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Dear Headteachers and PE Subject Leaders

**Swimming refusal and how to resolve the situation**

I am receiving a growing number of queries from schools about families how do not want their children to partake in school swimming sessions for a variety reasons.

Usually, situations can be resolved with the Headteacher inviting the parent in and providing a listening ear and explaining how the school swimming experience can be managed, but ultimately a parent cannot decide which parts of the PE curriculum they wish their child to participate in.

Swimming and water safety has been a statutory element of the national curriculum for physical education (PE) programme of study since 1994. In practice this means as with other national curriculum subjects a parent cannot choose to effectively cherry pick the curriculum and decide what subjects their child can take part in. If their child is a member of your school, they follow your curriculum and cannot dis-apply their child from school swimming.

Annual research by the national governing body for swimming Swim England shows that since 2012 only half of the children nationally aged between seven and 11 years old have met the required swimming target. This is a real concern as drowning is still the third most common cause of childhood deaths, and one of the aspects of school swimming focuses on safe self-rescue in different water-based situations. This is alongside stroke development and the 25-metre target which parents tend to know about.

As a response to this problem in October 2017 there was a new requirement for schools to publish swimming attainment levels. The new condition is part of the updated guidance from the Department for Education regarding PE and sport premium funding. Schools are now required to publish how many Year 6 pupils have met the national curriculum requirements relating to swimming and water safety.

My suggestion with parents who are reluctant to let them go because the children have water anxiety is that you meet with the parent and go through strategies to ensure their participation will be a positive experience and unpick the barriers. You can do work in school with the child about what to expect in school swimming, and plans you have to support them during the sessions. This seems to be a growing trend with parents, they either fall at one end of the spectrum or the other, i.e swimming club swimmers whose parents do not see the value in school swimming, or parents who may themselves have aquatic anxieties and feel they are protecting their child by removing them from the activity. Including them in the class activity is important for so many more reasons than just the 'schools must provide swimming instruction either at KS1 or 2' but about belonging, participating with their peers, alongside developing a life skill. My suggestion with the club swimming parents is to explain that water safety forms part of the course and the majority of school swimming teachers have or are involved in club swimming and so therefore are not going to 'undo' anything learnt in the club setting.

I am also working with Swim England to try and standardise school swimming across Lancashire to help make swimming a positive experience for all. We are creating lesson plans for teachers and teaching assistants who support children when school swimming. We are also offering CPD with Swim England for teachers and support staff at just £65 per person.

A final thought, if the pupils do not attend swimming, who manages their supervision and what do they do instead?

If you need any further support or guidance please do not hesitate to get in touch

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Many thanks

Jess Squires

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