

Delivering Leadership Skills through the PE Curriculum

A Guide for PE Departments

Leadership Skills Foundation

Inspiring SPORTS LEADERS Since 1981

Expert insight. Clear guidance. Practical next steps.

The PE curriculum is changing.

With **leadership and life skills** set to have a much clearer place within PE, now is the time to understand what the proposals could mean for your department - and how you can prepare without reinventing everything you already do well.

This guide will help you understand the direction of travel for leadership and life skills, give you food for thought to review your existing provision, and take **practical steps** towards a PE curriculum in which every pupil has opportunities to develop skills for life through **leadership learning.**



"As a member of the national curriculum drafting team with afPE, I want to reassure you that much of what has been proposed around developing leadership and life skills through PE is already taking place in departments across the country.

Every day, teachers are creating meaningful experiences that build confidence, foster a sense of belonging, and help young people develop essential life skills through leadership opportunities within PE.

The new national curriculum is not about starting again or replacing effective practice.

Rather, it is about recognising, refining, and celebrating the outstanding work that so many of you are already doing.

Thank you for your continued commitment to your pupils and for championing the unique power of PE to make a lasting difference by equipping young people with the skills, confidence, and character they need for life beyond education."

Lucy Supperstone
Member of the AfPE PE curriculum drafting team and
Director of Innovation and Standards, Leadership Skills Foundation

Leadership is returning to the PE curriculum. But schools aren't starting from scratch.

Sports leadership has been here before.

Prior to the 2009–10 curriculum review, pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 had opportunities to experience sports leadership and officiating to develop the skills needed for both.

When the curriculum was subsequently rewritten, sports leadership was removed as an explicit element of PE.

But it didn't disappear from schools.

Thousands of pupils have continued to experience leadership through PE, school sport and wider opportunities – because schools recognise the value it can bring.

Now, leadership skills are set to have a much clearer place within the proposed new PE curriculum.

The important difference is **who gets to experience them.**





Rather than leadership being something offered primarily to select pupils, particular year groups or those already seen as potential leaders, the proposed direction creates opportunities for **every pupil to develop leadership skills through physical activity.**

That could mean a significant shift for some PE departments.

But it doesn't mean starting again.

The opportunity is to recognise what you're already doing well and then make leadership skills development **more intentional, visible, progressive and inclusive.**

And with full implementation not until September 2028, schools have something valuable on their side: **time**.

Time to understand. Time to review. Time to prepare. Time to build teachers' and the wider workforce's confidence gradually.

A greater emphasis on the development of life skills through PE

The proposed PE curriculum is structured around developing the four domains of PE running from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 4:

1. Physical domain
2. Cognitive domain
3. Social domain
4. Emotional domain.

Teaching leadership skills through PE develops the cognitive and social domains, building essential skills and life skills that are transferable across all future learning. **Within learning leadership skills through the PE curriculum, pupils will be required to learn and develop skills such as:**



COMMUNICATION: Explain, listen, encourage and give feedback.



TEAM WORK: Collaborate, contribute and support others.



PROBLEM SOLVING: Make decisions and adapt activities, tactics or approaches.



SELF MANAGEMENT: Take responsibility, organise and reflect.



SELF BELIEF: Develop confidence through trying, practising and achieving success.

And leadership doesn't have to mean standing at the front of a group with a whistle. Pupils might organise, officiate, support a peer, solve a problem, make a decision or take responsibility for an activity.

The leadership experiences through the curriculum can be varied. Pupils could lead through sport, dance, outdoor and adventure activities or in other physical activity settings.

The important shift

From	Towards
Leadership opportunities for selected pupils	Leadership skills development as part of every pupil's PE experience
Leadership as an additional opportunity	Leadership skills development embedded progressively through PE
Recognising confident or sporty pupils as leaders	Recognising that every pupil can develop the skills to lead themselves and others





Five things PE departments should start thinking about

PE curriculum planning

Leadership may need to become more intentionally planned across your PE curriculum.

What could development of leadership skills look like across every year?

This doesn't necessarily mean creating separate leadership units throughout the timetable. It could mean identifying where opportunities to communicate, organise, make decisions, officiate, solve problems and support others already exist – and planning how these develop over time.

Staff knowledge and confidence

Curriculum change works best when teachers understand not only what they are being asked to deliver, but why and how.

Departments have time to identify where staff already feel confident and where further professional learning could help.

Building that confidence gradually is likely to be considerably easier than trying to make wholesale changes immediately before implementation.

Leadership opportunities for pupils

One of the biggest changes is moving from leadership development for some pupils to leadership development for every pupil.

That means looking beyond the pupils who naturally volunteer, captain teams or excel physically.

- How will the quieter pupil practise communication?
- How will a less physically confident pupil experience responsibility?
- How will every pupil learn that leadership is something they can develop?

Resources and delivery

You may already have much more to work with than you think. Opportunities to teach leadership skills can be found throughout your delivery. An abundance of opportunities for pupils to lead and use leadership skills are already available including:

Team/house captains. Peer feedback. Student demonstrations. Officiating. Equipment responsibilities. Supporting younger pupils. Sports days. Warm-ups. House competitions.



The question isn't simply:

"What new leadership activities do we need?"

Start instead with:

"Where is leadership already happening – and how could we make the learning recognised more explicit?"



Building a leadership skills PE curriculum-ready foundation

You don't need to redesign your curriculum tomorrow.

Use these four stages to start preparing at a pace that works for your department.

1. Understand: Get familiar with the direction of travel

Start by making sure your department has a shared understanding of what the proposed changes could mean.

Don't try to solve everything yet.

The first step is simply to build a common understanding.

2. Review: Find the leadership that's already happening

Before adding anything new, map your existing provision.

Then ask the more important question:

Who gets these opportunities?

Are they available to every pupil?

Or do they tend to go to pupils who are already confident, physically competent, sporty or outgoing?

Your existing PE curriculum could contain dozens of opportunities to develop leadership skills. The first job is to find them.

3. Prepare: Make leadership more intentional, visible and inclusive

Once you've mapped what's already happening, identify the gaps. Sometimes you simply need to change the intention behind an existing one.

Instead of:

“You’ll play a three v. three game, the winner is the first team to five points - play!”

Try:

Giving a few minutes for the teams to plan before they play, and then some time after the game to debrief. Ask the teams to share what they found was successful and what they would do differently next time.

4. Deliver: Start small. Learn. Refine. Build.

You don't need to wait until 2028 to begin.

Try small changes within existing PE lessons and see what works.

Try giving pupils small decisions

Let pupils decide how to organise equipment, adapt a warm-up, change a team strategy or structure part of an activity.

Leadership can begin with responsibility for one small decision.

Finishing sessions with leadership reflections

Even 60 seconds can help.

Ask:

- Who showed leadership today?
- How did they demonstrate it?
- Which leadership skill did you practise?

Repeated regularly, small experiences like these can build pupils' understanding of leadership.

It's a set of skills they can learn, practice and improve.

From individual opportunities to a consistent pathway

Having a solid foundation in place is a good first step on the journey. Putting it into practice can happen gradually, allowing departments to ease into the changes.

The next step is to consider how those opportunities can become part of an **inclusive, scalable and consistent pathway** so that every pupil has the chance to develop leadership skills, and those skills build progressively over time.

The **Leadership Skills Foundation** can work with schools to develop a framework that builds on existing practice, while providing the **structure, resources** and **recognition** needed to make leadership skills development **consistent** across year groups and **accessible** to every pupil.

The aim isn't to replace what already works, but to help connect those experiences into a clearer pathway for developing skills for life.



You don’t have to have all the answers yet

The proposed PE curriculum represents an important change.

But for PE departments, it also represents an opportunity.

An opportunity to make the skills pupils already develop through PE more visible.

An opportunity to give more young people responsibility and agency.

And an opportunity to ensure leadership skills development isn't reserved for a selected few but becomes something **every pupil can experience.**

For more than four decades, the **Leadership Skills Foundation** has helped schools use PE, school sport and physical activity to give young people meaningful opportunities to practice and develop leadership skills.

We can help your department understand the changes, build staff confidence and develop an approach that works for your pupils.

Ready to prepare?

Join our 20-minute online event with Lucy, where we'll explore the return of leadership to the curriculum with some Q&As:

Date: Thursday, 3 December 2026
Time: 16:00

Book now

Or speak to our team about how to get started on building an approach that works for your setting:

Email template



> The Sports Leaders programmes have brought about substantial success for our learners, both immediately and in the long term.
>
> These successes are evident in various aspects of their lives, from overcoming personal barriers to achieving broader life outcomes.
>
> **Kayleigh, PE teacher, Cornwall**