



Minister for School Standards

Department for Education Sanctuary Buildings 20 Great Smith Street London SW1P 3BT

5 December 2024

Dear Rachel Griffin,

The Secretary of State for Education has had the privilege of receiving and responding to correspondence from both Sunnah and Joe's mothers and I also extend my heartfelt condolences to them and their families. Thank you for writing to [REDACTED], Secretary of State for Education, following the conclusion of the Inquest of the deaths of Sunnah Summayah Khan and Joseph Ian Abbess enclosing the prevention of future deaths report.

The prevention of future deaths report sets out the importance of water safety awareness and you state that "An ideal opportunity to warn and inform all members of the public would be through educating children of the risks. The lack of providing education to children around these risks through the national classroom curriculum could lead to future deaths."

I agree that schools have a crucial role to play in helping ensure all children learn to swim and know how to keep themselves safe in and around water. This can be especially important for those pupils who may not have the opportunity to take part in swimming and water safety lessons outside of school. We have set up an independent Curriculum and Assessment Review which is seeking to deliver a curriculum that ensures children and young people leave compulsory education ready for life and ready for work, building the knowledge, skills and attributes young people need to thrive. In parallel we are carrying out further engagement on changes to be made to statutory Health Education. In making those changes, we will look at how best to complement swimming and water safety lessons already delivered through the PE curriculum, to ensure that all pupils are taught about water safety, including the water safety code, as recommended in the report. This consideration will build on the work and opportunities that are already underway.

Data from Sport England Active Lives Children and Young People Survey (2022/23) report that 94.2% of primary schools surveyed reported they provide swimming lessons. As you have highlighted in your report, swimming and water safety are compulsory elements of the National Curriculum for Physical Education. It states that:

All schools must provide swimming instruction either in key stage 1 or key stage 2. In particular, pupils should be taught to:

- *swim competently, confidently and proficiently over a distance of at least 25 metres*

- *use a range of strokes effectively [for example, front crawl, backstroke and breaststroke]*
- *perform safe self-rescue in different water-based situations.*

Pool-based lessons should teach children important water safety skills like treading water, safe exit and entry of the water and floating. We know, however, that some schools need additional support to deliver high quality swimming and water safety lessons: a recent [omnibus survey](#) by the Department reported that primary teachers who taught PE to key stage 1 and 2 pupils were generally confident planning, delivering, or supporting a PE lesson to improve a range of pupil outcomes. The exception, however, was in terms of planning, delivering, or supporting a PE lesson that improved swimming and water safety skills, in which a third of teachers (34%) were confident at key stage 1 and 46% of teachers at key stage 2. Swim England and the Swimming Teachers' Association have recently published nine suggested skills to support schools to deliver lessons that will enable children to achieve the 'perform safe self-rescue in different water-based situations' attainment target. The nine suggested outcomes have been developed to address the skills required in common fatal accidental drowning scenarios.

Water-based lessons can be complemented by classroom-based lessons that go further and cover aspects such as cold water shock, beach flags or the dangers of rip currents. There are a wide range of resources, programmes and support available from water safety organisations.

The partnership the Department of Education has with swimming and water safety organisations, including the Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK), the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI), Swim England, Canal and River Trust, through our membership of the National Water Safety Forum Education working-group helps us to extend the impact of support and guidance for schools and parents. The working group is focussing on supporting schools and other providers to deliver engaging and consistent water safety messaging that is appropriate for the age and capability of children and young people throughout key stages 1 to 5.

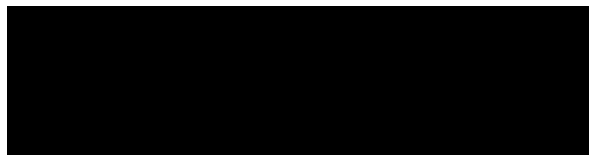
The Department has supported the RLSS UK's annual Drowning Prevention Week to help raise awareness across schools. I was pleased to learn that RLSS UK report that this year's campaign reached over 1.25 million children. I will take this opportunity to commit to the Department supporting the 2025 campaign to help more schools to participate.

It is important that all children have the opportunity to learn to swim and know the dangers of water. We are funding the Inclusion 2024 programme, which is led by the Youth Sport Trust, to increase and improve opportunities for children with special educational needs and disabilities to take part in PE, sport and physical activity. The programme includes a specific project focussing on swimming and water safety, which is led by Swim England. A series of free tools, guidance and advice have been developed and are available on [Swim England's website](#). These resources are also being extended onto nasen's [Inclusive Education Hub](#), so they can reach more teachers.

The Primary PE and Sport Premium can be used by schools to improve their swimming and water safety provision. Schools can use their premium to provide top-up swimming and water safety lessons for children not able to meet the national curriculum expectation after core lessons, for teacher training or to provide a broader range of aquatic sports to pupils.

Water safety should be part of every child's education, with PE and RSHE providing good opportunities for practical and classroom-based learning. No family should have to endure the heartbreak of Joe and Sunnah's families and I welcome further opportunities for the Department to work alongside them and sector organisations on awareness raising campaigns.

Yours,




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