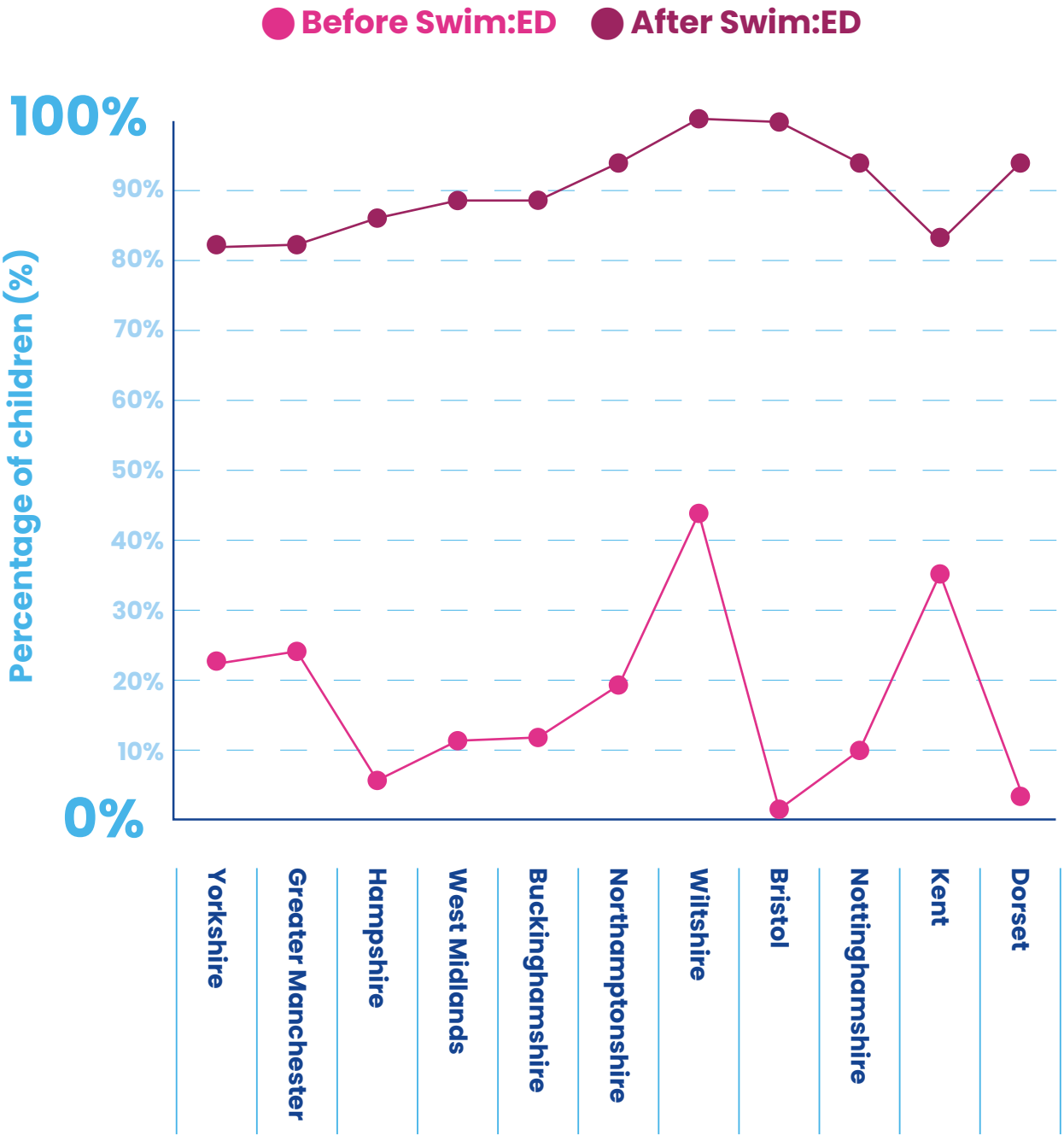
Regional Results

Thanks to our regional network of Swim:ED delivery partners, we can demonstrate the impact of Swim:ED across the UK.

Percentage of children able to swim 25 metres unaided



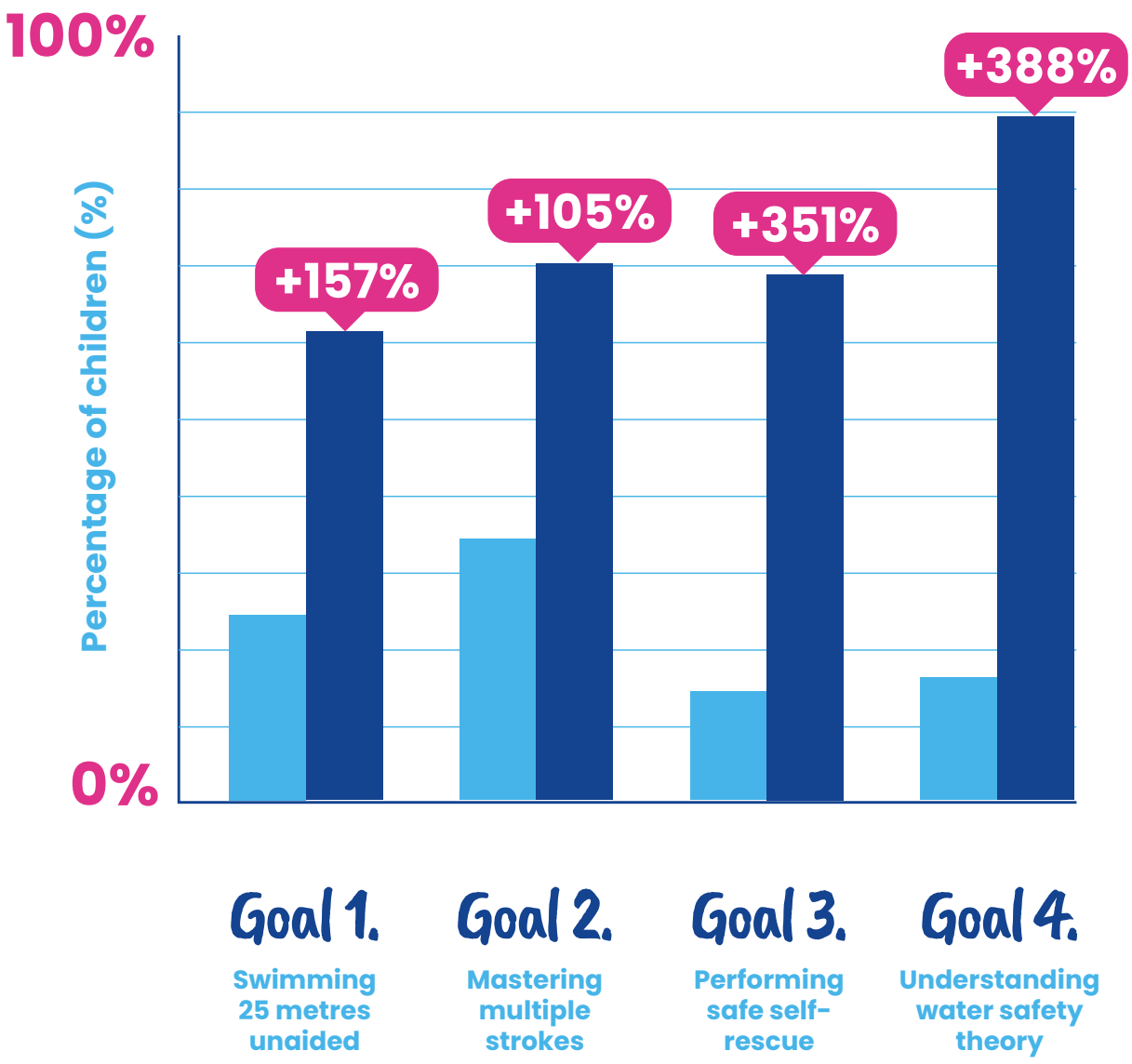
Percentage of children able to explain water safety



Summary

The chart below highlights the significant improvement across all categories after the programme.

Pre and post-programme percentages for each key category



“The success of Swim:ED demonstrates that a strong, skilled aquatic workforce is fundamental to improving outcomes for children and supporting more schools and communities to access vital provision.

Through a growing and developing network of swimming teachers, lifeguards, and delivery partners, they are building the capacity needed to deliver safe, high-quality swimming and water safety education at scale.”

Tara Dillon

CEO - CIMSPA - Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity



Widening access to water safety education

9.5% to 99%*

Every child deserves the knowledge to protect themselves around water – yet access to swimming and water safety education remains unequal.

The Royal Life Saving Society UK reports that children in the most deprived communities drown at twice the rate of those in the least deprived, highlighting the importance of ensuring that all children have opportunities to develop essential swimming and water safety skills.

This year, we began exploring how Swim:ED outcomes vary across different pupil groups, including children eligible for free school meals (FSM), those with English as an additional language (EAL), and those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) or those who have an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP). By analysing anonymised pupil data, we aim to build a clearer evidence base around swimming and water safety outcomes, identify differences in attainment and participation, and extend access and achievement for all children.

*Rise in water safety understanding among Year 6 pupils eligible for free school meals.
Figures rose from 10 to 104 of 105 pupils. 94 pupils newly achieved this goal.



Our first results showcase the impact of accessible education. After taking part in Swim:ED, Year 6 children across FSM, EAL, and SEND groups made remarkable progress against every programme target, including swimming 25 metres unaided, mastering multiple strokes, performing safe self-rescue, and understanding water safety.

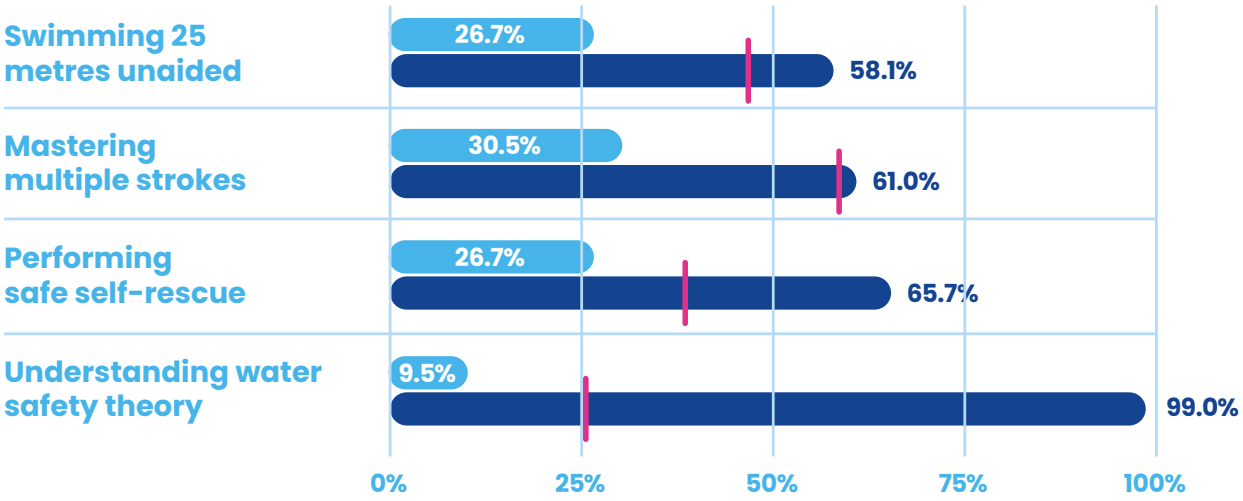
The most compelling outcome is the overlap between pupil groups. **Across every programme goal, attainment for FSM, EAL, and SEND children surpassed the starting point for children outside those cohorts.**

For example, among children eligible for free school meals, attainment in swimming 25 metres increased from 27% to 58%, and understanding of water safety leapt from 9.5% to 99%. In both cases, the end result exceeded the starting point for non-FSM pupils.

Before and after, against the starting benchmark

FSM: 105 assessable pupils | Non-FSM: 280 assessable pupils

FSM before FSM after | Non-FSM before (benchmark)



Other pupil groups achieved similar breakthroughs:

- For Year 6 pupils receiving SEN support or with an EHCP, safe self-rescue attainment climbed from 39% to 70% and water safety understanding surged from 20% to 96%.
- Among Year 6 children with English as an additional language, water safety understanding rose from 14% to 95%, and safe self-rescue grew from 37% to 72%.

Our early findings highlight the potential for inclusive swimming and water safety education to support children across a range of backgrounds and circumstances. As our data set develops, we'll continue to examine patterns and possibilities across pupil groups, using evidence-informed insight to shape stronger, more accessible swimming and water safety provision.

Fewer pools and less funding meant fewer opportunities for children to swim. Swim:ED gave more children the chance to receive swimming lessons. It also suited our pupils because we could organise them into same gender groups. Our children's journey throughout the programme was remarkable, and this is a true testament to Swim:ED and their team.

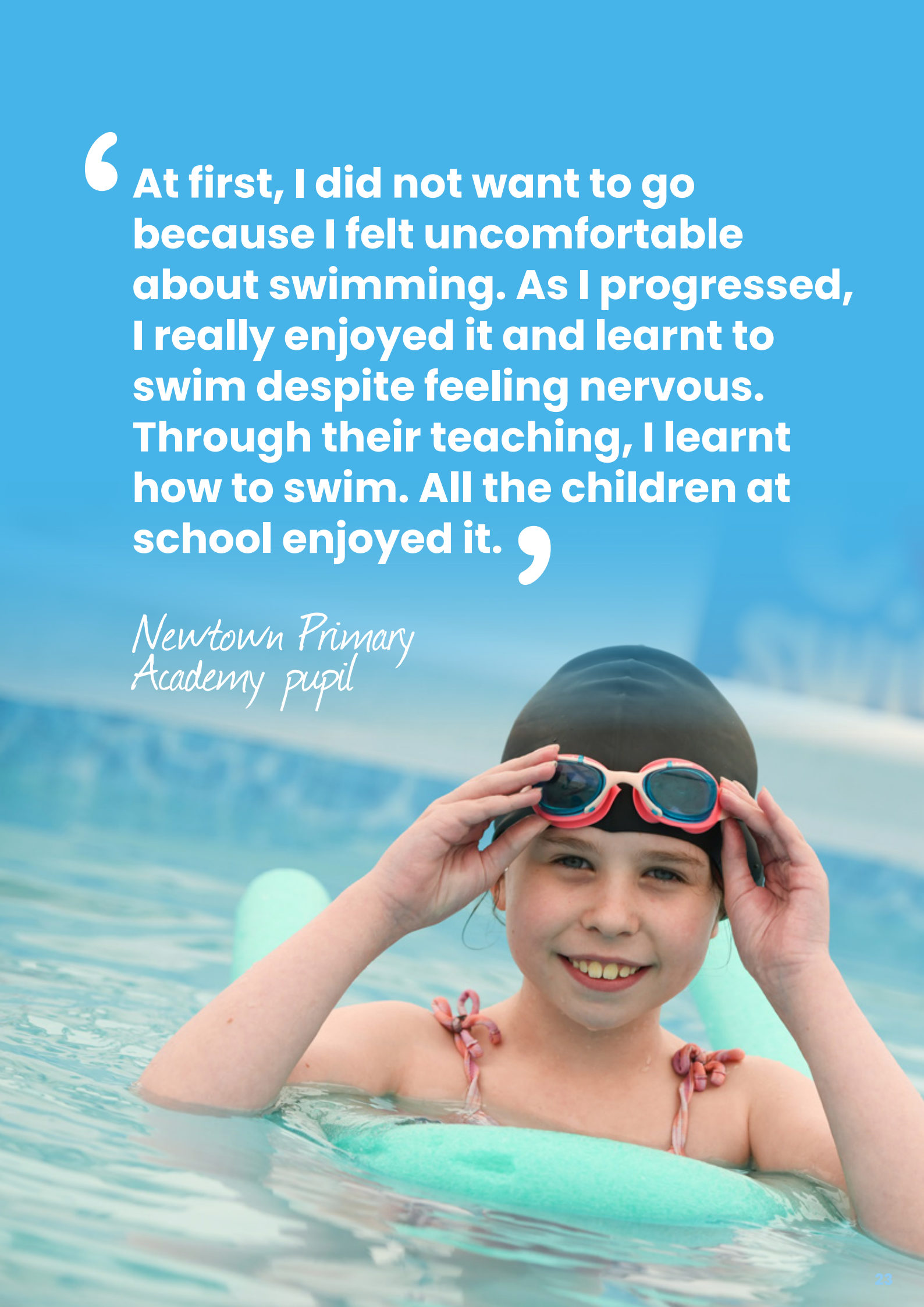
Daniel Maynard

Co-PE Lead - Hillary Primary School, Walsall

Only 24% of our children were leaving primary school able to swim 25 metres. Reviewing the impact Swim:ED had achieved in other schools gave us confidence to try a different approach. Bringing the pool onto the school site and providing children with several lessons each week stood out as a practical way to address the challenges we had experienced.

Emma Ward

Headteacher - Ravensthorpe Primary School, Peterborough



“At first, I did not want to go because I felt uncomfortable about swimming. As I progressed, I really enjoyed it and learnt to swim despite feeling nervous. Through their teaching, I learnt how to swim. All the children at school enjoyed it.”

Newtown Primary Academy pupil

Case Study

Closing a critical National Curriculum gap



Newtown Primary Academy
West Bromwich

We wanted our children to learn in a positive swimming environment where they could flourish, develop their existing skills, and gain new ones. Swim:ED was a fantastic experience for our school. Our pupils loved the provision and really engaged with it. Seeing the children make progress was a privilege.

James Bushell
Middle Leader

25 metres up 3,200%

Children able to swim 25 metres unaided rose from 1% to 33%.

Water safety up by 46%

Water safety awareness climbed from zero to almost half (46%).

Before Swim:ED, **over two-thirds (68%) of Newtown Primary Academy pupils had never been swimming**. The cost of lessons was a key concern for parents, placing basic swimming skills and potentially life-saving water safety knowledge out of reach for many families.

The school's diagnostic assessment found that 74% of pupils were unable to swim – markedly higher than the 28% national average. Although the remaining quarter displayed some swimming skills, **only 1% could achieve 25 metres unaided**. The assessment also showed that no children had an understanding of water safety.

The Newtown Academy team aimed to **close the gap with a high-quality swimming and water safety programme** that helped every child improve their swimming ability and develop important life skills. They also wanted to achieve value for money, avoiding the lost curriculum time and limited progress associated with standard off-site lessons.

Newtown Academy looked to Swim:ED to create a bespoke learning and assessment framework that met the school's unique needs and **delivered a pupil-focused programme to transform access, attitudes, and attainment**.

Supporting 112 pupils across Years 3 to 6, Swim:ED helped children hit National Curriculum targets, conquer their fears, and discover an ongoing passion for swimming. Within one half-term, **children's ability to swim 25 metres climbed from 1% to 33%** and safe self-rescue skills grew from a standing start to almost half the cohort.

As well as smashing traditional metrics, pupils built new reserves of courage and confidence:

- Several children were initially reluctant to swim, arriving late to lessons or hesitating before entering the pool.
- Newtown used pupil voice to understand children's worries and concerns, enabling them to take a lead in the process.
- With the school's support and Swim:ED's inclusive instruction, nervous pupils began enjoying the sessions, made outstanding progress, and became competent first-time swimmers.
- Advancements were particularly significant within Years 3 and 4, where 43% of the children were classed as Pupil Premium.
- A hugely popular after-school club allowed other pupils to take part.

While Swim:ED significantly lifted attainment levels for Newtown Primary Academy, it also delivered deeper impact across the whole school community, **giving many families the opportunity to experience swimming and water safety for the first time**. The programme earned enthusiastic support from staff, parents, and governors and helped pupils discover untapped strengths, talents, and self-belief – giving new and non-swimmers the skills to protect themselves in and around the water.

Case Study

Turning anxiety into achievement



Arden Primary Academy Stockport

Swim:ED made a real difference for our children. Pupils who had previously found lessons at the local baths challenging were much more engaged because the journey and unfamiliar environment were no longer creating anxiety. We saw clear progress in their swimming skills, while also reducing disruption to the school day.

Julia Dunn
Headteacher

Swimming 25 metres unaided up 211%

Following the programme, 25-metre attainment rates climbed from 18% to 56%.

Using a range of strokes reached 99%

Over 50% more children mastered a range of swimming strokes.

Self-rescue knowledge grew by 45%

After Swim:ED, 94% of pupils could perform safe self-rescue.

Arden Primary Academy were **losing entire afternoons to an off-site swim programme that didn't serve their children or staff**. After a long commute to the local swimming pool, some pupils felt genuine anxiety about stepping into unknown surroundings. This stress became a barrier to engagement and affected attendance and progress in the water.

Back at school, **weekly sessions robbed teachers of essential learning time** and placed stretched staff numbers under additional pressure.

Arden Primary needed a solution that increased children's access to swimming while **removing the barriers associated with travelling to an external pool**. Swim:ED's intensive three-week programme brought a heated pop-up pool onto the school playground, providing children with a worry-free walk from their classroom and winning back valuable curriculum hours previously spent on a coach.

Within three weeks, **Swim:ED transformed results and reignited pupil engagement**. Thanks to daily, small-group lessons, every child spent meaningful time in the water with qualified, experienced teachers. This focused approach reduced disruption and quickly consolidated learning, delivering greater impact in a significantly shorter timeframe.

Before Swim:ED, just 18% of participating Year 4 children could swim at least 25 metres. After the programme, over half (56%) of pupils met the National Curriculum target. What's more, **children achieved almost 100% attainment in mastering a range of strokes and performing safe self-rescue**.

Headteacher Julia Dunn said Swim:ED's positives reached well beyond the pool:

> The Swim:ED programme **removed the need for transport, reduced the loss of curriculum time, and increased participation among children** who had previously found off-site lessons challenging.
>
> Daily access to the pool also created greater consistency, helping children build their confidence and skills consistently, without waiting a week between sessions. **Children strengthened their learning each day without leaving the security of the school site**, contributing to rapid and measurable progress across all three assessed National Curriculum outcomes.

Case Study

Social connections and exceptional SEND support



Shire Oak Primary School
Leeds

Swim:ED gave our children regular, focused swimming lessons in a familiar environment. We saw clear improvements in swimming and water safety, particularly for younger children and those with SEND, alongside a real growth in confidence and enthusiasm.

Marcelle Maver
Deputy Headteacher

25 metre attainment rose 93%

Pupils able to swim 25 metres unaided grew from 45% to 87%.

Water safety knowledge accelerated by 69%

Awareness of water safety increased from 55% to 93%.

For Shire Oak Primary School, the difference was in the details. When Swim:ED came on board to support Year 2 and 3 children, almost half (45%) could swim 25 metres and 55% could recognise water safety hazards. However, **the obstacles of off-site lessons were holding many pupils back**.

Weekly lessons made it difficult for children to sharpen swimming skills, consolidate water safety knowledge, and progress at a meaningful pace. Large classes meant **pupils spent much of the session waiting their turn**. They also lacked valuable individual attention, particularly those with SEND, who could find traditional swimming environments challenging.

Seeking an alternative to costly, unproductive off-site lessons, Shire Oak Primary trusted Swim:ED to deliver an intensive, accessible swim and water safety programme directly from the playground.

Their objectives centred on sustained progress, personalised support, and school-wide inclusion:

- Help pupils become more confident in the water and make stronger progress than they had through weekly swimming lessons.
- Offer daily sessions to give children regular opportunities to overcome their fears, cement their skills, and succeed in a safe environment.
- Establish smaller groups for focused support, especially for children with SEND, who benefit from a calmer, more personalised experience.
- Ensure younger children, smaller children, and those with additional needs can participate safely and receive the support they require.

The Swim:ED team took Shire Oak's goals to heart, creating a bespoke programme and tailor-made physical structure with inclusion at their core. Guiding the school through setup, installation, and planning, we ensured **every element was designed to effectively teach younger and neurodiverse children**.

A block was placed inside the pool, creating a shallower area **where smaller children could stand safely and gradually become familiar with the water**. Meanwhile, older and more confident children strengthened swimming and water safety skills in small, level-appropriate groups.

Elsewhere, unexpected outcomes strengthened social connections and classroom performance. The Swim:ED programme **fuelled excitement throughout the school**, with children celebrating each other's achievements.

Academically, **smaller sessions created opportunities for more focused teaching in other curriculum areas**.

Case Study

Three years of Swim:ED success stories



St Mary's Catholic Primary Academy
Wolverhampton

Swimming and water safety have become an important part of St Mary's PE curriculum offer. Our pupils, staff, and parents are always excited to see the pool arrive. The programme, which we have adapted to meet the needs of our school and pupils, has helped many children feel safe in the water and achieve National Curriculum expectations. We would fully recommend the Swim:ED team!

Sarah Williams
PE Lead

Swimming 25 metres surged to 58%

Starting from zero, well over half of children learned to swim 25 metres.

81% of pupils can now understand water safety

After Swim:ED, 81% of pupils can now protect themselves in and around water.

For three years, Swim:ED has helped St Mary's Catholic Primary Academy **achieve National Curriculum goals** and strengthen pupils' swimming and water safety skills.

Before partnering with Swim:ED, St Mary's visited an off-site pool each week, sacrificing half a school day to minibus travel and **crowded, one-size-fits-all swim sessions**. Lessons were delivered in larger groups, and staff had to press for smaller, more focused classes.

Because sessions took place just once a week, **children struggled to retain and reinforce their swimming and water safety knowledge**. With seven days between pool visits, pupils appeared to start from scratch with every session. Monitoring improvement was equally challenging as their provider supplied no assessment data or evidence of children's progress.

When St Mary's investigated pop-up solutions, **Swim:ED stood out as the most organised, trustworthy, and professional**.

As part of a comprehensive onboarding process, we created a personalised programme to accelerate swimming abilities, strengthen water safety skills, and deliver St Mary's desired outcomes:

- Build a programme to meet the needs of their school and pupils.
- Make better progress through smaller group sizes and more frequent lessons.
- Achieve a greater impact by offering swimming every day.
- Ease communication by having the swimming teacher on site.

Three years on, **swimming and water safety are an established part of school life**. Excitement levels peak when the pool and Swim:ED team arrive on site, after-school clubs are thriving, and children approach the programme with greater assurance.

Their engagement drives impressive results. In the summer 2026 term, 25-metre attainment rates for Year 4 pupils jumped from 0% to 58%, while **water safety understanding rocketed from 0% to 81%**. Staff also tracked 100% attendance rates for Swim:ED sessions.

Our partnership has grown from a bespoke, pupil-first swim and water safety programme to a central pillar of the St Mary's curriculum. **Tailored tuition, focused support, and inspiring results have made water safety a priority among children, staff, and parents** – and provided a rewarding route to achievement, confidence, and essential life skills.

Onwards & upwards

Swimming and water safety skills have the potential to save lives – and change them for the better.

At Swim:ED, we're committed to shaping accessible, supportive programmes that include and inspire all children, whatever their background, abilities, and needs.

Positive impact requires a partnership approach. Since our last report, we've strengthened relationships with policymakers, educators, and national organisations to enhance our provision, redefine best practices, and make a measurable difference for underserved pupils.

Here's the story so far

Building more efficient swim spaces

We're constantly improving our pool and plant facilities – from adding step-free access for pupils with additional needs to boosting sustainability and reducing our carbon footprint. Right now, we're working on a prototype project to streamline pool plant operations – spanning self-contained pool filtration, water pumps, heating systems, safety gear, and storage – to maximise efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and ease of use.

Improving access with a data-driven approach

We're using data to shrink the divide in swim and water safety education. By developing our store of anonymised pupil information spanning gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic circumstances, we can pinpoint inclusion and attainment issues, address root causes, and recommend solutions to extend learning opportunities on a national level.

Calling for collaborative action on child drowning

Child drowning deaths have doubled since 2020. In October 2026, we used our platform at the RoSPA National Water Safety Conference to encourage shared commitment, collaborative action, and a coordinated approach to drowning prevention. Sharing Swim:ED's proven impact for UK primary pupils, we called on government, schools, and national partners to align efforts, improve access, and make swimming and water safety a consistent part of every child's education.

Researching smarter ways to teach swimming and water safety

Since 2024, we've worked with the University of Chichester to explore how different types of swimming lessons shape children's skills, knowledge, confidence, and experience in the water. The research – conducted in tandem with the Occupational Performance Research Group and supported by funding from the Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS UK) – investigates the impact of three different approaches to swimming and water safety education: traditional school swimming lessons, Swim:ED's pop-up pool programme, and the RLSS UK Rookie Lifeguard programme.

Research focus

The Impacts of Traditional Swimming Lessons, Pop-up Swimming Lessons and the Rookie Lifeguard Programme for School Children

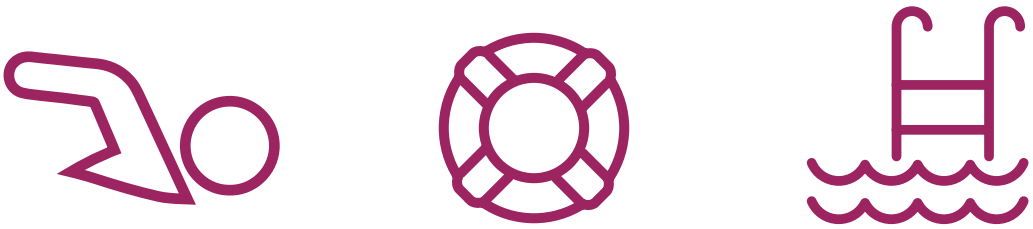
University of Chichester/RLSS UK.

How the research was conducted:

- Focus groups with children, teachers, and instructors examined their experiences of swimming provision.
- A longitudinal study involving 88 children aged 7 to 11 tracked perceived swimming ability, water safety knowledge, psychological engagement, and emotional experiences before, during, and after their programmes.
- Follow-up questionnaires evaluated whether improvements were retained.

88 children | 3 approaches | 4 measurement points | Ages 7 to 11

The three models were deliberately different.



Traditional swimming
4 lessons
Delivered weekly

Rookie Lifeguard
6 lessons
Delivered weekly

Pop-up pool
10 lessons
Delivered daily across three consecutive school weeks

Intensive lessons support rapid progress

Children across all three programmes improved their perceived swimming ability and developed their foundational and stroke-based swimming skills – **with pop-up pool participants showing the largest gains from lower baseline levels.**

Children beginning the pop-up pool programme generally started with lower levels of perceived swimming ability than those taking part in traditional swimming or Rookie Lifeguard provision. However, they demonstrated the most significant gains.

The findings suggest that:

- Pop-up pool programmes are effective for rapid skill development due to their high lesson frequency.
- Increased lesson frequency, including through models such as pop-up pools, can support skill development, particularly for learners with lower initial ability.
- How frequently children get into the water can play a key role in helping those with further to travel to make progress.

Happier experiences, healthier engagement

The research also measured success beyond swimming ability alone. Across the programmes, children reported increased confidence, enjoyment, and motivation. At the same time, social interactions and opportunities to learn new skills were powerful drivers of engagement.

For children taking part in the pop-up pool programme, the experience was overwhelmingly positive – helping them build courage and conquer nerves. The number of swimmers describing lessons as scary fell from 20% at the programme's midpoint to 12% at the end.

95% thought their lessons were **FUN**

76% said swimming made them feel **CONFIDENT**

85% described their lessons as **EXCITING**

80% said swimming made them feel **PROUD**

85% found swimming lessons **ENJOYABLE**

78% said swimming made them feel **SAFE**

The results spotlight the close connection between emotions and engagement. Researchers concluded that effective swim and water safety provision should develop physical skills alongside confidence, positive experiences, and supportive learning environments.

Water safety must be explicitly taught

One critical message is clear: Children need to learn both how to swim and how to stay safe in and around water.

While water safety improved significantly over time across the study, the research identified knowledge gaps across the provision, particularly regarding cold-water response and rescue behaviour. The Rookie Lifeguard programme achieved the strongest water safety results, reflecting its structured and explicit focus on safety education.

However, the authors stress that swimming skills alone are insufficient for drowning prevention and recommend explicitly embedding structured water safety education within swimming programmes.

Combining the strengths of each approach

Rather than identifying a single type of swimming lesson as the answer for every child, the study champions the benefits of each approach. The researchers suggest that combining these positives may deliver the most effective blueprint for future swimming provision.

TECHNICAL PROGRESSION	SAFETY EMPHASIS	INTENSITY
Traditional swimming	Rookie Lifeguard	Pop-up pool

For pop-up pools in particular, the findings provide encouraging independent evidence:

- Intensive provision can help children make rapid progress, including learners beginning from lower levels of ability.
- Meanwhile, positive experiences, confidence, and engagement remain important parts of the journey.

A positive challenge

The research also presents a positive challenge for everyone involved in swimming education: continue to strengthen water safety teaching, assess swimming competence objectively, and create learning environments where children can develop the skills, knowledge, and confidence they need in and around water.

Request the full research report

To request a complimentary copy of our joint research report – The Impacts of Traditional Swimming Lessons, Pop-up Pool Swimming Lessons, and the Rookie Lifeguard Programme for School Children – please email **info@swim-ed.co.uk**



A transformative turnkey solution

Swim:ED's all-in-one approach delivers a secure, heated pool straight to your school playground.

We take care of the planning, build, and logistics – and create a fully bespoke programme featuring qualified instructors, intuitive tech tools, and swim curriculums shaped around your school's goals, needs, and ability levels.

The end of lost learning time

On-site facilities cut disruption and claw back vital curriculum time – maximising every moment in the classroom and the water.

Inclusive instruction

A safe, supportive swim space where every pupil is welcome. Children learn essential swim and water safety skills, whatever their needs, circumstances, or ability level.

A safety-first approach

Rigorous protocols, qualified lifeguards, and experienced teachers create a safe, secure environment to set goals, stick with them, and succeed.

Flexible, cost-effective provision

Intensive programmes, taught in small, results-focused groups – frequently more cost-efficient than standard off-site sessions. Top-up lessons and after-school clubs are also available.

Digital tools, data-driven reporting

An online portal providing health and safety info, ready-to-share comms templates, and more – plus real-time reporting on pupil progress, fully aligned with the National Curriculum.

“One of the most dangerous things we can say in education is, ‘We have always done it like that.’ Continuing with the same approach does not make it the right one. Swim:ED is different and will be one of the best things you do for your children. It will change the way you think about swimming and water safety at school.”

Kate Baskeyfield

Headteacher - Kingsway Primary School, Urmston



Picture the possibilities for your school

Swim:ED provides impactful, inclusive swimming and water safety education to primary schools across the UK.

Our personalised programmes support your school's specific needs, removing the stress of off-site lessons, accelerating swimming and water safety attainment, and creating the next generation of confident swimmers.

We also help businesses grow and excel in the educational sector.

To learn more about swim programmes and delivery partnerships,

visit swim-ed.co.uk
email info@swim-ed.co.uk
or call 0121 663 1798

Connect with us for the latest updates and insights:

SwimEdUK SwimEd.UK

Swim:ED