



We're here
for young
wheelchair
users



Young Wheelchair Users and Physical Education (PE)



PE is a statutory part of the school curriculum in the UK, and the Equality Act (2010) legally requires schools to make “reasonable adjustments” for pupils with disabilities to access all parts of school life, including PE.

However, many PE teachers may feel under-prepared or lack confidence in adapting lessons. There may also be systemic barriers such as insufficient adapted equipment, a lack of subject skilled support staff and limited time for planning. Without targeted CPD and practical tools to support school colleagues, young wheelchair users may perpetually remain excluded from the wide-ranging physical, social and wellbeing benefits that adaptive PE can deliver.

While the lack of resource, equipment and time for adapting PE must be acknowledged, we wanted to focus on practical support that will support school colleagues to be more confident to make adaptations and include young wheelchair users, and for young wheelchair users to work with schools to improve inclusive practices. Good communication between schools and young people and their families is key to promoting inclusion, understanding needs and managing expectations.

The following section includes the following child centred resources which have been approved by our Youth Board,

- Conversations: A 10-Point Plan for talking to young wheelchair users about PE
- Useful links & resources

A 10-Point Plan for talking to young wheelchair users about PE

1. Start with can do not can't do

Avoid assuming limitations. Instead, invite them to share what they like, want to try, or already do. They may have a sport, dance, or hobby that has not been considered.

“Tell me what kinds of movement or activities you enjoy — inside or outside of school.”

2. Focus on strengths, not limits

Reinforce a “what you can do” approach. Unless you ask you will not know where their strengths lie, maybe they have great upper body strength, balance, speed, or control — use this as a building block.

“What are you good at, or feel confident doing or trying?”

3. Offer choices, not tokens

Give real, meaningful options — do not offer tokenistic jobs like scorekeeping unless the young person chooses that. Break the session down into specific activities rather than focusing on the overarching topic e.g. ‘basketball’, there may be some activities as

part of the ‘topic’ that they can do or want to try. If a young wheelchair user identifies that the session or skills are not adaptable, discuss further options with them to ensure there is still value in the session e.g., they may complete a referee training course or carry out research to referee games.

“We will be doing basketball today, we will be dribbling, passing and shooting. Are you happy trying any of those activities?”

4. Talk about the environment

Be open about barriers like grass, uneven ground, or poorly placed equipment. It is okay to name them — and work together to fix them.

“Is there anything about the PE space that makes it harder to join in?”

5. Do not make it a medical interview

Only ask what is relevant to making PE safe and inclusive. Focus on preferences and support needs, not diagnoses or conditions.

Avoid questions like “can you walk at all?”



6. Check clothing & equipment needs

Wheelchair users may need different types of clothing to move around easily in PE or may prefer to use different equipment. They will also need additional time for changing before and after a PE session.

“What sort of kit do you prefer using and what will help you feel comfortable moving around?”

7. Ask about previous PE experiences

This can reveal negative and positive experiences — all of which help you shape a more supportive approach.

“What was PE like at your last school or last year?” / “Was there anything you liked or didn’t like?”

8. Get their ideas for adapting activities

Young people will often have brilliant and simple ideas for rule tweaks, team structures, or equipment swaps. Their ideas should be encouraged and included in discussions with the class to embrace the inclusive approach.

“How would you change a game like basketball to make it work better for you?”

9. Check in regularly, not just once

Inclusion is ongoing — needs and confidence shift over time. Keep communication open and honest.

“How did PE feel this week? Anything we should change for next time?”

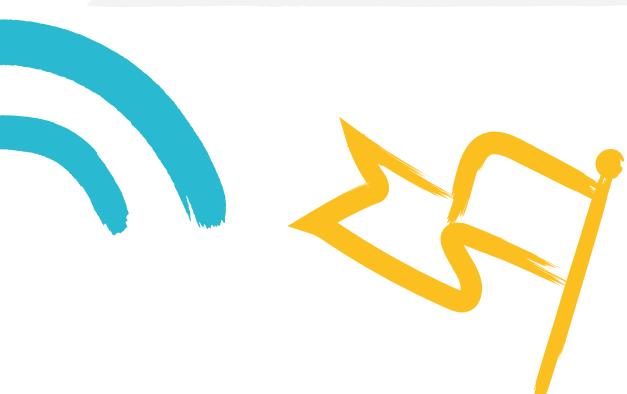
10. Wider inclusion

It is important to support young wheelchair user(s) within the wider school system. This includes extending inclusion to whole-school activities such as sports day. Other considerations may need discussion with school colleagues — for example, if a pupil needs longer to change, this may need to be communicated with other teachers if they arrive at the next lesson a little later. A helpful way to explore this with the pupil is to ask a simple, open question such as:

“Is there anything that would help you join in with things like sports day, or anything you’d like me to let your other teachers know?”

Closing comments

Every child’s needs and experiences are different, so avoid making assumptions or grouping pupils based on their disability. Open and honest communication is key, as each young person is the best guide to what works for them.



Useful Links & Resources

Approaches and things to think about in making PE more inclusive

Link	Overview
Levelling the playing field: the physical education subject report - GOV.UK	Subject report from Ofsted (2023) that includes recommendations for schools and wider policy.
Research review series: PE - GOV.UK	Ofsted's research review on quality PE curriculum, progression, pedagogy, and school systems (2022)
5 Ways to Make PE More Inclusive for All Students - PE Blog	PE Office's five ways to get started in making PE more inclusive.
10 Simple Ways to Make PE Lessons Inclusive for SEND Pupils	A practical guide from Future Stars Coaching to ensure your PE lessons are inclusive and accessible to all pupils, including those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

The STEP (Space, Task, Equipment, People) Model

Link	Overview
Inclusive PE Training - The Activity Inclusion Model - YouTube	The Activity Alliance's video explaining the Activity Inclusion Model
Inclusive PE Training - The STEP Tool - YouTube	The Activity Alliance's video explaining the STEP Tool
Differentiate PE Lessons with STEP Framework The PE Hub	The PE Hub's 'Change your PE Lessons in 4 STEPs' including a STEP planning sheet
Adapting Activities In PE: Highlights Physical Education Webinar FA Learning	England Football Learning's webinar exploring how we might differentiate PE lessons in order to support and challenge pupils within our delivery.
Using the S.T.E.P. principle to adapt activities Every Body Moves	Every Body Moves explores the STEP approach and includes top tips along the way

Activity and Adaptation Ideas

Link	Overview
Inclusive PE activity cards and other resources	Activity cards from the Activity Alliance to provide teachers and school staff with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to plan and deliver inclusive and accessible PE sessions.
Adapting Activities In PE: Highlights Physical Education Webinar FA Learning	England Football Learning's webinar exploring how we might differentiate PE lessons in order to support and challenge pupils within our delivery.
SEND PE Activities - Youth Sport Trust	Youth Sports Trust SEND PE Activities
Inclusive PE lessons - Action Duchenne	Action Duchenne have put together a guide for inclusive PE including ideas for adapting specific sports.
Inclusive PE Training Activity Alliance	Inclusive PE Training from the Activity Alliance. A two-hour eLearning module that guides you through the key principles of inclusion, offering interactive tasks and top tips to embed inclusive practice. There is a minimal cost associated with this resource.

Regional Links

Region	Link
England	Sport England
Scotland	Scottish Disability Sport
Wales	Disability Sport Wales
Northern Ireland	Disability Sport NI

Specific Sport Websites

Sport	Link
Paralympics GB	The ParalympicsGB website has a great overview of wheelchair and adaptable sports.
Athletics	BWAA - British Wheelchair Athletic Association
Basketball	Home - British Wheelchair Basketball
Boccia	Boccia UK
Dance	Wheelchair Dance - WheelPower
Cricket	Cricket - WheelPower
Football	The Wheelchair Football Association – Powerchair Football in England
Racing	British Wheelchair Racing Association
Rugby	Great Britain Wheelchair Rugby - Honesty, Integrity and Fair Play
Tennis	Play wheelchair tennis Guide to wheelchair tennis LTA
Volleyball	Volleyball England Play



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Whizz Kidz

info@whizz-kidz.org.uk

020 7233 6600



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