



School Swimming Phase 1 Pilots in Scotland: Evaluation

Executive summary for
sportscotland and Scottish Swimming
| 14th September 2023

Direct enquiries regarding this report should be submitted to:

Nicola Graham, Principal Consultant, EKOS

Email: nicola.graham@ekos.co.uk

EKOS Limited
St. George's Studios
93-97 St. George's Road
Glasgow
G3 6JA
Reg 145099

www.ekos-consultants.co.uk

Neil Ross, Director, Integratis Consulting

Email: neil@integratisconsulting.com



Introduction

sportscotland and Scottish Swimming supported four School Swimming Pilots during 2023. These took place in Dundee, East Lothian, North Lanarkshire, and Scottish Borders. The pilots were to have a focus on closing the equalities in sport gap. The School Swimming 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. This executive summary sits alongside a main report and a summary report for each pilot.

Context

School swimming provision is not a statutory requirement in Scotland (unlike in England) – as such provision varies from one local authority area to another. While the benefits of being able to swim (and swimming as a physical activity) are well understood, not all local authorities in Scotland provide school swimming. Scottish Swimming is committed to providing improved opportunities and access for children and young people to learn to swim, and to become confident, safer, and competent swimmers.

Scottish Swimming and partners have developed a draft school swimming framework to support delivery of effective school swimming provision at a local level. The draft framework is not meant to be prescriptive - rather it provides a set of guiding principles. This recognises that a one-size-fits-all approach to delivery may not be appropriate for local authority areas or schools. Scottish Swimming can support delivery partners at a local level to plan, organise, and prioritise how they are going to deliver school swimming. It is, however, important to acknowledge the recent and current challenging financial and operating environment in the public sector, as this may have implications for the future planning and delivery of school swimming in Scotland.

The pilots

Each pilot adopted a different approach to delivery in their local authority area.

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' school swimming provision during the school day. Five schools took part and the year groups ranged from Primary 5 to Primary 7.

Targeted approach

East Lothian - 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.

Holistic approach

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

Schools are a key partner in the pilots. The number of schools and pupils involved varied across the pilots, and the totals are outlined in **Figure 1**. More information about each pilot is presented in **Table 1**, over. This again highlights that a one-size-fits-all approach may not be appropriate, and that school swimming provision needs to be tailored to an area's needs and circumstances.

Figure 1: Schools and pupils involved in the pilots



Source: Pilot projects monitoring data.

Table 1: The pilots

	Dundee	East Lothian	North Lanarkshire	Scottish Borders
Approach	Holistic	Targeted	Universal	Rural
Main partner	Baldrigon Academy	East Lothian Council	North Lanarkshire Council	Live Borders
Other partners	Leisure and Culture Dundee Active Schools Scottish Swimming Primary school	Enjoy Leisure SwimWell Scotland Ltd Primary schools	Primary schools	Scottish Borders Council Primary schools
Number of weekly sessions	Between 8 and 12 weeks planned 12 weeks actual	8 weeks	12 weeks	6 weeks planned Actual - two schools (5 weeks and one school 4 weeks)
Wet-side session	30 mins	40 mins	45 mins	30 mins
Dry-side activities	-	-	45 mins	15 min (two schools)
Number of primary schools involved in pilot	1	19	5	3
Primary year group(s)	P4	P5	P5-P7	Whole school (2 schools), and P4 (one school)
Number of pupils involved	30	1,238 children assessed of which 216 assessed as non-swimmers	134	86
Number of pools used	1	5	4	2
Number of swim teachers involved	2	3	7	8

Source: Pilot lead partners.

Note: East Lothian - this is for a block of schools. More children were assessed, and more non-swimmers were supported with school swimming as part of wider approach.

A focus on deprivation

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. Research, including that commissioned by **sportscotland** and the Scottish Government, continues to show that those who live in the 20% most deprived areas are significantly less likely to participate in physical activity than those who live in the least deprived areas.

We adopted a 'best fit' approach and used published datasets to provide an assessment of deprivation at a school and school pupil population level. That is, all pupils - not just those pupils who took part. The main finding is that targeting of primary schools in the most deprived data zones in Scotland was partially achieved by the pilots:

- Almost all the primary schools involved in the North Lanarkshire pilot were in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) Quintile 1 - the 20% most deprived data zones in Scotland. North Lanarkshire Council adopted a targeted approach to select schools in the most deprived areas as this was an aim of the Scottish Government funding.
- Across the other three pilots, no schools were in the 20% most deprived data zones. That being said, Scottish Borders has a relatively high level of "geographic access to services" deprivation, and the schools involved in the Dundee pilot are located in Quintile 2. The East Lothian pilot was based on swimming ability (that is, non-swimmers) rather than SIMD.

This does not mean that some pupils at the schools (and by association children and young people who took part in the pilots) do not live in SIMD Quintile 1 areas. A review of existing data sets shows that the extent to which the pilots likely supported children and young people who live in SIMD Quintile 1 was also partially achieved. Points to note include that:

- The Dundee pilot, followed by the North Lanarkshire pilot, were more targeted based on this measure than the other pilots.
- The Scottish Borders and East Lothian pilots were less likely to reach children and young people who live in a 20% most deprived data zone (for the reasons outlined above).
- A point to note for East Lothian is that all Primary 5 children are assessed on swimming ability through a swimming assessment based on the council's own criteria. This represents a considerable number of children assessed overall. In the case of this pilot, a total of 1,238 Primary 5 children were assessed and 216 were identified as non-swimmers at the start. Children who live in SIMD Quintile 1 were involved in the pilot 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.

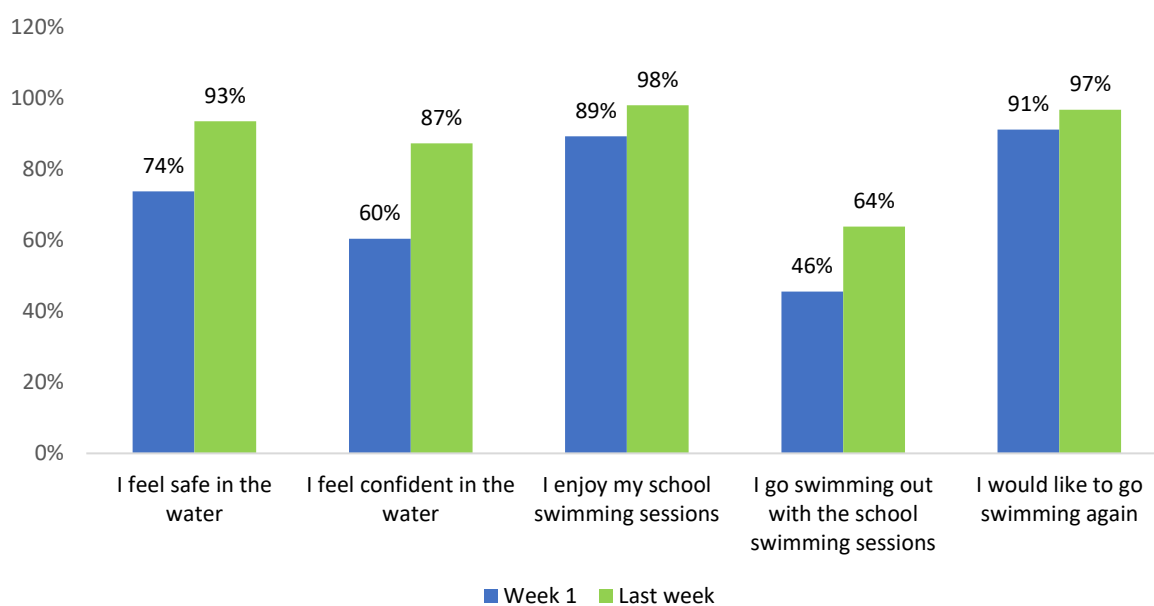
Experience and impact

It was not possible to provide an aggregated assessment of the impact on the participants for the four pilots as a whole. Some high level findings and observations include that:

- The findings on progression in swimming ability and water confidence and safety are encouraging. However, they do need to be considered in the context of small sample sizes and partial monitoring data in some cases.
- A relatively small proportion of children could be considered confident, safer, and competent swimmers by the end of the pilot. The exception being the Scottish Borders pilot, but data may be skewed (no data was provided for two of the three schools).
- It is important to note that a relatively large proportion of children who participated start from a low level of swimming ability. The exception again being the Scottish Borders pilot.
- Some swimming outcomes (or skills) are more difficult for children to master than others and possibly require additional time on task. For example, the deep water test and distance-related skills.

The pilots have also had a positive impact on children’s feeling towards swimming, most notably feelings of safety and confidence in the water, **Figure 2**. These are key aims of the pilots.

Figure 2: Childrens’ views on the school swimming provision and going swimming - East Lothian and North Lanarkshire pilots (selected - those reporting “Yes”)



Sources: EKOS analysis of North Lanarkshire Council and East Lothian Council monitoring data. N=270 (131 - North Lanarkshire - three responses were excluded as a few children did not provide an end of pilot assessment; and 139 - East Lothian).

The tables on the following pages summarise some of the main aspects that worked well with each pilot, challenges, and lessons learned. The summary report for each pilot contains more information, including points which are relevant to all four pilot projects.

Table 2: What worked well with the pilots

Dundee	East Lothian	North Lanarkshire	Scottish Borders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnership approach, including Active Schools and strengthening connections between a cluster primary and secondary school. Strong focus on deprivation. No transport cost barriers to participation. The primary school is in close proximity to the secondary school pool. A strong focus on employability of young people. In-built flexibility to extend delivery to address challenges related to industrial action within schools and pool closures, and to provide senior pupils with more time to support delivery and complete their qualification. Leisure and Culture Dundee has an Aquatic Mentor to deliver future SSTQ courses. Primary School teacher undertook an exercise with children during the school day to capture wider qualitative feedback. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Primary 5 children are assessed for swimming ability – non-swimmers then receive school swimming provision. Dedicated swimming teacher resources focussed on school swimming delivery. Effective partnership with a private sector company that provides additional swim teacher capacity when required. School swimming transport is coordinated by the Council's transport dept. Effective partnership and contract in place with Sports and Leisure Trust who operate pools where school lessons are delivered. Supplementary features: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> P5 children assessed as not requiring school swimming receive eight free swimming sessions at local pools. Children assessed as non-swimmers also receive follow-on support on completion of their block of school swimming. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong focus on deprivation. Inclusion of dry-side activities with a purpose. 12-week block includes 45-minutes poolside and 45-minutes dry-side PE activity. Attractive to schools as longer session contributes towards requirement to deliver at least two hours of PE for all pupils. Some schools share the cost of transport where they are in close proximity. In-built flexibility to extend delivery to address challenges related to industrial action within schools and pool closures. The sessions are (in some cases) delivered to two schools at a time to maximise swim teacher and participant ratios, and to maximise the use of time and spaces available. Each child receives some formal recognition of participation and achievement (that is, a school swimming report card). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An established framework for school swimming that is aligned to the curriculum for excellence. The sessions are (in some cases) delivered to two schools at a time to maximise swim teacher and participant ratios, and to maximise the use of time and spaces available. There are good relationships in place with schools that enables those schools who wish to participate in school swimming to do so easily and with minimum disruption. The inclusion of dry-side activities with a purpose. A focus on addressing geographic access to services deprivation.

Table 3: Challenges faced by the pilots

Dundee	East Lothian	North Lanarkshire	Scottish Borders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the start of the pilot there was a lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities of the management and delivery partners. Not all individuals were involved at the outset. • There could have been greater clarity on what was expected from the Baldragon Academy school pupils' involvement at the outset. • The majority of Leisure and Culture Dundee swim teachers are at university and availability to be involved in the pilot was constrained. • Pool dimension and depth of the Baldragon Academy swimming pool created some problems for how the sessions were meant to run and the number of children that could be supported at any one time. • The Baldragon Academy school pupils involved in supporting delivery did not all have good levels of swim ability. • The SSTQ course clashed with the school exam timetable and study time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industrial action and pool closures impacted the pilot's delivery and data quality. • The high failure rate in deep water tests indicates a need for targeted skill development to improve overall success rates. • Varying participation rates across schools suggest the need for enhanced awareness and equitable access to ensure all children have the opportunity to participate. • Inadequate resources for data collection and analysis compromised the pilot's evaluation. Future iterations should allocate sufficient resources for robust data management and analytics. • Financial constraints, such as teacher and operational costs, require a more efficient allocation of resources for sustainable delivery. • The absence of a follow-up system and inadequacy of the duration for pupils with additional support needs highlight the need for a more comprehensive and inclusive approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transport costs – this is a significant barrier for many schools and is evidenced by a declining number of primary schools involved in the North Lanarkshire Council existing school Learn to Swim offer (and pilot). • Time away from the school day can also be challenging for schools, not least as many schools are catching up for lost time post COVID-19. School swimming provision may be considered less of a priority within this context. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many schools (particularly following COVID-19) are prioritising time in the classroom to make up for time lost learning during the pandemic. Further, competition in schools from other activities means many schools do not prioritise school swimming. • For some primary schools the costs were also prohibitive, although for the pilot part-funding was provided by the Scottish Government. • Scottish Borders Council and Live Borders have no systems in place to capture attendance, assessment and wider outcomes of the children in a digital format. • School swimming is not mandated in Scottish Borders, and so participation is left to the personal discretion of school Head Teachers.

Table 4: Lessons learned by the pilots

Dundee	East Lothian	North Lanarkshire	Scottish Borders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In any partnership or collaborative approach, early engagement and involvement of all partners and key individuals at the planning stage is critical as this will help to ensure a shared and clear understanding of roles and responsibilities. • Swim teachers are best placed to undertake the technical assessment of children - rather than relying solely on any third party input. • More teaching and theory time (that is, more than 45 minutes a week) is required for the secondary school candidates. • The timing and mode of delivery of the SSTQ are both important considerations. These may also impact on the retention of young people. • The continuous lifelong learning opportunities element was not inbuilt from the start of the pilot, rather it fell into place as the timing was right. It should be incorporated from the start. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unforeseen challenges like school strikes and pool closures necessitate a flexible and adaptable approach to programme delivery. • An eight-week programme may be insufficient for comprehensive skill development in aquatic safety for all children. • Some skills, such as the deep-water test, may require a more targeted approach to delivery. • Ensuring equitable opportunities across all schools is crucial for the programme's fairness and effectiveness. • Rigorous data collection and analysis are essential for assessing effectiveness and guiding improvements. • Balancing targeted support with broader access requires thoughtful resource allocation, especially for children with additional support needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The high cost of transport is the main barrier to involvement of primary schools. Financial assistance is required to help encourage more schools to be involved, and so that children do not miss out on an opportunity to learn a vital lifesaving skill. • Time away from school can be another barrier to involvement. The North Lanarkshire approach can be attractive to some schools because it offers a 90-minute combined session (as described above). The inclusion of dry-side activity works best if it has a purpose. • It is essential to undertake the initial assessment of children's baseline swimming competency in Week 1 to ensure children are streamed into the correct group based on their ability. • Given the number of children involved in each season, it makes sense to split children into a wet-site group and a dry-side group. This makes an efficient use of both time and spaces available within venues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early communication with schools and financial assistance are critical for encouraging participation, especially when school budgets are constrained. • Longer and more frequent swimming sessions may be more effective. However, any provision of school swimming is beneficial and shows progress. • The inclusion of dry-side activity works best if it has a purpose (for example, CPR). • A structured digital system for capturing attendance, assessment, and communication is essential for monitoring and reporting progress effectively. • Active collaboration between schools, councils, and leisure facility operators is vital for resource management and the pilot's overall success. • Addressing the diverse needs of children and continuously refining the programme based on feedback ensures equitable access and maximises impact.

Recommendations

It is important to recognise that a one-size-fits-all approach to school swimming delivery may not be appropriate for local authority areas or schools. School swimming should be actively promoted and encouraged - and any provision is better than none.

sportscotland and Scottish Swimming should:

- Disseminate the findings of this evaluation to stakeholders, including to local authorities. While outcomes are mixed, the findings in relation to improvements in swimming ability and water confidence and safety (and wider health and wellbeing outcomes) are encouraging. Sharing the findings may also encourage local authorities that do not provide school swimming to make a case for future provision.
- Share the findings with the Scottish Government as part of the evidence base to make a case for the longer-term sustainable funding for school swimming. This would also help to overcome the barriers to participation faced by schools.
- Take the necessary steps to finalise the school swimming framework for wider use at a local level. Swimming outcomes should be reviewed to ensure they are clearly and sufficiently defined and to support a consistent approach to monitoring.
- Clarify whether school swimming provision should have a particular focus on deprivation. Most, but not all, pilots addressed deprivation in some way (albeit to varying degrees). This may look different in, for example, urban compared to rural areas.
- Develop resource packs to support school swimming provision at a local level. These could then be used by local delivery partner(s) to engage with and secure buy in from key stakeholders, including schools.
- Prepare detailed guidance to inform the monitoring of school swimming provision and provide training. This will help ensure a shared understanding as well as standardisation and consistency in data collection and reporting. Monitoring should be proportionate, and an external evaluation should also be factored into future plans.
- 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.