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School Swimming Phase 1 Pilots in Scotland: Evaluation – East Lothian Pilot

Contents

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

sportscotland and Scottish Swimming supported four school swimming pilots during 2023. This included pilots in Dundee City, East Lothian, North Lanarkshire, and Scottish Borders. The pilots were to have a focus on increasing swimming skill and confidence for children and young people from the most deprived areas in Scotland. That is, a focus on closing the equalities in sport gap.

The School Swimming Phase 1 Pilots were part-funded by the Scottish Government, and the overall project was managed by **sport**scotland. Scottish Swimming supported implementation of the pilots at a local level.

EKOS Ltd and Integratis Consulting were commissioned to undertake an independent evaluation of the pilots to better understand how each pilot progressed and to evidence their impact. It should be noted that the pilots started prior to the evaluation getting underway. This report provides a summary of the East Lothian pilot and sits alongside separate documents including: a main report which provides an overview of evaluation findings at a programme level; a summary report for each of the other three pilots; and a standalone executive summary.

1.2 The East Lothian pilot

Each pilot adopted a different approach to delivery in their local authority area (**Appendix A**). This recognises that a one-size-fits-all approach to delivery may not be appropriate.

In East Lothian a targeted approach was undertaken. All Primary 5 children in East Lothian were assessed for swimming ability in the second week of the school term. Nineteen schools took part in the pilot and 216 children who were assessed as non-swimmers took part in the pilot and were provided with a block of 'quality' school swimming provision during the school day.

The remainder of this report outlines the evaluation findings and is based on:

- A review of background information and monitoring data provided by East Lothian Council and participating primary schools.
- Remote consultations undertaken with five individuals across two organisations involved in the pilot, including East Lothian Council and SwimWell Scotland Ltd.

2 Project management and delivery

2.1 Introduction

This section sets the scene for the East Lothian pilot. It provides an overview of the partners involved in the school swimming pilot and the underpinning rationale for the project.

2.2 Management and delivery arrangements

The school swimming pilot was managed by a small, dedicated team within East Lothian Council, including the Acting Active Business Unit (ABU) Team Leader and ABU Business Support Coordinator. Both played significant roles in the pilot, and school swimming is one of their day-to-day responsibilities.

The ABU Business Support Coordinator participated in the initial and early conversations with Scottish Swimming to discuss potential school swimming pilot projects. The ABU Team Leader managed the swim teachers who delivered the pilot and oversaw the collection of all relevant monitoring data.

Three part-time swim teachers, who are also Physical Education (PE) specialists, are employed by East Lothian Council and were solely responsible for the actual delivery of the school swimming lessons. One of these teachers took on the added responsibility of gathering the monitoring and evaluation data.

The school swimming lesson delivery model relied on several key components and partnerships, which were essential to its successful operation.

One such component was the transportation of children to and from swimming pools in East Lothian. This aspect was coordinated by the Council's internal transport team, which utilised council vehicles to transport children to and from swimming pools when necessary. This illustrates the integrated nature of the swimming lesson delivery model within the region. The Council also engages commercial transport providers as and when needed.

The local authority also has an established and valuable partnership with SwimWell Scotland Ltd, a commercial swimming lesson provider. This collaboration allows the Council to access additional swimming teacher resources when needed, ensuring the smooth operation and delivery of school swimming lessons. This strategic partnership plays a crucial role in maintaining the quality and consistency of the school swimming lessons, ultimately benefiting the participating children.

Another crucial partner in the pilot was Enjoy Leisure, the Council's arm's-length sports and leisure facilities operator. It is responsible for managing the Council's sports and leisure facilities, including swimming pools. The contract between the Council and Enjoy Leisure ensures that time is allocated in the swimming pools to accommodate the school swimming programme. Furthermore, and as described later, the contract provides for children who are still unable to swim after participating in the school swimming programme to join the community Learn-to-Swim programme offered by Enjoy Leisure, free of charge.

A critical element for the successful delivery of the pilot in East Lothian was the commitment from schools and teachers who view it as an integral part of their pupils' day-to-day activities. The consistency of lesson times and venues allocated to each school, remaining static year on year, also contributed to the pilot's success by minimising disruption to classroom activities.

2.3 Pilot project development and rationale

The East Lothian pilot builds upon the existing school swimming model in East Lothian and adopts a targeted approach - a focus on providing additional structured support to non-swimmers.

As part of this pilot, all Primary 5 pupils were assessed for swimming ability at the start of the new school term. The targeted approach identifies non-swimmers, who then receive a block of high-quality school swimming lessons during curricular time.

The pilot also incorporates several supplementary features, including that:

- Primary 5 children assessed as not requiring swimming lessons receive vouchers for eight free swimming sessions at local pools.
- Children assessed as needing school swimming lessons receive follow-on support on completion of their block of school swimming lessons:
  - Those who can now swim are provided with vouchers for eight free swimming sessions at local pools.
  - Those who are still unable to swim are offered the opportunity to continue their swimming lessons within the community Learn-to-Swim programme offered by Enjoy Leisure (eight vouchers).

The underlying rationale for the school swimming pilot is that swimming proficiency is considered a fundamental life skill, one that every child should possess. The experience of the East Lothian Council swim teachers is that the number of children that are non-swimmers is increasing. In addition, East Lothian is a coastal local authority where children are more exposed to open water.

Therefore, by incorporating school swimming lessons into the school curriculum, the pilot ensures that all children have the opportunity to learn about water safety and increase their swim ability, regardless of their families' financial background.

Before implementing a targeted approach to school swimming provision in East Lothian, all Primary 4 children used to receive a set of 10 school swimming lessons during the school year. The transition to a targeted delivery model was motivated by the necessity to achieve financial efficiencies across the whole service, including school swimming. A range of options were considered at that time, including 'do nothing' and options that explored changes to the existing model.

3 Implementation

3.1 Introduction

This section provides more detail on the implementation of the East Lothian school swimming pilot and on the primary schools and pupils who took part. Additional contextual information about East Lothian (for example, population, deprivation, urban and rural classification) can be found in **Appendix B**.

3.2 Primary schools involved in the pilot

Timing

The pilot commenced on 9th January 2023 and concluded on 6th March 2023, spanning a period of eight weeks. While the existing Learn-to-Swim programme typically runs with minimal interruptions, this particular block (that is, the pilot) encountered significant disruptions due to industrial strike action by teachers as well as the temporary closure of one swimming pool for maintenance work. This meant some lessons were cancelled.

Primary schools

A total of 19 primary schools in East Lothian participated in the pilot, **Table 3.1**.

Table 3.1: Participating primary schools

|		
Athelstaneford Primary School	Haddington Primary School	St Mary's RC Primary School
Campie Primary School	Innerwick Primary School	Stoneyhill Primary School
Cockenzie Primary School	Law Primary School	West Barns Primary School
Dirleton Primary School	Letham Mains Primary School	Windygoul Primary School
Dunbar Primary School	Longniddry Primary School	Yester Primary School
Elphinstone Primary School	Pinkie St Peter's Primary School	
Gullane Primary School	Preston Tower Primary School	

Source: East Lothian Council

Point to note include that:

- 216 Primary 5 pupils were assessed as non-swimmers and took part in the pilot.
- This represents 36% of the total Primary 5 school roll within the 19 schools (see **Figure 3.3**).

Urban and rural classification

The participating primary schools were located across East Lothian, including those based in more rural communities, **Figure 3.1**.

**Figure 3.1: Urban and rural classification of participating primary schools**
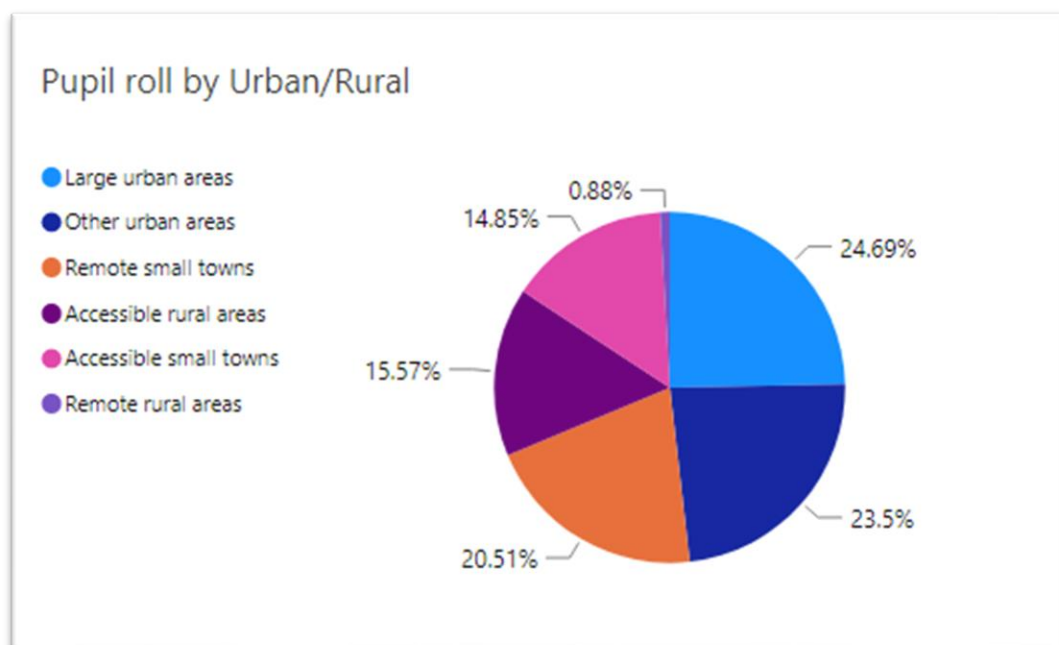
Source: Scottish Government, Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland (2021).

Average road distance from pool venue (miles)

Five swimming pools were used for the pilot, including North Berwick Sports Centre, Musselburgh Sports Centre, Mercat Gait Centre, Dunbar Leisure Pool and The Loch Centre.

The average distance travelled to swimming pool venues was 2.31 miles, with the furthest being 5.6 miles away, **Figure 3.2**. This can be attributed to the strategic distribution of swimming pool venues across East Lothian. The close proximity of pools to schools not only helps minimise transportation costs but also reduces the time pupils spend away from the school day.

Figure 3.2: Average road distance from pool venue (miles)
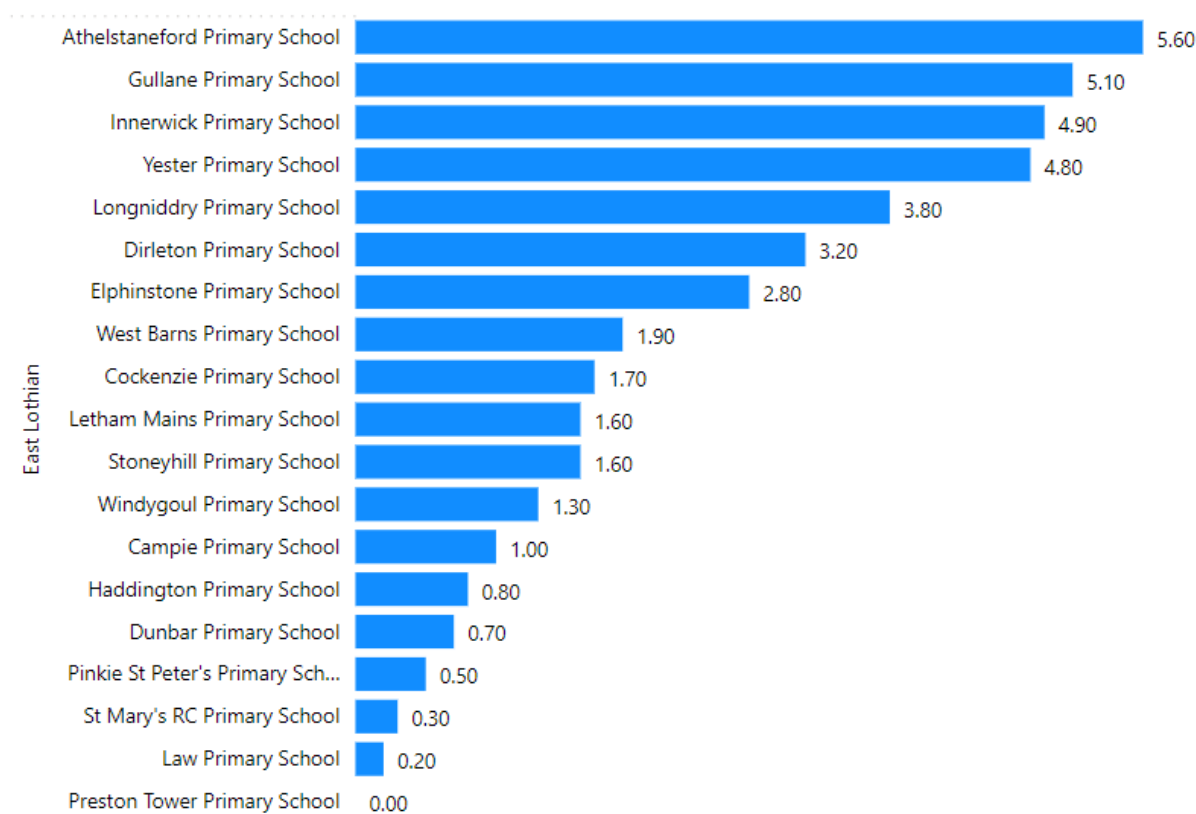
Deprivation

The pilots were to have a particular focus on increasing swimming skill and confidence for children and young people from the most deprived areas in Scotland.

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is the Scottish Government's standard approach to identify areas of multiple deprivation in Scotland. It is a relative measure of deprivation across 6,976 small areas (called data zones). The SIMD is formed from more than 30 indicators of deprivation which have been grouped together into seven domains - income, employment, health, education, housing, crime, access to services. The latest data was updated in June 2020.

Table 3.2 shows that:

- No primary school which took part in the pilot is located in SIMD Quintile 1 (20% most deprived data zones).
- Preston Tower Primary School has the most pupils who live in SIMD Quintile 1 (18%), this is followed by Windygoul Primary School (7%).
- Few other schools have many (or any) pupils on the school roll who live in the 20% most deprived data zones in Scotland.

While this provides an assessment of deprivation at a school and school pupil population level (all pupils – not just those pupils who took part in the pilot) - a fair assumption to make is that the East Lothian school swimming pilot has been less successful in engaging children who live in deprived areas.

However, the East Lothian pilot was based on swimming ability (that is, non-swimmers) rather than SIMD. A point to note, however, is that all Primary 5 children are assessed for swimming ability during the second week of the new school term (and only non-swimmers take part in the pilot). In this regard, children who live in SIMD Quintile 1 were involved, but were simply not assessed as non-swimmers. Primary 5 children assessed as not requiring school swimming also received vouchers for eight free swimming sessions at local pools.

An alternative measure of deprivation is the percentage of pupils registered for free school meals. Eligibility for free school meals in Scotland used to be based on receipt of benefits (for example, Universal Credit, Income Support). This is perhaps not the best measure of deprivation. Now in Scotland, children at local council schools can get free school meals during term-time in Primary 1 to Primary 5[1] (that is, their family's financial circumstances do not matter). The Scottish Government has made a further commitment to work with local authorities to extend universal provision to all pupils in Primary 6 and Primary 7 by 2024.

Free school meals is therefore a less meaningful measure of deprivation than the SIMD. The latest data is for 2021, and so some of the changes outlined above do not yet feature in the data. Points to note from **Table 3.2** for the East Lothian pilot are that:

- 100% of Primary 1 to Primary 4 pupils at all primary schools who took part in the pilot are registered for free school meals.
- The proportion of Primary 5 to Primary 7 pupils at participating schools registered for free school meals ranged from data suppressed (absolute numbers small) for a few schools to a high of 34% (Pinkie Primary School).

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[1] Since August 2021,free school lunches during term time was extended to all Primary 4 children, and to all Primary 5 children by January 2022.

Table 3.2: Primary schools and pupils – SIMD Quintile 1 and Free school meals

Primary school	Is the school located in SIMD Quintile 1	Proportion of pupils at school who live in SIMD Quintile 1	Proportion of Primary 1 – Primary 4 pupils receiving free school meals	Proportion of Primary 5 – Primary 7 pupils receiving free school meals
Athelstaneford Primary School	No	0%	100%	-
Campie Primary School	No	3%	100%	10%
Cockenzie Primary School	No	3%	100%	15%
Dirleton Primary School	No	0%	100%	-
Dunbar Primary School	No	-	100%	9%
Elphinstone Primary School	No	-	100%	20%
Gullane Primary School	No	0%	100%	9%
Haddington Primary School	No	0%	100%	11%
Innerwick Primary School	No	0%	100%	-
Law Primary School	No	0%	100%	4%
Letham Mains Primary School	No	0%	100%	19%
Longniddry Primary School	No	0%	100%	-
Pinkie Primary School	No	-	100%	34%
Preston Tower Primary School	No	18%	100%	15%
St Mary's Primary School	No	0%	100%	12%
Stoneyhil Primary School	No	3%	100%	-
West Barns Primary School	No	0%	100%	-
Windygoul Primary School	No	7%	100%	14%
Yester Primary School	No	0%	100%	8%

Source: The Scottish Government, Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland (2021) and The Scottish Government, Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.
Data for some schools is supressed (small numbers) to protect confidentiality.

3.3 Pupils involved in the pilot

Number of pupils

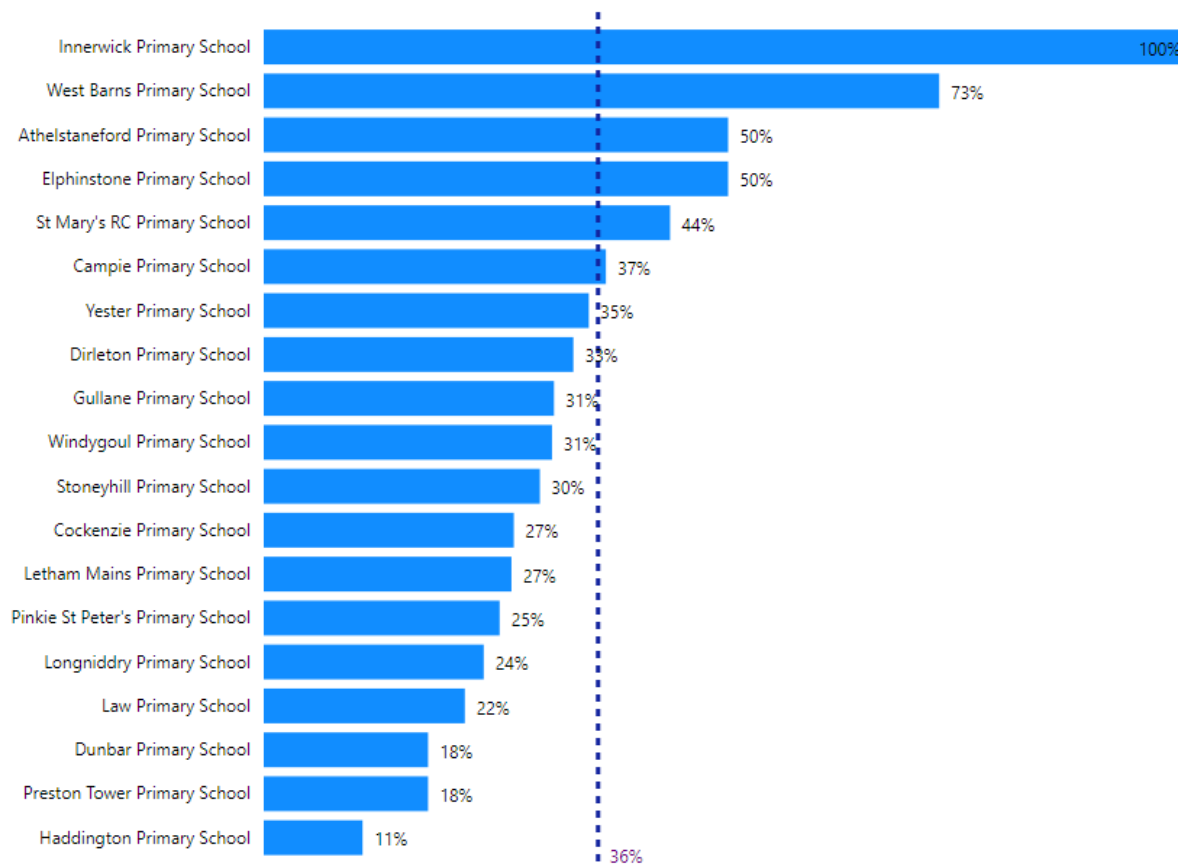A total of 216 pupils were involved in the East Lothian pilot. Points to note include that:

- The gender distribution of children was fairly balanced (51% female and 49% male).
- There was limited participation of children with disabilities in the pilot (two participants were registered as having a disability).

• 14% of children were registered for free school meals.

Participation in pilot as a percentage of Primary 5 school roll

The data illustrated in **Figure 3.3** shows the percentage of the Primary 5 children participating in the school swimming pilot for the 19 schools against the Primary 5 school roll.

Figure 3.3: Participants in the pilot as a percentage of primary school roll

School	Percentage
Innerwick Primary School	100%
West Barns Primary School	73%
Athelstaneford Primary School	50%
Elphinstone Primary School	50%
St Mary's RC Primary School	44%
Campie Primary School	37%
Yester Primary School	35%
Dirleton Primary School	35%
Gullane Primary School	31%
Windygoul Primary School	31%
Stoneyhill Primary School	30%
Cockenzie Primary School	27%
Letham Mains Primary School	27%
Pinkie St Peter's Primary School	25%
Longniddry Primary School	24%
Law Primary School	22%
Dunbar Primary School	18%
Preston Tower Primary School	18%
Haddington Primary School	11%

(Average line shown at 36%)

Source: Source: Scottish Government, Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland (2021).

Although the average participation rate is 36%, it would be interesting to investigate the factors which contribute to the varying levels of engagement in the pilot across the schools. Understanding these factors could help identify opportunities to increase participation and ensure more children acquire essential water safety and swimming skills while at primary school.

3.4 Lesson structure, content, and attendance

The school swimming pilot was delivered as a series of eight 40-minute sessions (that is an eight-week block).

As mentioned, before commencing the pilot, an initial assessment was conducted for all Primary 5 children across East Lothian at the beginning of each academic year (August) to identify those children with the greatest need for school swimming lessons.

This preliminary evaluation examined children's abilities in four aquatic skills:

- A deep water test - safely swim a minimum of 15 metres in deep water without stopping/putting feet down/holding on to the side.
- A float test - float on back for minimum of five seconds.
- A submerge test - face/head in water for minimum of five seconds.
- A swim across the pool test - swim (using any stroke) across the width of the pool in shallow water without stopping/putting feet down/holding on to the side.

Children who do not complete these assessments are then prioritised for the school swimming lessons.

3.5 Costs

The focus of the evaluation was not to compare the cost of each of the pilots (not least as each pilot adopted a different approach). Rather, the focus was to better understand the extent to which the pilots were successful in getting children and young people to improve their water safety and swimming skills.

For the East Lothian pilot, costs would in reality be incurred for the following broad cost headings:

- Project management team/administration support.
- Swim teacher costs.
- Pool hire.
- Lifeguard costs.
- Equipment.
- Transport.

In the current financial climate, tough decisions require to be made by local authorities and other public sector organisations about how they target and prioritise scarce financial resources. Any school swimming provision is better than no provision at all.

4   Experience and impact

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides our analysis of the monitoring data for the East Lothian pilot provided by East Lothian Council - the baseline and end of pilot data on technical ability for the primary school pupils who took part, and additional qualitative feedback.

Scottish Swimming provided each pilot with details of the information and data to be captured (and when), and a template for recording this.

4.2 Context

The East Lothian model for the school swimming pilot used a structured assessment process that enabled the local authority to effectively target school children in the greatest need of swimming lessons and to continuously assess the progress of participants in relation to the various aquatic skills.

The initial assessment was conducted for all Primary 5 school children to identify those who were unable to swim and required school swimming lessons. This assessment took place at local swimming pools.

Once selected for the school swimming pilot, participants took part in a week one assessment, which evaluated their individual competencies in four key areas: a deep water test, a float test, a submerge test, and a swim across the pool test. This assessment established a baseline that was used to monitor individual progress throughout the eight week block.

Upon completing the pilot, participants took part in a final assessment that covered the same four test areas. Those children who did not complete the different skills were offered the opportunity to attend the community Learn-to-Swim programme provided by Enjoy Leisure. This multi-layered assessment process ensures that children receive targeted support, enabling them to develop crucial swimming skills and to improve their overall aquatic abilities.

4.3 Overall performance

At the conclusion of the eight week pilot, participants underwent a comprehensive assessment to evaluate their progress. A large proportion of children (64%) did not successfully pass the swimming lessons and therefore could not be considered confident, safer, and competent swimmers at the end of the pilot, **Figure 4.1**.

On a more positive note, 36% of children did pass and this demonstrates a notable improvement in their water safety knowledge and swimming ability.

It is important to note that a portion of the participants were unable to attend the week eight assessment, either due to absence or pool closures. As such, base numbers in the charts in this section are less than the 216 children who took part. These external factors may have influenced the overall results. Future iterations of the pilot should consider contingency plans to overcome this issue – not only to ensure a complete data set, but so that children are informed of the progress they have made since their involvement.

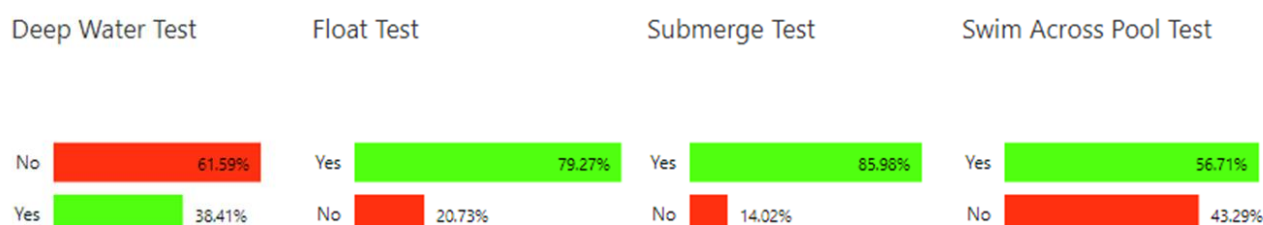**Figure 4.1: End of pilot – pass and fail rates**
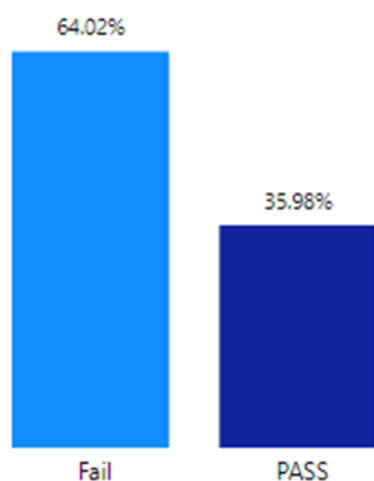
Source: East Lothian Pilot Programme Data
N=164

It is clear that participants faced varying levels of difficulty in completing the four skills tests. At the end of the pilot the following results were observed (see **Figure 4.2**):

- Deep water test: 62% of participants were unable to complete this successfully.
- Float test: 21% of participants were unable to complete this successfully.
- Submerge test: 14% of participants were unable to complete this successfully.
- Swim across the pool test: 43% of participants were unable to complete this successfully.

These findings suggest that certain skills may pose greater challenges for participants than others. There may be value in reassessing the pilot's lesson structure and allocate additional time spent on the more challenging tasks and skill sets.
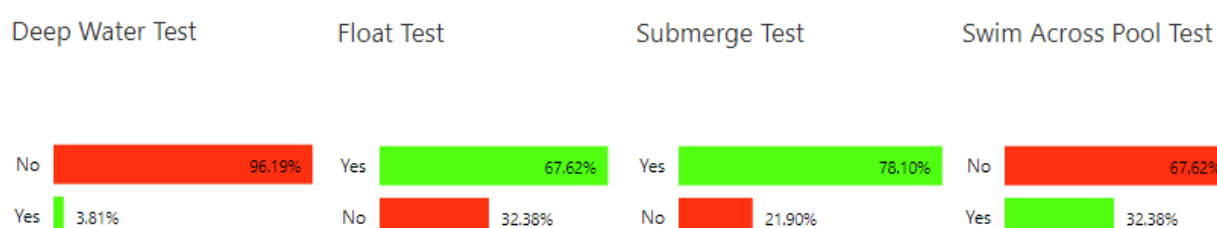
Figure 4.2: End of pilot - swimming skills assessment

Deep Water Test		Float Test		Submerge Test		Swim Across Pool Test	
No	61.59%	Yes	79.27%	Yes	85.98%	Yes	56.71%
Yes	38.41%	No	20.73%	No	14.02%	No	43.29%

Source: East Lothian Pilot Programme Data
N= 164

Looking at the monitoring data specifically for those participants who did not pass the school swimming lessons at the end of pilot, **Figure 4.4** shows that the deep water test posed the highest level of difficulty. Over 96% of participants who failed the pilot were unable to successfully complete this particular test. The swim across the pool test also presented a significant challenge, with nearly 68% of these participants unable to pass the test at the end of the pilot.

Figure 4.3: End of pilot - swimming skills assessment (children who failed assessment)

Deep Water Test		Float Test		Submerge Test		Swim Across Pool Test	
No	96.19%	Yes	67.62%	Yes	78.10%	No	67.62%
Yes	3.81%	No	32.38%	No	21.90%	Yes	32.38%

Source: East Lothian Pilot Programme Data
N= 105

As noted above, this suggests that additional time spent on the task (that is the more challenging skill sets) may be required for more children to be able to master and complete skills such as deep water test and the swim across the pool test by the end of the block.

When analysing the data for participants who did not pass the overall school swimming pilot, a notable disparity was observed between the percentage of males and females who failed - 55% of males failed compared to 45% of females.

In addition, there was a noticeable increase in the percentage of children who did not pass the school swimming pilot among those in receipt of free school meals compared to the baseline figure for the pilot as a whole (27% versus 20%).

These findings highlight the importance of understanding and addressing the unique challenges faced by different demographic groups. It may be necessary to investigate the underlying reasons behind the higher failure rates for males and those in receipt of free school meals, as well as to develop targeted strategies to better support their learning needs. This could include implementing additional support resources, modifying teaching methods, or offering supplementary lessons tailored to these specific groups.

4.4 Additional monitoring data

This section provides our analysis of additional monitoring data requested by Scottish Swimming.

Similar to the technical ability data presented in the sections above, the intention was for some additional monitoring data to be captured from the children at the baseline stage and then at the end of the pilot (that is, so that we could monitor any change). Children were asked to review some short statements about the school swimming provision and about swimming more generally.

We also provide more subjective analysis provided through the observed experiences of the swim teachers.

I feel confident in the water

Figure 4.4 illustrates the responses to the question "I feel confident in the water" at two different points in time: Week 1 and Week 8. The chart shows the number of children who felt confident (Yes), did not feel confident (No) or were unsure:

## Figure 4.4: I feel confident in the water
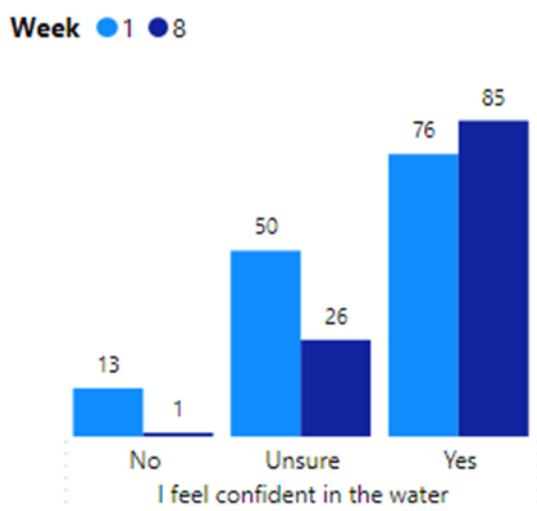
Week ●1 ●8

Source: East Lothian Pilot Programme Data
N= 139 in week 1 and 112 in week 8.

I feel safe in the water

Figure 4.5 illustrates the responses to the question "I feel safe in the water" at two different points in time: Week 1 and Week 8. The chart shows the number of children who felt safe (Yes), did not feel safe (No) or were unsure:

## Figure 4.5: I feel safe in the water
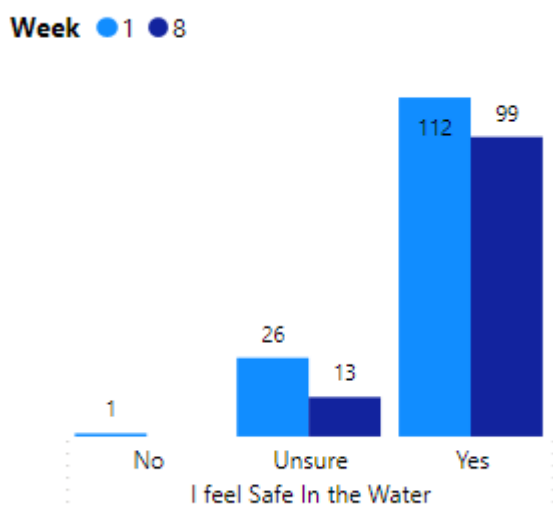
Week ●1 ●8

Source: East Lothian Pilot Programme Data
N= 138 in week 1 and 112 in week 8.

I would like to go swimming again

Figure 4.6 illustrates the responses to the question "I would like to go swimming again" at two different points in time: Week 1 and Week 8. The chart shows the number of children who would like to go swimming again (Yes), would not like to go swimming again (No) or were unsure:

Figure 4.6: I would like to go swimming again
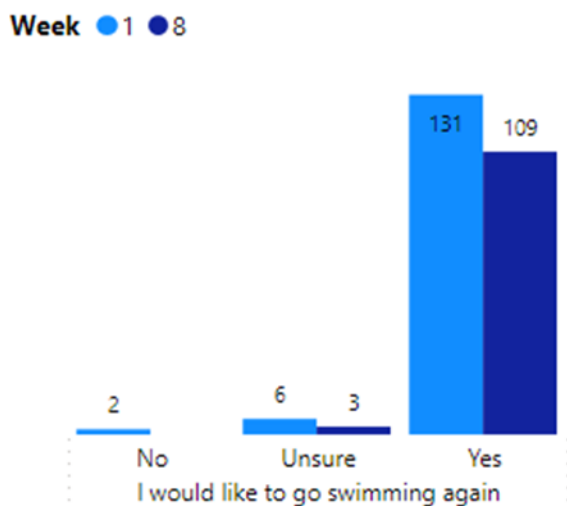
Source: East Lothian Pilot Programme Data
N= 137 in week 1 and 112 in week 8

I go swimming out with the school swimming lessons

Figure 4.7 illustrates the responses to the question "I go swimming out with the school swimming lessons" at two different points in time: Week 1 and Week 8. The chart shows the number of went swimming outside school lessons (Yes), did not go swimming outside school lessons (No) or were unsure:

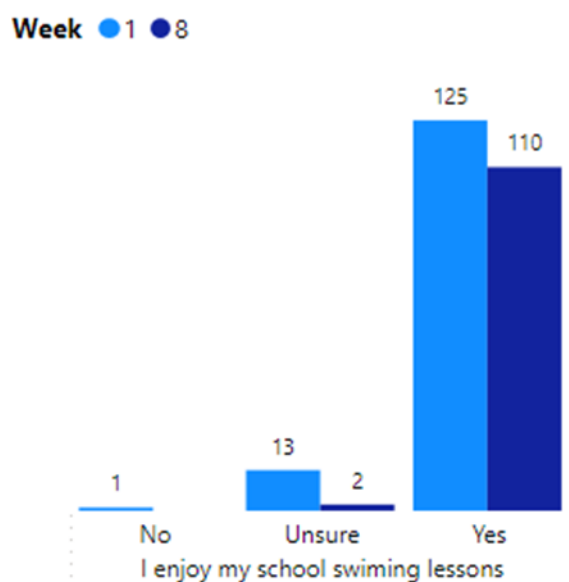**Figure 4.7: I go swimming out with the school swimming lessons**
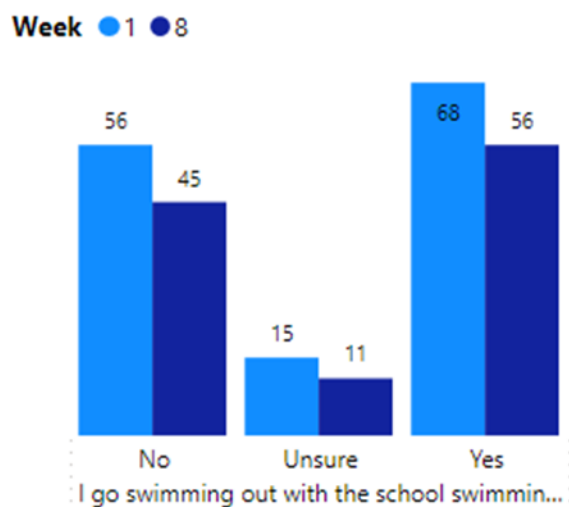
Week ●1 ●8

Source: East Lothian Pilot Programme Data
N= 139 in week 1 and 112 in week 8.

I enjoy my school swimming lessons

Figure 4.8 below represents the responses to the question "I enjoy my school swimming lessons" at two different points in time: Week 1 and Week 8. The chart demonstrates the number of children who enjoyed swimming lessons (Yes), did not enjoy swimming lessons (No) or were unsure:

Figure 4.8: I enjoy my school swimming lessons

Week ●1 ●8

Source: East Lothian Pilot Programme Data
N= 138 in week 1 and 112 in week 8.

In conclusion, the analysis of the five questions described above, shows a generally positive impact of the 8-week school swimming pilot on children's attitudes and behaviours towards swimming.

Across all five measures – confidence in the water, feelings of safety, desire to swim again, swimming outside of school lessons, and enjoyment of swimming lessons – there was a noticeable shift from "No" and "Unsure" responses to "Yes" responses from week 1 to week 8:

- The pilot seems to have been particularly successful in increasing students' confidence in the water, with the percentage rising from 54.68% to 75.89%.
- There was an increase in the proportion of children feeling safe in the water, rising from 80.58% to 88.39%, despite a decrease in the total number of responses.
- The desire to continue swimming increased slightly, with "Yes" responses rising from 94.24% to 97.32%.
- While there was a small decrease in the number of children who swim outside of the school lessons, the proportion doing so remained fairly steady, suggesting that the pilot did not deter children from swimming outside of school.
- Most encouragingly, enjoyment of swimming lessons saw a significant increase, with "Yes" responses rising from 89.93% to 98.21%.

Overall, the pilot appears to have had a positive influence on children's confidence, safety, and enjoyment of swimming, and it seems to have encouraged a greater desire to continue swimming. However, the slight decrease in swimming outside of school lessons may warrant further investigation to understand if there are any barriers preventing children from doing so.

4.5 Wider outcomes

Feedback from the swimming teachers emphasised the pilot's wider benefits for children from an educational and personal development perspective. For instance, the swimming lessons are said to complement and reinforce concepts taught in broader curriculum subjects, particularly in the field of science. This interdisciplinary connection enriches children' understanding of the practical applications of their academic knowledge.

Furthermore, the pilot offers valuable life skills for children, such as utilising public transportation to access services and navigating local communities – the children gain a certain level of independence. Another important aspect is the development of socialisation skills and the fostering of appropriate behaviours in public places and spaces. By participating in the school swimming pilot, children learn to interact respectfully and effectively with their peers, instructors, and other members of the community.

In summary, the East Lothian school swimming pilot not only equips children with essential water safety knowledge and swimming skills but also contributes to their holistic growth and development by fostering connections to other academic subjects, enhancing life skills, and promoting social competence.

4.6 Areas for improvement

In order to enhance the overall effectiveness of the pilot, it is essential to consider not only the previously mentioned improvement opportunities but also explore additional avenues for optimisation. One such area involves tracking the progress of participants who do not successfully complete the pilot and subsequently join the community Learn-to-Swim programme.

Currently, there is no established system for monitoring the uptake or outcomes of children as they transition from the school-based programme to the community programme.

Implementing a tracking mechanism could provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the community Learn-to-Swim programme in addressing the learning needs of those who did not succeed in the initial school-based lessons.

By collecting and analysing data on the participants' progress and achievements in the community programme, it will be possible to identify areas for further improvement in both the school and community-based programmes. These insights could lead to the development of targeted strategies, additional support resources, or modified teaching methods that better cater to the needs of the participants who require additional assistance.

Ultimately, investing in a comprehensive follow-up system and integrating the findings from the tracking data into the continuous improvement efforts of the swimming programme will help ensure that all participants have the opportunity to develop essential swimming skills and contribute to the overall success of the initiative.

5   Strengths, challenges, and lessons learned

5.1 Introduction

This section touches on the main strengths of the East Lothian targeted approach to school swimming, as well as challenges encountered, and lessons learned.

5.2 Strengths

The reported strengths of the East Lothian approach are as follows:

- An efficient and well-structured team in place to manage and deliver a comprehensive and targeted school swimming programme, including a well-structured assessment process.
- Dedicated swimming teacher resources focussed on school swimming delivery.
- Effective partnership with a private sector company that can provide additional swim teacher capacity when required.
- School swimming transport is coordinated by the Council's internal transport team, which utilises Council vehicles to transport children to and from swimming pools when necessary. This illustrates the integrated nature of the swimming lesson delivery model.
- Effective partnership in place with the Sports and Leisure Trust who operate pools where school lessons are delivered. The leisure management contract between the Council and Enjoy Leisure reflects the importance of, and makes specific reference to, provision of pool time to accommodate school swimming.
- The commitment from schools and teachers who view school swimming as an integral part of their pupils' day-to-day activities.
- The school swimming model has several supplementary features which strengthen its effectiveness and provides increased opportunities for children to swim over and above their block of school swimming, including:

  o Primary 5 children assessed as not requiring school swimming receive vouchers for eight free swimming sessions at local pools.
  o Children assessed as needing school swimming receive follow-on support on completion of their block of school swimming:
    o Those who can now swim are provided with vouchers for eight free swimming sessions at local pools.

  - Those who are still unable to swim are offered the opportunity to continue their swimming lessons within the community Learn-to-Swim programme offered by Enjoy Leisure (free of charge).

- The distribution and location of swimming pools across East Lothian ensures that travel distances and therefore time away from class and travel costs are minimised.

5.3 Challenges

The main challenges were identified as follows:

- School industrial action along with pool venue closures had a detrimental effect on the delivery of the pilot, leading to some lessons being cancelled, and on the quality and completeness of monitoring and evaluation data.
- Deep water test difficulty: a large proportion of children who failed at the end of the pilot struggled with the deep water test. A more targeted approach may be needed.
- Differences in participation rates across schools could indicate uneven access or varying levels of awareness about the school swimming provision. Ensuring equal opportunity for all children to participate in swimming lessons is important.
- Evaluation and data collection: the collection, analysis, and utilisation of accurate data is crucial for evaluating the pilot's effectiveness and identifying areas for improvement. Constrained resources may have been a factor.
- Costs and resource allocation: financial constraints, such as swimming teacher salaries and other operational expenses, presented challenges in delivering the pilot efficiently.
- Continuity and follow-up: there is currently no follow-up system in place to track children who do not successfully complete the school swimming pilot and whether they participate in the community Learn-to-Swim programme.
- The shift to a targeted model of provision in East Lothian was driven by the need to make financial efficiencies. This may result in some children missing out on the opportunity to learn essential swimming skills. Balancing targeted support with broader access is a challenge the programme should address.
- Primary schools with large Primary 5 school rolls can find participation challenging when only some children take part in the swimming lessons (that is, non swimmers) while others remain at school. Teaching staff need to be found for both groups of children. This is less of an issue where a whole class attends school swim lessons (universal approach).
- The administration effort (that is, time) required for organising, scheduling and recording information can be onerous and time consuming - school registers, class registers and capturing attainment information, etc.

- Demand for school swimming is likely to increase as the number of children who can swim declines, and demand grows in line with population growth and new primary schools being developed.
- Some children who are prioritised for school swimming choose not to attend. The reasons for this varies, but in some cases, it is felt that there may be a stigma associated with being positively targeted for additional support and children appearing to be different in some way to their peers.
- For pupils with additional support needs (ASN) the eight-week programme is felt to be an insufficient duration and schools often contact the Council team to request additional provision as there is a perception that ASN pupils benefit greatly from swimming and aquatic activities. Any school swimming provision should, however, be actively promoted and encouraged, as this may be the only opportunity some children have to learn these vital lifesaving skills and develop water safety knowledge and awareness

5.4 Lessons Learned

The main lessons learned can be described as follows:

- Flexibility and adaptability are crucial in the face of unforeseen challenges, such as school strikes and pool closures, which can significantly impact programme delivery and the quality of monitoring data.
- While any school swimming provision should be actively encouraged, the pilot team feel that the current eight-week programme may not be sufficient for all children to develop the necessary aquatic skills to stay safe in water.
- Identifying specific areas where children struggle, such as the deep water test, can inform targeted interventions to enhance skills development.
- Ensuring equal access and participation across all schools is essential for providing a fair opportunity for every student to benefit from the programme.
- A meticulous approach to data collection, analysis, and evaluation is necessary for assessing the programme's effectiveness and identifying areas for improvement.
- Balancing targeted support with broader access is an ongoing challenge, requiring careful consideration of resource allocation and programme design.
- Efficient administration and organisation are critical for managing the programme effectively, especially with increasing demand and growing student populations.
- Addressing potential barriers to participation, such as stigma or concerns around additional support can promote a more inclusive and welcoming environment for all children.

- Recognising and accommodating the unique needs of children with ASN is vital, as they may require extended or tailored swimming instruction.
- Continuity and follow-up with children who do not successfully complete the pilot is essential for ensuring their continued learning and development in swimming skills.

6   Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This section presents some suggested recommendations for consideration by **sport**scotland, Scottish Swimming, and partners.

6.2 Recommendations

Our suggested recommendations are as follows:

- Consider extending the duration or intensity of the school swimming programme to better address children's skills development needs, particularly in areas like deep water safety.
- Implement targeted interventions to address specific skill gaps, such as additional deep water training sessions, to improve overall success/pass rates.
- Continue to raise awareness of the physical and wider benefits of being able to swim and going swimming out with the school day to reinforce learning, and to address the barriers that may prevent some children from participation. The pilots confirm that school swimming provision on its own is not likely to make most children confident, safe, and competent swimmers.
- Enhance communication and outreach efforts to promote equal access and awareness of the pilot across all schools, ensuring every student has an opportunity to participate.
- Allocate additional resources for data collection, analysis, and evaluation to accurately assess the pilot's effectiveness and inform evidence-based decision-making.
- Re-evaluate the balance between targeted support and universal access, considering whether a hybrid model could provide essential swimming skills to a broader range of children while maintaining financial efficiency.
- Streamline administrative tasks, such as scheduling and record-keeping, through the use of digital tools or software to reduce the workload for school swimming staff.
- Develop a follow-up system to track children who do not successfully complete the school swimming pilot and encourage their participation in community Learn-to-Swim programmes.
- Address potential barriers to participation by promoting a positive and inclusive programme environment, and offering additional support to children who may be hesitant to join due to stigma or concerns.

- Provide tailored swimming instruction and additional support for children with ASN, ensuring their unique needs are met and they have ample opportunity to benefit from the programme.
- Establish contingency plans to minimise disruptions to the programme due to unforeseen challenges such as school strikes or pool closures, ensuring continuity and consistency in delivery.

Appendix A: The other three pilots

Universal approach

North Lanarkshire - a cluster of primary schools located in deprived areas were invited to take part in the pilot in North Lanarkshire. A whole class or year group took part and were provided with a block of 'quality' swimming lesson provision during the school day. Five schools took part and the year groups ranged from Primary 5 to Primary 7.

Holistic approach

Dundee – the approach adopted in Dundee was a combination of the universal and targeted approaches and sought to develop a holistic and sustainable model of delivery. The collaborative approach involved a range of stakeholders to support delivery, including Active Schools. One cluster primary school took part in the pilot with all Primary 4 children provided with a block of 'quality' swimming lesson provision during the school day at a secondary school with its own pool (Baldragon Academy). Delivery was supported by some senior pupils of Baldragon Academy who undertook training to achieve the Scottish Swimming Teacher Qualification (SSTQ). This was with a view to providing opportunities for skills development and developing a pipeline for the future workforce.

Rural approach

Scottish Borders - as the number of children in each primary class or year group may be small in rural primary schools, a whole school approach was (in the main) adopted in the Scottish Borders pilot. Three schools took part - two schools involved all pupils (Primary 1 - Primary 7), and a larger school involved its Primary 4 class. The delivery model was originally designed to support effective school swimming within a rural setting and the challenges this presents. A more intense delivery model was anticipated – that is, increased time on task per visit and a reduced number of visits to maximise the time spent at the venue and offset the cost of travel (for example, time and money).

Appendix B: About East Lothian

Population

East Lothian has a population of circa 109,500, of which around 18,500 are under 15 years old (17% of the region's total population). The age profile of East Lothian is broadly in line with the national average.

Table B.1: Population by age group (2021)

Age group	East Lothian		Scotland	
	Population	% of total population	Population	% of total population
0-14	18,558	17%	853,730	16%
15-24	10,788	10%	615,608	11%
25-34	12,279	11%	754,051	14%
35-44	13,326	12%	692,525	13%
45-54	15,455	14%	728,089	13%
55-64	16,309	15%	762,036	14%
65+	22,865	21%	1,073,861	20%
Total	**109,580**	**100%**	**5,479,900**	**100%**

Source: NOMIS.

Looking at population projections (among other things, for example local housing developments, developments within the school estate), are important to better understand how an area is expected to change in the medium to longer-term – as well as to understand implications for the demand for services, including sport and leisure.

In terms of how demographics are forecast to change within East Lothian over the next decade, points to note from **Table B.2** include that:

- The population of East Lothian is forecast to grow 6% between 2023 and 2033.
- While the child (0-15 years) population is forecast to decline by 3% over the same period, it is not the age group with the largest forecast decline.
- Interestingly, East Lothian is forecast to have a growing working age population, in particular those aged between 35 and 54 years, as well as a growing older population (65+).

Table B.2: East Lothian - population forecast (2022-2033)

Age group	2023	2033	Population change (2023-2033)	Population change (2023-2033) (%)
0-14	18,164	17,608	-556	-3%
15-24	11,192	12,092	900	8%
25-34	12,175	11,150	-1,025	-8%
35-44	13,598	15,785	2,187	16%
45-54	14,560	15,307	747	5%
55-64	16,338	14,659	-1,679	-10%
65+	23,715	30,012	6,297	27%
Total	**109,742**	**116,613**	**6,871**	**6%**

Source: The Scottish Government, Population Projections (2018-based).

Urban and rural

The [Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification](#) can be used to classify geographies as urban, rural, and remote. The classification for East Lothian and Scotland is outlined in **Table B.3**. Much of East Lothian is an urban geography, but it also has an accessible rural geography which is higher than the national average.

Table B.3: Percentage of population in each 6-fold Urban Rural category (2020)

Categorisation	East Lothian	Scotland
Large Urban	22.7%	37.8%
Other Urban	39.9%	33.9%
Accessible Small Towns	12.2%	8.6%
Remote Small Towns	0%	2.6%
Accessible Rural	25.2%	11.6%
Remote Rural	0%	5.5%

Source: The Scottish Government, Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification.

Deprivation

The pilots were to have a particular focus on increasing swimming skill and confidence for children and young people from the most deprived areas in Scotland. We consider this in more detail later, however, the following points helps to set the scene at an East Lothian level.

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is the Scottish Government's standard approach to identify areas of multiple deprivation in Scotland. It is a relative measure of deprivation across 6,976 small areas (called data zones).

The SIMD is formed from more than 30 indicators of deprivation which have been grouped together into seven domains - income, employment, health, education, housing, crime, access to services. The latest data was updated in June 2020.

Key points to note for East Lothian include that:

- There are 132 data zones in the region.
- Few data zones (eight) in East Lothian are within the most deprived 20% data zones in Scotland .
- The most deprived data zones in East Lothian are all in the west of the region (for example, in Tranent, Wallyford and Macmerry, Preston Seton Gosford, and Musselburgh).
- 5.2% of East Lothian's population reside in the most deprived SIMD quintile.
- 20 data zones are in the 20% most educationally deprived.
- 30 data zones are in the 20% most access deprived.