



South Tyneside Council

Always Active Uniforms

January 2026

Contents

1.0. Executive Summary	3
2.0. Background and Rationale	4
2.1. Introduction.....	4
2.2. Childhood obesity.....	4
2.3. Outdoor play and active learning	6
2.4. The issue of school uniforms	8
2.5. “Always Active Uniforms”	10
3.0. Pilot Study.....	11
3.1. Pilot outline	11
4.0. Focus Groups.....	16
4.1. Participants.....	16
4.2. How?	17
5.0. Findings	18
5.1. Comfort and movement.....	19
5.2. Learning and wellbeing	19
5.3. Identity and belonging	20
5.4. Cost and practicalities	20
5.5. Choice and inclusion	20
5.6. Concerns	21
5.7. Reflections.....	21
5.8. Using drawings.....	22
6.0. Next steps	22
7.0 Bibliography	24
8.0. Appendices	28
8.1. Appendix I – AAU Flyer for children	28
8.2. Appendix II – Focus Group Questions	29
8.3. Appendix III – Pupil Drawings.....	30

1.0. Executive Summary

South Tyneside Council is exploring the introduction of an Always Active Uniform (AAU) to support children's movement, well-being, and learning across the school day. Two local primary schools expressed interest in piloting this approach through the 2026/2027 school year. In preparation, early-engagement focus groups were conducted with 36 pupils, which were facilitated by [South Tyneside Young Health Ambassadors](#).

Children expressed support for adopting an AAU that is designed around active wear. They reported that their traditional uniform restricts movement, can cause discomfort, and makes play more difficult. In contrast, they felt that an AAU would help them to move more freely, focus better during lessons, and feel more excited about coming to school.

Their discussions aligned with wider research which shows that active wear can reduce barriers to participation, particularly for girls and those with sensory needs, and supports more inclusive, equitable school environments. Beyond comfort, pupils discussed other elements of their uniform that were important to them, including identity and belonging. Some expressed the necessity of the school logo for both safety and pride, whilst others emphasised the value of choice, suggesting that both a traditional and an AAU should be available. Concerns were aired regarding the move from primary to secondary school and the (re)introduction of a traditional uniform, with the concept of a 'transition uniform' for Year 6 pupils emerging as a possible solution.

The children's feedback was thoughtful, creative, and insightful. Their discussions presented important benefits and challenges which need careful consideration within the implementation of an AAU, and this will directly inform the next steps of this work, including uniform design, school and parent engagement, and the evaluation framework. When implemented with consideration, the findings indicated that an AAU has the potential to meaningfully enhance school engagement, physical activity, and wellbeing, whilst maintaining school identity and feelings of belonging, all the while ensuring that children feel heard, supported, and involved in shaping their uniform experience(s).

2.0. Background and Rationale

2.1. Introduction

As widely promoted by both the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the National Health Service (NHS), regular physical activity is essential for supporting children and adults physical and mental health ([WHO, n.d.](#); [NHS, n.d.](#)). Indeed, both public health bodies recommend that children should engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise daily, with important and well established benefits from doing this including improved physical fitness, enhanced cardiometabolic and bone health, better cognitive outcomes and mental wellbeing, as well as reducing body fat (adiposity) ([Bull et al., 2020](#)).

Despite the clear benefits, physical activity remains a significant public health concern ([Raiman et al., 2023](#); [Thomas-Eapen, 2021](#)). Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive, multi-component strategies that operate across settings, including schools, communities, families, and wider environments, to create the conditions which can enable and encourage children, young people, and adults to be more active throughout their daily lives.

2.2. Childhood obesity

Globally, the number of children living with obesity has continued to rise, prompting significant concern regarding associated outcomes such as increased risk of chronic health conditions, reduced quality of life, and higher morbidity ([Thomas-Eapen, 2021](#); [ten Valde et al., 2021](#)). In England, data from the [National Child Measurement Programme \(NCMP\)](#), which is produced by the [Office for Health Improvement and Disparities \(OHID\)](#), provides a detailed picture of childhood weight status at both national and local levels. The NCMP assesses children at two key time points (Reception (ages 4-5) and Year 6 (ages 10-11), and categorises weight status across six groups: (i) underweight (ii) healthy weight (iii) overweight (iv) overweight (including obesity) (v) obesity (including severe obesity) and (vi) severe obesity. This comprehensive breakdown enables relevant authorities (e.g. local

authorities) to monitor trends over time and tailor interventions to address the growing prevalence of unhealthy weight among children. More information about these categories, the measurements, and the definitions can be found on the [NHS website](#) (2025) and through OHID's [National Child Measurement Programme annual report](#).

According to the [Obesity Health Alliance](#), the most recent release of NCMP data (school year 2024/2025) illustrates that, nationally, whilst the majority of children remain a healthy weight (75.4% in Reception, 62.2% in year 6), around 10.5% of children in Reception and 22.2% of Year 6 children are living with obesity. They highlight that excluding the pandemic peak (2020), this represents the highest prevalence of obesity in Reception since measurements began in 2006/2007. Furthermore, there is a strong socioeconomic pattern surrounding this issue, whereby children living in the most deprived communities are twice as likely to experience obesity compared to those living in the least deprived areas (see [Twaiats and Alwan \(2019\)](#) and [Mireku and Rodriguez \(2020\)](#)). This disparity is echoed in the 2024/2025 NCMP data, too, which shows obesity rates of 14% versus 6.9% in Reception, and 29.3% versus 13.5% in Year 6. Crucially, this deprivation gap has continued to widen since the NCMP's inception (2006), highlighting the persistent and growing inequalities that are impacting children's health.

Locally, whilst there are several initiatives underway to address childhood obesity, it continues to present a significant public health challenge. Recent data for South Tyneside from the NCMP (2024/2025) shows that in Reception, whilst 73.8% (n=1,055) of children are classed as being of a healthy weight, 12.9% (n=185) are overweight, 25.2% (n=360) are overweight (with obesity), 12.2% (n=175) are living with obesity (including severe obesity), and 3.5% (n=50) are living with severe obesity. For those in Year 6, whilst 58% (n= 945) of children are classified as measuring a healthy weight, 13.8% (n= 225) are overweight, 41.1% (n=670) are overweight (with obesity), 27.3% (n=445) are living with obesity (including severe obesity), and 8.3% (n=135) are living with severe obesity.

These figures for South Tyneside are illustrated below:

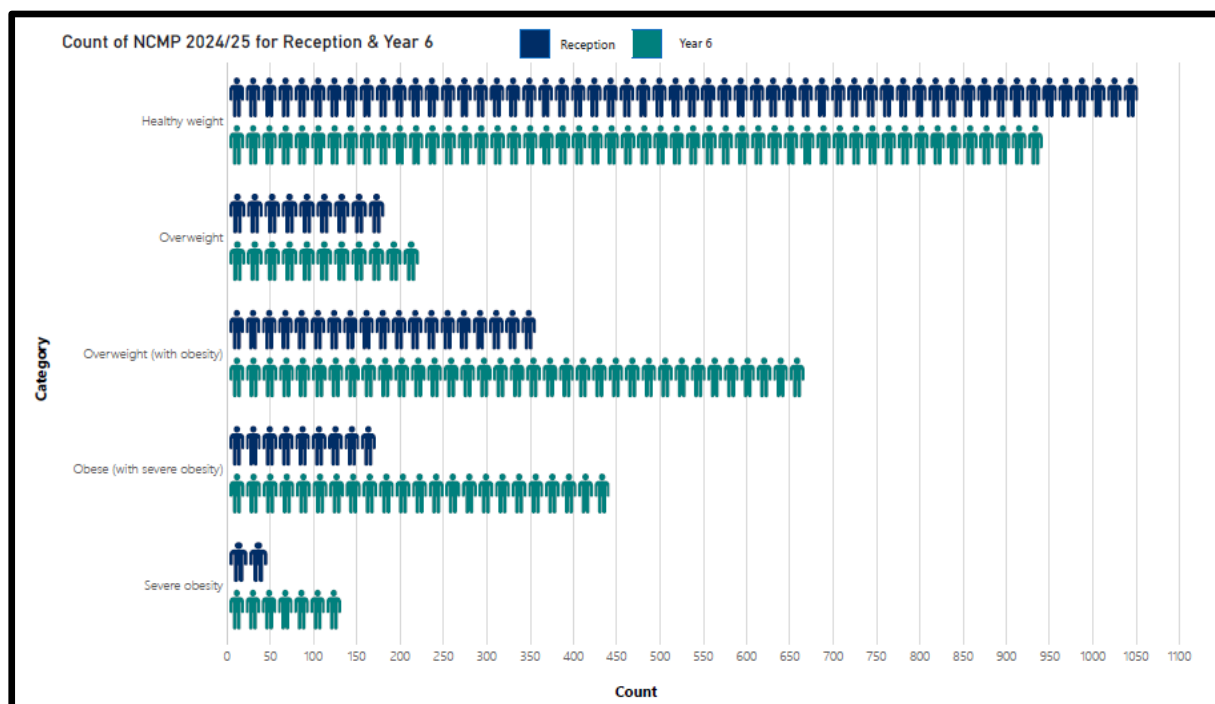


Fig 1: Count of NCMP 2024/25 for Reception and Year 6

Whilst many of the children are reported as being in a healthy weight category, the data highlights that, despite ongoing interventions, excess weight in childhood remains high locally, and continues to require sustained, targeted action.

2.3. Outdoor play and active learning

At both national and local level a wide range of interventions have been implemented to influence and improve children's and young people's engagement and attitudes to physical activity (see [Beets et al. \(2016\)](#) and [Messing et al. \(2019\)](#) for further discussion). In South Tyneside, examples of such work include the [NCMP](#), along with third sector partnerships, including the [Foundation of Light](#) which delivers the Healthier Families programme, providing families with children in Year 6 with a free 12-week course which is focused on physical activity, healthy eating, and fun giveaways. Alongside this, the [Fair Food project](#) is also underway, which aims to address factors that can reduce life expectancy and quality of life, including poor health, food insecurity, and fuel poverty.

A key challenge in promoting physical activity among children (and young people) is implementing an approach with long-term, sustainable impact. One technique which has gained increasing traction in recent years is the promotion of more targeted physical activity within education settings; places where many children and young people spend a large proportion of their time, yet where active movement has been (traditionally) limited, and sedentary behaviour often encouraged and rewarded ([Bull et al., 2020](#)).

Introducing more physical activity into the education environment can be done in several ways, and this is often school and resource dependant. Broadly, however, such approaches can encompass both/either outdoor initiatives (e.g. [Outdoor Play and Learning \(OPAL\)](#)), which focus on improving outdoor environments and play opportunities, as well as classroom strategies (e.g. [physically active learning \(PAL\)](#)), which deliberately integrates movement directly into curriculum delivery. To illustrate, children may have a “loose-parts construction zone” in the playground (OPAL), where they can use crates, planks, tarpaulins, ropes and tyres to create bridges, castles, or obstacle courses (amongst other ideas). In doing so, they work together, negotiate roles, manage physical challenges, assess risks, and adapt plans, all within an open-ended, movement-rich play which is designed for exploration and enjoyment. In the classroom (PAL), pupils might partake in a “times table relay”, whereby they move around a set course walking, hopping, or skipping (for example), solving calculations together. Here, physical movement becomes an intentional pedagogical tool which supports engagement, reinforces learning, and fosters focus.

As [OPAL’s evidence](#), along with data from the National Children’s Bureau’s independent evaluation (see [Lester, Jones and Russell, 2010](#)) demonstrate, OPAL approaches have a multitude of benefits for children, including (but not limited to); improving wellbeing, behaviour, cognitive, and social development; allowing for two and a half times more physical activity and; creating more equitable and inclusive environments where everyone has better, more active and more enjoyable playtimes. This has particularly been the case for girls, children with additional needs, those receiving free school meals, and those less inclined towards sports and physical education ([Lester, Jones and Russell, 2010](#)). Similarly, peer-reviewed research has found that integration of a PAL approach also has many

benefits, which include increasing children's physical activity ([Bacon and Lord, 2021](#); [Norris et al., 2020](#)), improving attention, focus and classroom behaviour ([Bacon and Lord, 2021](#); [Watson et al, 2017](#)), and improvements in academic achievement ([Bedard et al., 2019](#)). Critically, a key element to success is a whole-school approach, where PAL is consistently appearing in the curriculum, where behaviour and learning is monitored alongside physical activity, and where school staff feel confident, well equipped, and can co-design pedagogical approaches together (see [Daly-Smith et al, 2020](#)).

2.4. The issue of school uniforms

With this, it is then no surprise that a key element of both OPAL and PAL is school uniform, as the clothes children are required to wear at school can significantly influence how they engage with play and active learning. A growing body of evidence (see [McBride & Neary, 2021](#); [Reidy, 2021](#); [Ryan et al, 2024](#); [Youth Sports Trust, 2025](#)) increasingly shows that traditional school uniforms, which are often based on formal office-style clothing, may restrict movement as well as limit comfort. As a result, this can create barriers to children's full participation in play and physical activity across the school day, regardless of pedagogical approach (e.g. OPAL and PAL). In this context, a more flexible, movement-friendly uniform becomes a clear means of enabling children to engage more freely and equitably in learning that is centred around movement and physical activity.

Importantly, this discussion extends beyond active learning, and there is evolving national and international interest in how school uniform policies influence children's comfort, wellbeing, inclusion, and overall experiences of school life. Indeed, poorly designed uniforms can limit movement, contribute to discomfort, and exacerbate inequalities, especially for girls, gender-diverse pupils, religious and cultural minorities, and those from low-income backgrounds ([McBride & Neary, 2021](#); [Reidy, 2021](#); [Ryan et al, 2024](#); [Youth Sports Trust, 2025](#)). Broader cultural analysis (see [Friedrich and Shanks, 2023](#)) further shows that school uniform policies regulate pupil's bodies and behaviours, reflecting disciplinary and social expectations rather than supporting wellbeing.

Cost of school uniforms is another critical piece of the jigsaw within this conversation, which is an issue made ever-more pressing during a period of increase cost of living, as [The Children's Society](#) highlighted in June 2025. This challenge is mirrored locally, where South Tyneside's anti-poverty work has highlighted concerns from parents who describe uniform costs as a significant financial pressure.

Although some schools are taking steps to reduce such pressures, many still require multiple branded items as part of their uniform policies. Such garments are often only available through a single supplier and cannot easily be purchased at a lower cost from alternative providers, such as supermarkets or high-street retailers. Consequently, this limits flexibility, and affordability becomes a matter of school policy rather than choice, which is magnified for low-income families.

Recognising these challenges, the government's [Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#) (which is currently under consideration in the House of Lords), proposes a significant reform to school uniform policies. The Bills seeks to restrict the number of branded items that schools can require as part of their compulsory uniform, capping this at three items in primary schools, and four items in secondary schools where a tie is required. Such a shift away from branded items, allowing families to purchase more affordable alternatives available on the high-street, represents a clear and meaningful national commitment to improve uniform accessibility, removing cost-related barriers to school participation, and enabling families access to school uniforms that are durable, low-cost, and widely available.

Against this background, an AAU pilot scheme offers a timely opportunity to consider not only the affordability of school clothing, but also the ways in which this could work to support children's comfort, movement, and engagement throughout the school day.

2.5. “Always Active Uniforms”

The [Active Uniform Alliance](#) (AUA) is a coalition of varied people and organisations from around the UK who share the common goal of ensuring all primary school children are dressed in clothing that helps them to “always be active” (AUA, n.d.). Specifically, the AUA highlight that in contrast to the traditional uniform, an AAU prioritises children’s comfort, mobility and spontaneous movement, and participation across the school day. Whilst there is no specific uniform, AAUs are generally made up of components which are made from darker colours and more breathable fabrics, are not restrictive, are loose to enable free movement, and are robust, easy to clean, and cheap to replace. Items might include round neck t-shirts, leggings or jogger bottoms with shorts or skirts for warmer weather, and plain black active-wear trainers.

Alongside encouraging movement, an AAU has a range of practical benefits for both school and home. For schools, one of the most immediate advantages is the removal of the need for children to change into separate kits for physical education, reducing lost learning time. This also lowers the risk of forgotten, misplaced or damaged items, which is a common source of cost for families. Similarly, active-wear clothing tends to be more durable which can reduce uniform replacement costs, and they are made from moisture-wicking and quick-dry materials, meaning they are easy to clean, faster to dry, and reduce the need for maintenance, which is important for busy family life. AAUs may also better meet the needs of pupils with sensory sensitivities and/or fine motor challenges due to the softer materials and fewer restrictive fastenings, allowing children to dress more independently whilst feeling more comfortable throughout the day.

Understood collectively, these benefits demonstrate how an AAU can function not only to better support children’s movement and health, but also as a practical, cost-effective, and inclusive approach to school uniform policy. It is within this wider context that South Tyneside Council is exploring an AAU pilot as part of its commitment to improving children’s health and wellbeing. Importantly, the pilot aligns closely with the OPAL approach used by both participating schools (one of which is Platinum Level, denoting their “exceptional standards in outdoor play provision” ([OPAL, n.d.](#))), and with the Council’s anti-poverty

strategy, which recognises the financial burden traditional uniform places on families. By providing movement-friendly, durable, and cost-effective uniform options, the AAU aims to enhance comfort and activity whilst reducing financial pressures for households.

3.0. Pilot Study

In collaboration with the physical activity organisations, [Sport England](#) and [Rise North East](#), and informed from the work [Moki bands](#) have undertaken with the [Youth Sports Trust](#), this pilot builds on AAU approaches taken by other organisations and institutions. The use of the AAU approach in nearby Dame Dorothy Primary School in Sunderland (for more on this, [see this article](#)) has been particularly influential.

As demonstrated above, this initiative complements on-going work in the borough to increase children's physical activity, as well as responds directly to findings from South Tyneside Council's 'Reducing the Cost of the School Day' programme, which identified school uniform as one of the most significant financial pressures faced by local families.

Following this finding, an expression of interest was circulated to all primary schools in the borough, and the two schools undertaking this pilot responded immediately, demonstrating a strong appetite for this innovative, relevant, and important change that has the potential to benefit both children and families.

3.1. Pilot outline

This pilot will run across two academic years (2025/2026 and 2026/2027), with the first year acting as the baseline measure and the second year providing the intervention, allowing for effective, measurable data (and change) to be collected, considered, and evaluated. Due to financial limitations and to reduce disruption, only certain years groups will be considered for both the baseline year and pilot year; this is under discussion with both schools at this time.

3.1.1. The data

A comprehensive range of data will be collected for this piece of work; this will come from both the baseline year and the pilot year and will feed into a robust evaluation of the AAU initiative. During both the baseline and pilot year, data which is routinely collected by the schools, including attendance, attainment, and behaviour records, along with obesity rates (taken from school health datasets), physical activity information (through [Moki bands](#), see below), and active travel data will be collected. Qualitative insight from the focus groups, along with other forms of feedback will also be incorporated, helping to build a detailed picture of patterns, experiences, and perceptions.

Physical activity will be monitored through information from school staff and the children directly. Data from the teachers will include lesson plans and other pedagogical tools, demonstrating how movement is present in their usual school day, and can be used to explore how this evolves across the AAU period. It is anticipated that during the pilot intervention year, more PAL-informed approaches will be integrated into the children's curriculum in line with the AAU's emphasis on active learning. Movement data will also be collected using Moki bands, which the year group(s) will wear from (approximately) February through to May. These devices track anonymous physical activity data such as active minutes and steps taken, but show no biofeedback, meaning the children will not be provided with this information. Data from these bands will be downloaded every Friday to ensure consistent and reliable monitoring, which is important as each band holds only 7 days' worth of data before it is automatically replaced. With these bands, careful consideration has been given to factors such as weather and seasonal variations, school holidays, and shifts in school routine (e.g. trips, summer-term activities, sports day etc). Collecting data during this period is expected to provide a representative sample of the pupil's natural movement across these different conditions, and across both the classroom and the playground.

Active travel data will also be gathered to understand patterns and changes outside of the school gates.

Alongside such quantitative measures, qualitative insight will also be gathered from pupils, parents and carers, teaching staff, and governors, to build a rich picture of experiences and attitudes before, during, and after implementation. Such data could include feedback around inclusion and comfort from the pupils, family feedback such as benefits and/or cost implications, teacher feedback and commentary around the impact on learning, behaviour and culture, and insight into the experiences of those with more specific needs, including gender-diverse pupils and those with sensory sensitivities. Together, this will provide a comprehensive foundation against which the AAU's impact can be meaningfully assessed and evaluated.

3.1.2. How?

Early discussions with the schools indicate that the AAU will be implemented for the chosen year group(s) in September 2026.

Moki bands will be supplied to the schools with support from [Sport England](#) and [Rise](#), allowing for one band per child. Pupils will be required to wear a Moki band all day from early February through to May in both the baseline year (2026) and the pilot year (2027). Each morning, they will collect a band and “tap in” at the start of the school day and will return it when they “tap out” before going home. This data will be downloaded to a laptop every Friday. This simple routine enables consistent and accurate monitoring of daily activity across both years of study without providing additional workload to the teacher.

The final design of the AAU itself is under discussion with the schools, and each institution will determine its own specific uniform following consultation with staff, parents, governors, and pupils. Helpfully, such conversations are supported by learning from local examples such as Dame Dorothy Primary School, who have openly shared their experiences and have provided valuable insight. Early discussions with the two primary schools indicate that the uniform is likely to consist of round neck t-shirts, ¾ zip sweaters, joggers or leggings, and options for shorts or skorts for warmer months, along with simple black trainers. All items will be unbranded. Across both schools there is a consensus that the clothing needs to be durable, affordable, widely available, practical, and suitable for all weather conditions.

In line with the Council's wider anti-poverty body of work, the pilot aims to secure funding to provide a full AAU to every child within the participating year groups during the pilot year. This approach is integral to remove financial barriers for families, ensuring that all children can fully participate in the intervention without any additional cost. Moreover, by providing the uniform, the pilot can gain clearer, more reliable insights into the AAU's impact on learning, wellbeing, physical activity, and inclusion, whilst also strengthening engagement from children, their families, and the schools.

3.1.3. Potential challenges

Whilst this project is at an exciting and encouraging stage, it is important to recognise that there are several potential challenges which require addressing. This is particularly important as introducing an AAU represents a shift in school policy and practice, so it is essential to anticipate potential challenges and plan strategies to best overcome them.

Firstly, and perhaps most likely, is potential resistance in uniform changes from parents and guardians, staff, governors, and/or pupils; all of whom may value traditional uniforms for any number of reasons (e.g. identity, discipline, or appearance). Whilst understandable, this may be mitigated through early and transparent engagement, with clear and frequent consultations, communications, and opportunities for meaningful feedback.

A second potential concern around an AAU pertains to hygiene, with a concern centred around pupil's wearing the same clothing for both classroom learning and physical activity. This can be effectively and sensitively addressed through guidance on washing frequency, affordable items being readily available, provision of spare items in school, and alignment with school hygiene policies.

Similarly, an AAU has the potential to integrate with other existing policies which may prevent other problems arising. For example, this can include approaches regarding hair, jewellery, and PE kit rules (e.g., non-branded items, hair tied up for physical activities, the removal of earrings). This may require an internal review for each school, with the updating

of policy documents to ensure consistency and clarity, and will help to avoid confusion for staff, families, and pupils.

Schools may also need to anticipate cultural and religious factors, offering flexibility where needed.

3.1.4. Evaluation

Evaluation is a key part of any initiative, and gives space to ask whether the intervention worked, for whom, why, and how. A robust evaluation of the AAU initiative needs to look beyond surface-level outcomes to understand how the programme was implemented, and why particular changes may (or may not) have occurred. By examining both the process that shape delivery and the effects experienced by children, staff, and families, an evaluation can successfully provide a detailed picture of (potential) impact.

A process evaluation will likely explore how each school introduced the AAU, what preparations and communications took place, the differences in roll-out, and any factors that both supported and/or hindered implementation, along with any unintended or surprising consequences.

An outcome evaluation will explore how (if at all), why, and for whom, the AAU impacted different elements of the school day. This could include the children's physical activity, learning, classroom behaviour, inclusion and peer relationships, active travel, and with that, activity beyond the school day. Feedback will also be gathered from the pupils, their families, and teaching staff to provide a rounded understanding of the uniform's perceived impact.

In addition, a social and economic evaluation would complement this work, allowing for the exploration of the cost-benefit ratio of the AAU for both families and the schools, including comparisons costs with the traditional school uniform, potential cost savings from improved attendance and reduced exclusions, and everyday cost-saving measures, such as fewer damaged or lost items. Such an evaluation would also explore the feasibility of scaling the

AAU more widely across South Tyneside, as it will form a robust evidence base that can support future decision-making, helping to determine whether the AAU approach can be adopted more widely to enhance physical activity, wellbeing, active learning, and inclusion whilst (potentially) reducing financial pressures on families.

4.0. Focus Groups

To ensure this work is shaped by those most affected, South Tyneside Council has undertaken pupil focus groups in the two participating schools. The sessions explored children's views on their current uniform, their feelings about and their priorities for an AAU, and how uniform changes might influence their comfort, identity, and daily experiences. Capturing pupil voice at this stage is a fundamental part of this approach, ensuring the pilot is informed by perceived pupil need and concern, and their ideas.

4.1. Participants

The children who took part in the two focus groups were representatives from the School Council, across Years 2 through to 6, although no specific information was taken about who took part, such as gender or age.

Several [South Tyneside Young Health Ambassadors](#) (13 to 18 year olds) acted as peer facilitators for these focus groups. Their role was to ask the children questions, and to probe conversations around school uniforms with them, using a question schedule for assistance (see 8.2 Appendix II).

Two members of staff from the Public Health team at South Tyneside Council, as well as staff from each primary school also facilitated the sessions.

4.2. How?

Before undertaking the focus groups, members of the School Council were introduced to the concept of an active uniform through a leaflet that was created for them (see Section 8.1. Appendix I). This included what clothes make up an active uniform, why the school was thinking about changing to this approach, and how this might benefit the children. Doing this meant all participating pupils had a basic understanding of the purpose of the session and would be prepared (in some way) to discuss the active of an active uniform with the Young Health Ambassadors.

One workshop was carried out per school, with 18 children in each group (t=36).

A relaxed, conversational style approach was adopted for the focus groups to ensure pupils felt at ease and able to contribute openly. The sessions were held in spaces familiar to the children, helping to create a supportive environment, with staff they already knew, and the children were already seated when the facilitators arrived, enabling the sessions to begin smoothly.

Each workshop started with introductions of everyone involved, with the supporting teaching then providing a brief explanation, reiterating of the purpose of the workshop, outlining what we would be discussing, why we would be discussing it, and what they could expect.

Importantly, whilst facilitated by school and Council staff, the focus group was primarily led by the Young Health Ambassadors, who are young people themselves (aged between 13 and 18). Their involvement helped create a more relatable and youth-led atmosphere, working to reduce any feelings of intimidating formality or hierarchy. Having questions delivered by young people (rather than older adults) also worked to encourage a more open, candid conversation with the children, helping them to feel more able to share their honest views, and support a more balanced power dynamic within the workshops.

To encourage creative thinking and to maintain engagement, pupils were given drawing materials (including paper, pens and crayons) and were invited to illustrate what they would like to see in an AAU. Whilst drawing, they were asked a series of open-ended questions (see 8.2. Appendix II), which prompted whole-group discussion and a natural exploration of their ideas, experiences, and preferences.

The focus groups lasted around 60 minutes. The format was purposefully designed to be interactive, accessible and inclusive, enabling all pupils to participate meaningfully and share their perspectives on potential active uniform design and implementation.

5.0. Findings

Before commencing with the discussion activity, the pupils were first asked (i) do you like your school uniform? and (ii) do you think wearing an active uniform would help you at school? For each question the children were asked for a show of hands for those who agreed / disagreed. Of the 36 children who took part, five shared that they did not like their school uniform, leaving 31 agreeing that they liked it. All 36 children agreed that an active uniform would help them at school.

Broadly, the children who took part supported a more comfortable, flexible, active uniform. They identified barriers created by current uniforms, including restricted movement, discomfort, body temperature, and difficulty with fastenings. More, the children reported that they felt an active uniform would help them focus better, feel more confident, move more freely, and enjoy breaktimes and active learning.

Discussion for what would be included in their AAU centred around joggers, leggings, shorts, skorts, sweatshirts, and round-neck t-shirts, with black trainers.

Overall, the representatives from the schools showed enthusiasm for the implementation of an AAU. The children's ideas were creative but thoughtful, and they offered well-considered insights into how a more comfortable and flexible uniform could support their learning,

wellbeing, and ability to be active throughout the school day in ways that matter to them most.

Several common themes were identified from the two workshops, which included:

5.1. Comfort and movement

Children spoke positively about an AAU, emphasising a preference for increased comfort and movement, and favouring stretchy, loose, soft clothing. They frequently expressed a liking for joggers, leggings, skorts, shorts, and round neck t-shirts in different colours. They said their current uniform “can’t stretch” and it is “harder to move fast” and “uncomfortable sometimes”. Employing an AAU would allow them to “move faster”, “jump” and “join in more play”; for instance, “jumping off the monkey bars we won’t need to be worried about the skirt going up”. They also expressed a preference for fastenings that are easier for them to use, including “no buttons or zips so things won’t get caught”.

5.2. Learning and wellbeing

Children shared that being comfortable and wearing an AAU would help them to focus and pay attention, sit comfortably, and regulate their body temperatures more easily. An AAU would also make them “more excited about coming to school” and they would “behave better”. Whilst there was no expansion on why they might “behave better”, further conversation suggests it might be linked to feeling “more relaxed”.

Whilst most shared support for an AAU, a small number of children expressed concern that being “too comfortable” or feeling like “they were in PE all day” might lead to increased excitement (“they...might just react like it’s PE and go a bit crazy”), or that “behaviour might change because people will be more comfortable”.

5.3. Identity and belonging

For some children, part of their sense of identity and belonging is embedded within their school uniform and school identity. Some pupils felt that their current uniforms signal where they belong (“the school badge...it represents the school!”), and they have pride in this, and that they hold this representation within their communities (“We need the logo because people won’t know who we are”). The school logo was very clearly seen as a positive (“I like the swan!”) and essential to their uniforms, which was also associated with feelings of safety, as some pupils expressed anxiety about losing visibility of which school they attend.

5.4. Cost and practicalities

Pupils demonstrated an awareness of the labour-related and financial implications of school uniforms, and many felt that an AAU would help reduce costs. They highlighted that “parents could do less on a nighttime” and that with fewer clothes it is “less bits to buy” and people “wouldn’t need to pay as much money for the uniform because there would be less uniform”. They also said that they “wouldn’t forget about PE and wouldn’t have to change” and that it would be “warmer on the yard” and they would “stay cleaner in the mud”.

5.5. Choice and inclusion

The children showed that they value having a choice within their uniform options, and they expressed enthusiasm for being involved in the decision-making process. It was clear some of the pupils felt that offering two uniform styles or varieties (such as keeping both a traditional uniform and an active uniform) would increase fairness (“could we have two options so it’s fair?”) and would allow pupils to choose what they feel most comfortable wearing (“people should have a choice”).

This is likely linked to the worries and concerns some of the children had over the implementation of the new uniform, and what this might look like.

5.6. Concerns

Whilst there was clear support for the school employing an AAU approach, some children expressed some concerns. Key to this was both identity, and agency over what is worn. Comments around concerns included noting that some children “might be a bit confused and a bit scared because the uniform is changing”, whilst others said, “it will depend if people feel happy in what they’re wearing and it might make them feel that school can’t let them be what they want to be”. It is here that pupils mentioned having a choice (as above), and that the school “could just do two options and then people will have a choice so it’s fair”.

Another concern centred around the transition to secondary school, and how an AAU might impact this and make this move difficult, as these uniforms are typically more formal. One pupil said, “they might be worried about if it’s difficult to have PE and look scruffy and then go to secondary school and have to be smart and tuck in shirts and wear ties and wear a blazer”. The idea of a ‘transition uniform’ was then discussed, with a suggestion that “in Year 6, because they lead us, maybe they could wear like a month or half a year of wearing things that we could wear in comp, like purple for our school, and they could see how it feels and how it will be...and instead of a cardi there could be a blazer”.

5.7. Reflections

Overall, the focus groups demonstrated strong pupil support for the introduction of an AAU approach, with the children articulating clear and considered reasons for valuing comfort, flexibility, and practicality in their school uniform. Importantly, their contributions highlighted not only the potential benefits of an AAU for movement, learning, and wellbeing, but also the broader meaning that school uniforms hold for them, including identity and belonging.

At the same time, the discussions did demonstrate there are important concerns that need to be addressed sensitively. Worries largely surrounded the children's desire for personal agency and choice, their attachment to existing markers of their identity (particularly the logo), and anxieties around how a more relaxed uniform might impact the transition to secondary school.

Such insights underline the importance of a carefully managed implementation process, where clear communication is maintained, the school's identity is preserved, and that choice is offered to ensure that the children feel included, heard, and supported. At the same time, it is essential that any potential options for/around choice are presented in ways that avoids stigmatisation and do not contribute to widening existing inequalities.

5.8. Using drawings

Pupils were encouraged to express their ideas visually by creating drawings of what they would like their AAU to look like. This helped them to think creatively about comfort, movement, and practicality while giving them an accessible way to communicate their preferences. Importantly, this activity provides visual insight into how children imagine an AAU that is colourful, comfortable, and representative of their school community.

A small selection of their work can be seen in Section 8.3. Appendix III.

6.0. Next steps

Overall, the research evidence and the early engagement with the schools suggest that an AAU approach has strong potential to enhance physical activity, comfort, inclusion, wellbeing, and equity across the school day. Whilst uniform changes alone will not address every barrier to participation and movement, both research and the perspectives shared by the pupils indicate that flexible, comfortable, and inclusive uniform options can play a meaningful role in creating more supportive and enabling school environments.

There are several next steps for this pilot following on from the focus groups. This includes:

- **Sharing the findings** of the focus groups with school leaders and governors, which will help support decision-making around the design and roll-out of the AAU pilot.
- **Engage parents and carers** through communicating key messages, which could invite further feedback to ensure the pilot reflects the needs and experiences of families.
- **Source sample uniform items** for children to try on and test, allowing schools (and pupils) to assess comfort, fit, durability, and suitability for active play.
- **Implement Moki bands** to progress the next stage of baseline physical activity data collection.
- **Finalise the pilot implementation plan** for 2026/2027, including timelines, communication milestones, data tracking, and responsibilities across partnerships.
- **Develop an evaluation framework**, ensuring baseline and pilot-year data collection is in place, and that data collection is robust, consistent, and aligned across both schools.
- **Explore options for developing an appropriate secondary school transition**, engaging with local secondary schools, to understand uniform expectations and develop an appropriate approach that supports Year 6 pupils preparing to move into a more formal uniform setting.

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8.0. Appendices

8.1. Appendix I – AAU Flyer for children



The flyer features a photograph of four children running happily in a school hallway. The boy in the foreground is wearing a white polo shirt and has a backpack. The background shows other children in similar attire. The flyer has a blue header with the South Tyneside Council logo and name. The main title is 'Active Uniforms - Let's Get Moving!' in white and yellow text. Below the title, there are two paragraphs of text and a list of items to wear. The bottom left has a 'FINANCIALLY SECURE' logo.

South Tyneside Council

Active Uniforms - Let's Get Moving!

We're trying out comfy school clothes that make it easier to run, jump, play, and learn.

Instead of your usual school uniform, you'll will have a new Active Uniform.

You'll wear things like:

- Joggers, shorts, or leggings
- A t-shirt
- A sweatshirt
- Black trainers

 **FINANCIALLY SECURE**



The flyer features two photographs of children. On the left, a boy in a yellow t-shirt and grey shorts is running. On the right, a boy in a pink polo shirt is holding a soccer ball and giving a thumbs up. The flyer has a white background with blue and yellow wavy lines. The text is in blue and yellow. The bottom has a blue bar with white text.

Why are we doing this?

- You can run, jump, and play easier
- You'll be comfy all day, in class and outside
- You won't need to change for PE, meaning more time for fun!
- It will be easier to buy and wash at home
- Everyone can join in, including your teachers

How might it help you?

Being comfy at school helps you to:

- Concentrate better in the classroom
- Feel happier
- Join in with games and learning
- Move more during playtimes

What happens next?

We are testing this idea to see how it helps children feel happier, move more, and enjoy school.

We will ask you what you think, and we'll ask the grown-ups around you, including your teachers.

Do you have any questions?

You can ask your teachers about this, and they will be able to help you.

8.2. Appendix II – Focus Group Questions

Active Uniform – Pupils Workshop Questions

We are considering introducing an active uniform at our school to support pupils' comfort, wellbeing, and get more active. Your feedback is important to help us to make plans. Please take a few moments to answer the following questions.

An Active Uniform is a comfortable version of a school uniform, blending traditional school-wear with a P.E kit.

1. Do you like your school uniform?
2. Do you think wearing an “active uniform” (like comfy joggers and a t-shirt) would help you at school?
3. How do you think an active uniform would make you feel at school?
4. Would you like to have an active uniform at school?
5. What kind of clothes would you like for an active uniform?
 - T-shirt and joggers
 - Skirt
 - Shorts
 - Leggings
 - Something else?
6. Do you think having an active uniform would change how people see your school or how children behave?
7. What could help children and families if the uniform changes?
8. Is there anything else good or bad about having an active uniform you want to tell us?

8.3. Appendix III – Pupil Drawings

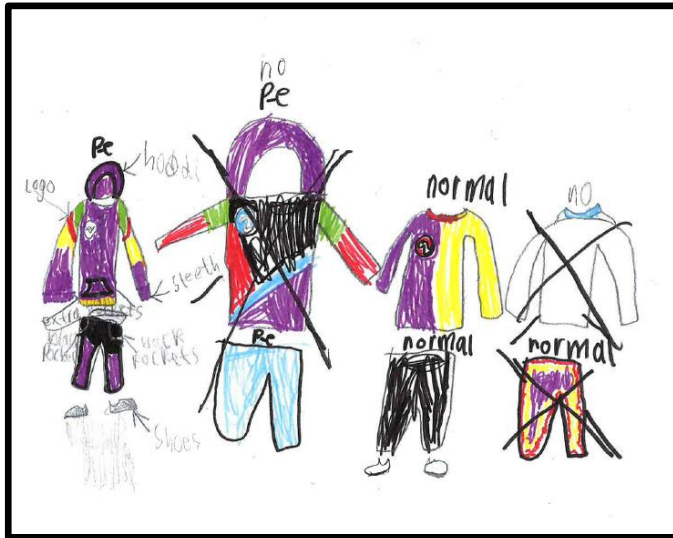


Fig 2: a drawing of several uniform ideas, showing colour tops and bottoms for an AAU, with drawings for their normal uniform too.



Fig 3: a drawing showing a child in a blue AAU, with the school's name and a logo.



Fig 4: a drawing showing several colourful uniform ideas using vibrant colours and patterns, including stripes and hearts.