

# ACTIVE LIVES CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SURVEY

## ATTITUDES TOWARDS SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY (ACADEMIC YEAR 2017/18)

Published March 2019

# WELCOME

Welcome to the second part of the Active Lives Children and Young People Survey year 1 results. This report represents the richest ever data exploring how children and young people aged 5-16 in England feel about sport and physical activity, measured between September 2017 and July 2018.

The last report revealed that although 43% of children and young people lead active lives, there is much more to do to increase activity levels at every age, whilst also addressing some significant inequalities – including gender and affluence. To help with that challenge, this report focuses on the five elements of physical literacy – enjoyment, confidence, competence, understanding and knowledge. It identifies which of those elements – both individually and in combination – have the biggest impact on increasing levels of activity, mental wellbeing, resilience and social trust.

It's well understood that increasing activity levels will make an important contribution to improved physical wellbeing, but the data presented helps us better understand how delivered in the right way, sport and physical activity can also contribute to better mental wellbeing, individual development and social and community development outcomes for children and young people.

The intention of this report is to summarise the key findings. We hope it becomes a valuable, practical tool to help the wide range of organisations with an interest in providing children's sport and physical activity understand and recognise the importance of how children feel, alongside what activity they do.

Finally, I would like to record my thanks to colleagues within the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education who have been key partners in the delivery of this survey, the network of Active Partnerships who have recruited the schools to take part and finally the schools, children, parents and teachers who took the time to complete the survey.

**Lisa O'Keefe** Insight Director

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## KEY INFORMATION

This report presents data from the Active Lives Children and Young People Survey for the academic year 2017/18. Data is presented for children and young people in school Years 1-11 (ages 5-16) in England.

## RELEASE DATES

This release: 21 March 2019  
Next release: TBC

## FIND OUT MORE

For further information on the data presented in this report, please visit the [Active Lives section](#) of our website.

Children and young people's attitudes to sport and physical activity are key to understanding their levels of activity, mental wellbeing, resilience and social trust.

## THE REPORT HAS FIVE KEY FINDINGS:

1

### **Physically literate children and young people are more likely to be active**

Physical literacy has five elements – enjoyment, confidence, competence, understanding and knowledge. The more elements present, the more active a child or young person is likely to be.

2

### **Enjoyment is the biggest driver of activity**

While all of the reported attitudes make a difference, enjoying sport and physical activity makes the biggest difference to activity levels.

3

### **Physically literate children and young people are happier, more resilient and more trusting of other children and young people**

The more elements of physical literacy present, the higher the levels of happiness, resilience and social trust.

4

### **Physical literacy declines with age**

As children and young people grow older, they report lower levels of enjoyment, confidence, competence and understanding.

5

### **There are important inequalities that must be tackled**

Girls and those from less affluent families are less likely to enjoy being active.

These findings will be used to inform a new attitudes-led market segmentation of children and young people. More details on our next steps can be found on [page 26](#).

# UNDERSTANDING ATTITUDES

The Government's *Sporting Future* strategy identified that: "Opportunity for children to take part in and develop a love of sport and physical activity is vital to ensuring their long-term enjoyment and participation."

The survey helps us understand the relationship between attitudes, activity levels and wider outcomes. However, it does not establish what causes positive (or negative) experiences. As a next step, we'll be generating a market segmentation of children and young people based on these attitudes (see [page 26](#)).

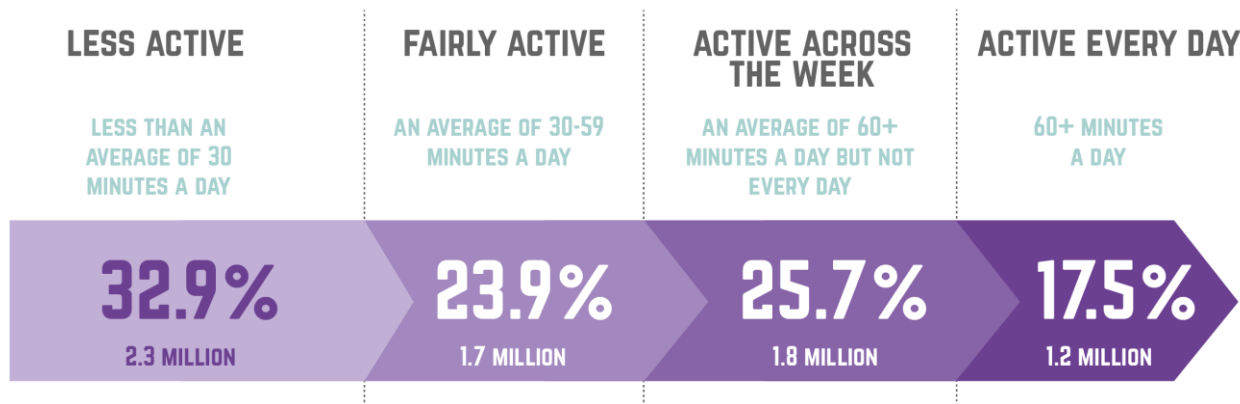
# BACKGROUND



## UNDERSTANDING ATTITUDES TOWARDS SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IS KEY

In December 2018, we published the first data from the Active Lives Children and Young People Survey, revealing that while 3 million children are active, 2.3m do not reach at least an average of 30 minutes a day (are less active).

This report builds on that analysis to look at the attitudes of children and young people to sport and physical activity, and most importantly how this impacts on their activity levels, mental wellbeing, resilience and levels of social trust.



## DEFINITIONS

The International Physical Literacy Association's definition of physical literacy has five elements: enjoyment, confidence, competence, understanding and knowledge. The organisation says these help an individual "value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life".

Source: *The International Physical Literacy Association*

We used this definition to develop statements covering each of the five attitudes that we added to the survey.

## POSITIVE ATTITUDES

When talking about individual attitude statements, we report where a child strongly agrees<sup>1</sup> with a statement as evidence of positive feelings towards it. For example, where a child strongly agrees that they enjoy taking part in sport, we describe that child as enjoying sport and physical activity. These statements were developed by an expert advisory group commissioned by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and Sport England.



<sup>1</sup>By looking specifically at those who "strongly agree", we both mitigate the tendency of children and young people to "agree" to socially desirable statements, and focus on how the firmest attitudes relate to activity and health and social outcomes.

[LINK TO DATA TABLES](#)

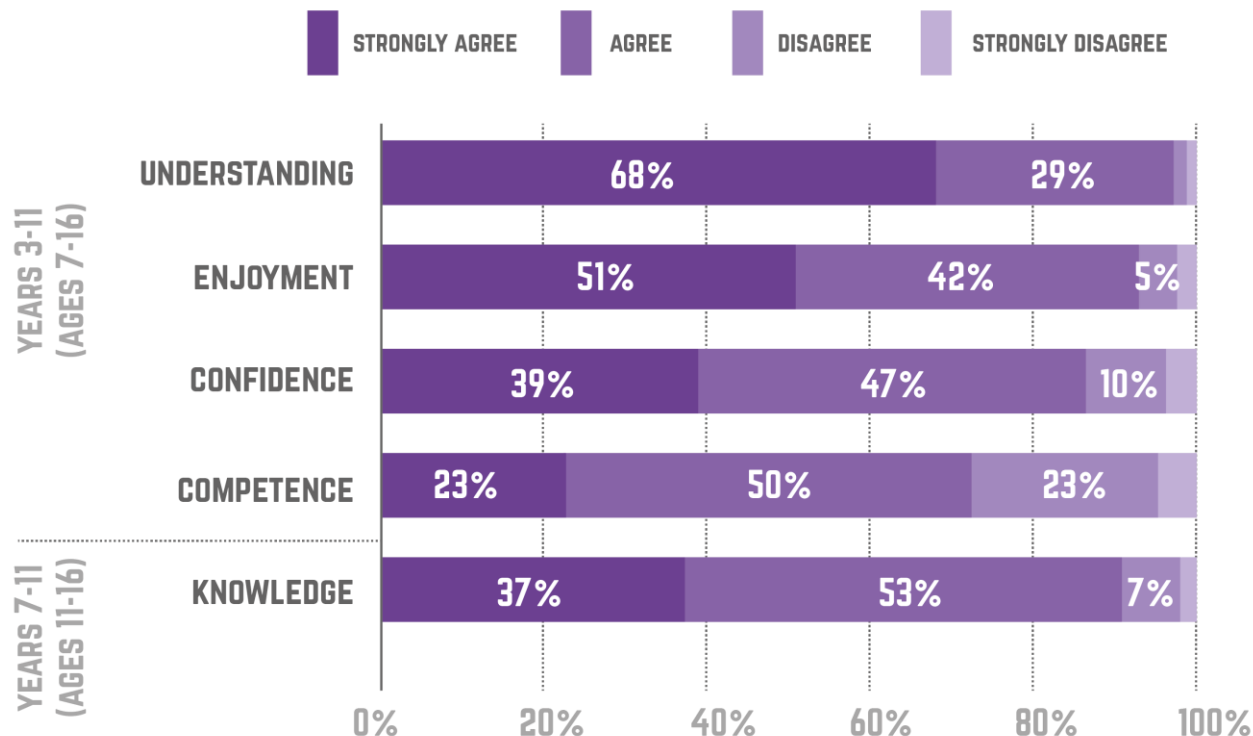


# POSITIVE ATTITUDES

## HALF OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ENJOY SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The majority of children and young people feel they understand why exercise and sports is good for them, but just 51% strongly agree that they enjoy taking part, meaning 49% are not likely to receive the full benefits of doing so.

Levels of feeling confident when taking part or finding sport easy (competence) are lower.



### Years 1-2 (ages 5-7) children

- The majority love being active (63%) and love playing sport (61%).
- 83% find sport easy.





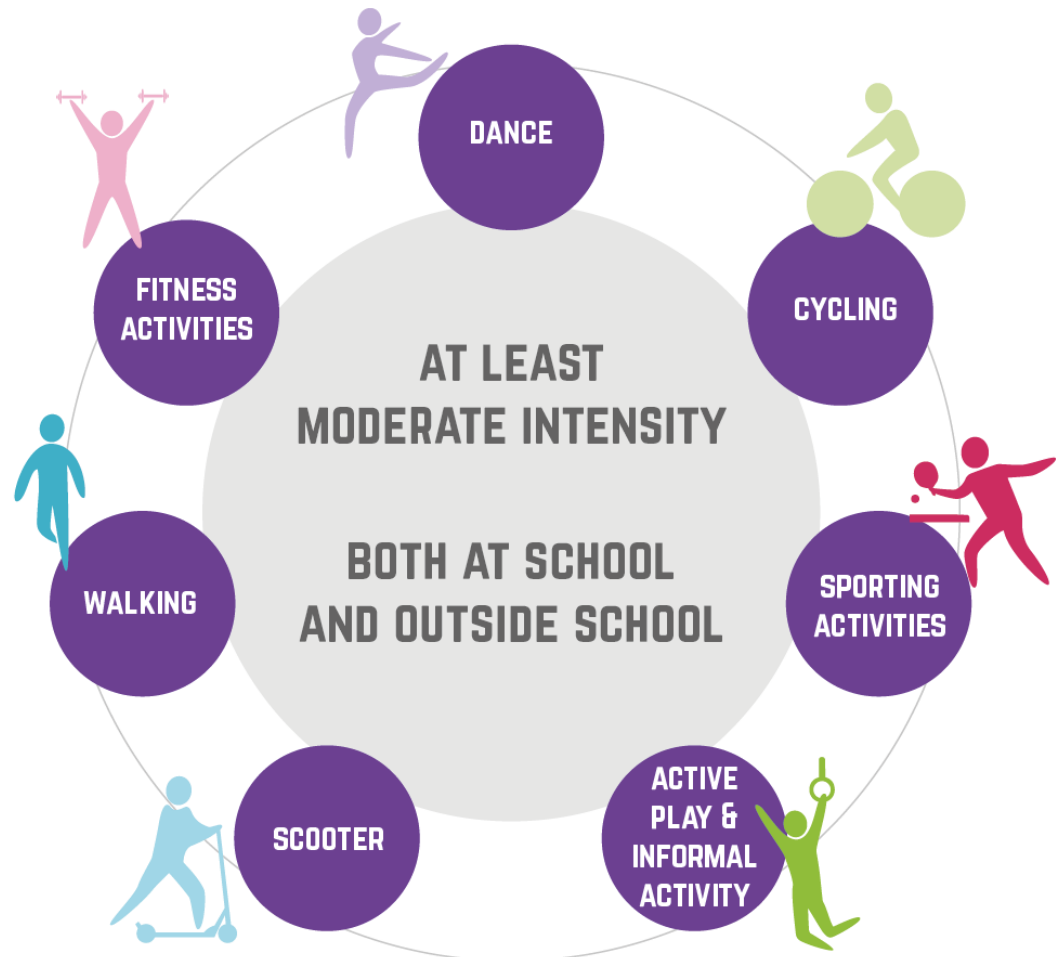
# ATTITUDES AND ACTIVITY LEVELS

## DEFINITIONS

Activity Levels are broken into:

- Active every day (at least 60 minutes every day)
- Active across the week (an average of at least 60 minutes a day, but not every day)
- Fairly active (an average of 30-59 minutes a day)
- Less active (less than an average of 30 minutes a day).

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY?



[LINK TO DATA TABLES](#)



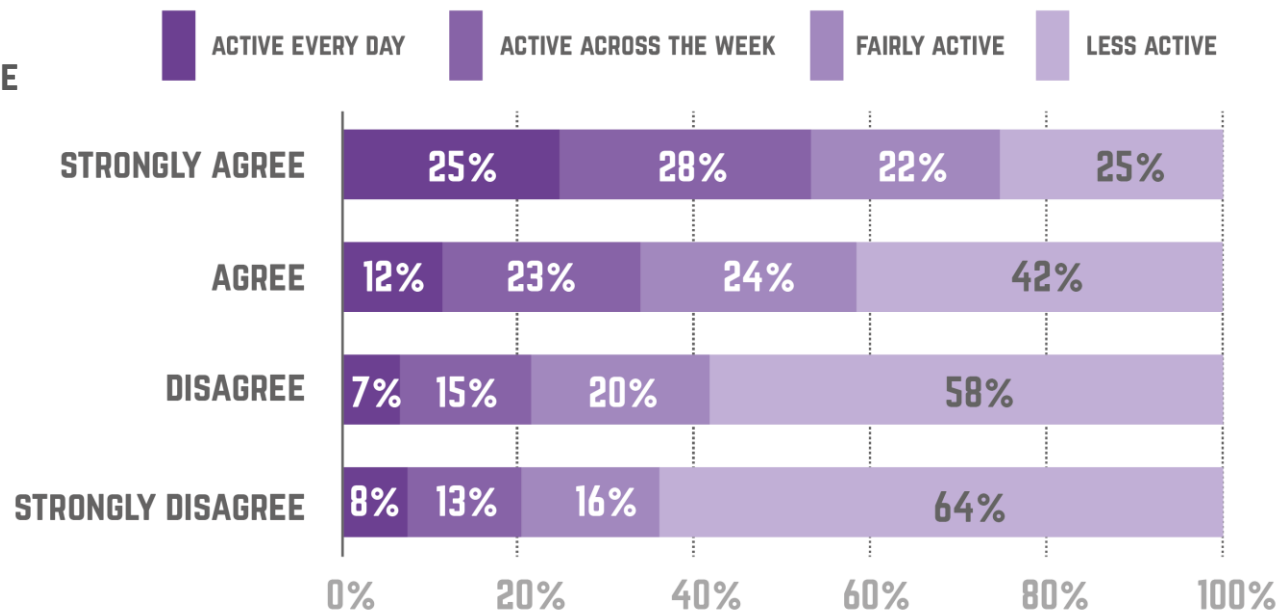
# ATTITUDES AND ACTIVITY LEVELS

## PHYSICALLY LITERATE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE ACTIVE

There's a strong positive association between activity levels and enjoying it, feeling confident when taking part and knowledge of how to get involved or improve. Over half of children and young people who strongly agree that they enjoy taking part in exercise and sports are active – either every day or across the week. In contrast, the majority who strongly disagree are less active.

While not as strong as it is with the other three attitudes, there's still a clear positive association between activity levels and finding sport easy (competence) and understanding why taking part is good for them.

### “I ENJOY TAKING PART IN EXERCISE AND SPORTS” YEARS 3-11 (AGES 7-16)



### Years 1-2 (ages 5-7) children

Of those who love playing sport, 54% are active (every day or across the week), compared with 47% of those who like playing sport.

There's no association between finding sport easy and levels of activity.





# ATTITUDES AND ACTIVITY LEVELS

## ENJOYMENT IS THE BIGGEST DRIVER OF ACTIVITY LEVELS

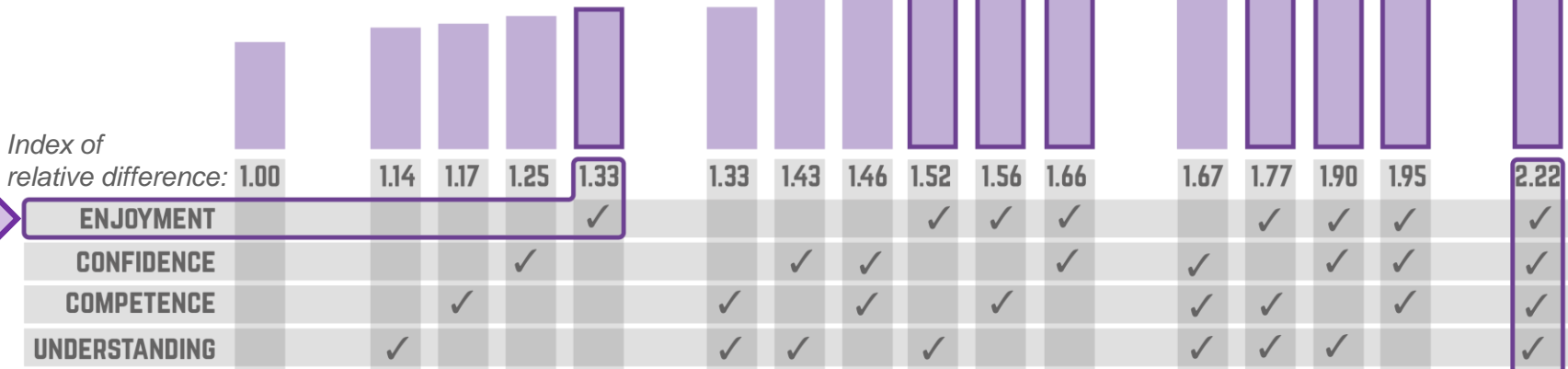
Further analysis highlights the importance of the combination (and number) of positive attitudes, with enjoyment being the key driver (see darker outlines).

### YEARS 3-6, ACTIVITY LEVELS OUTSIDE SCHOOL BY POSITIVE ATTITUDES

Enjoyment is the key driver of activity levels – those who strongly agree that they enjoy taking part do 33% more minutes of activity than those who don't. In addition, combinations of attitudes including enjoyment drive more minutes of activity.

#### Understanding the chart

The ticks in the table represent which attitudes are present. The numbers indicate the relative difference in minutes of activity. See [page 29](#) for more details.



HIGHER  
↑  
Relative difference in minutes of activity  
■  
LOWER

Strong agreement with all four attitudes drives the greatest number of minutes – more than twice as many compared to strongly agreeing to none of them.

# ATTITUDES AND WIDER OUTCOMES

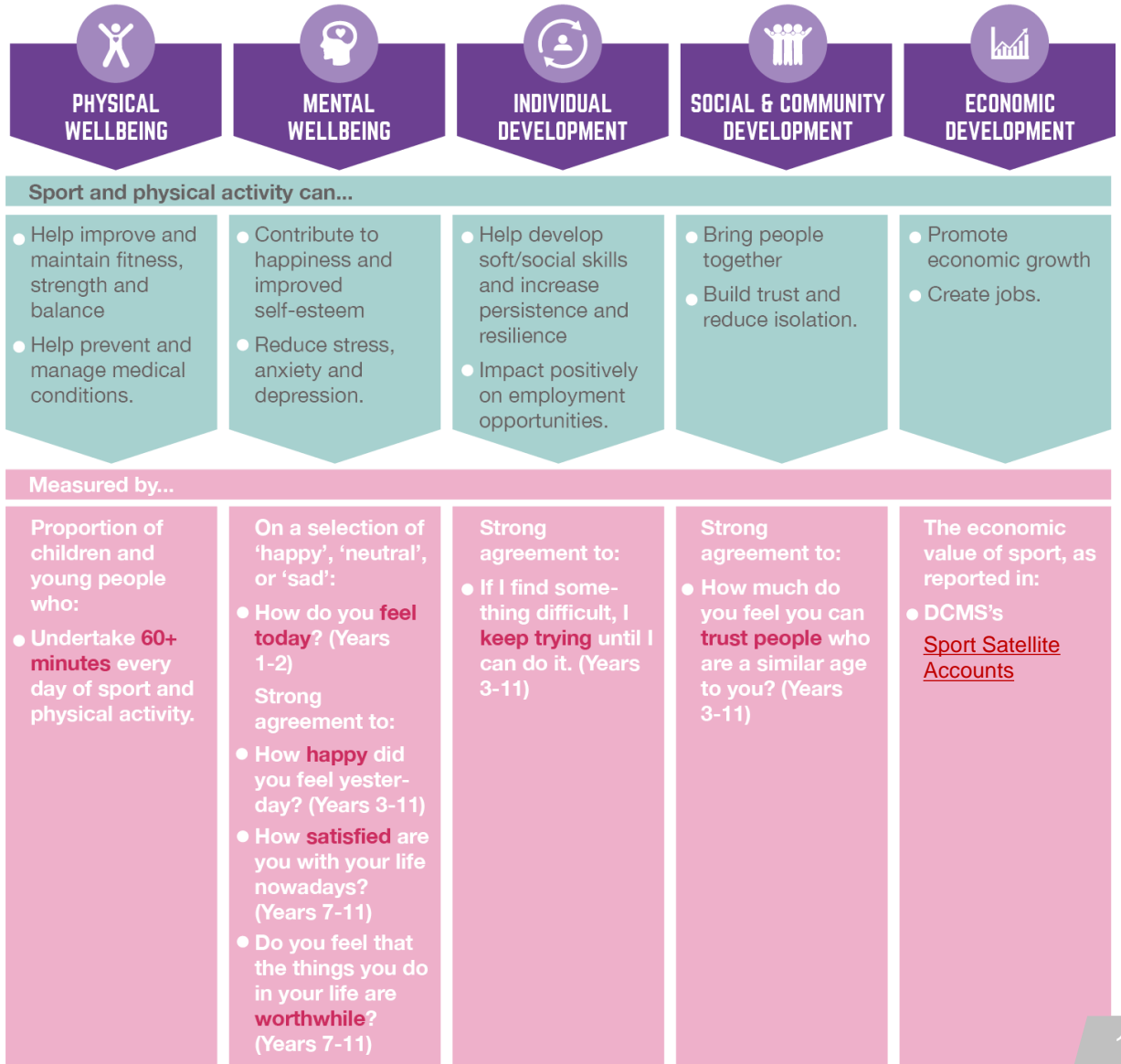
## DEFINITIONS

This chapter presents data looking at the associations between attitudes and wider outcomes for children and young people, both overall and linked to their levels of engagement in sport and physical activity.

Measures covered are:

- Mental wellbeing (happiness)
- Individual development (resilience)
- Social and community development (social trust).

LINK TO DATA TABLES

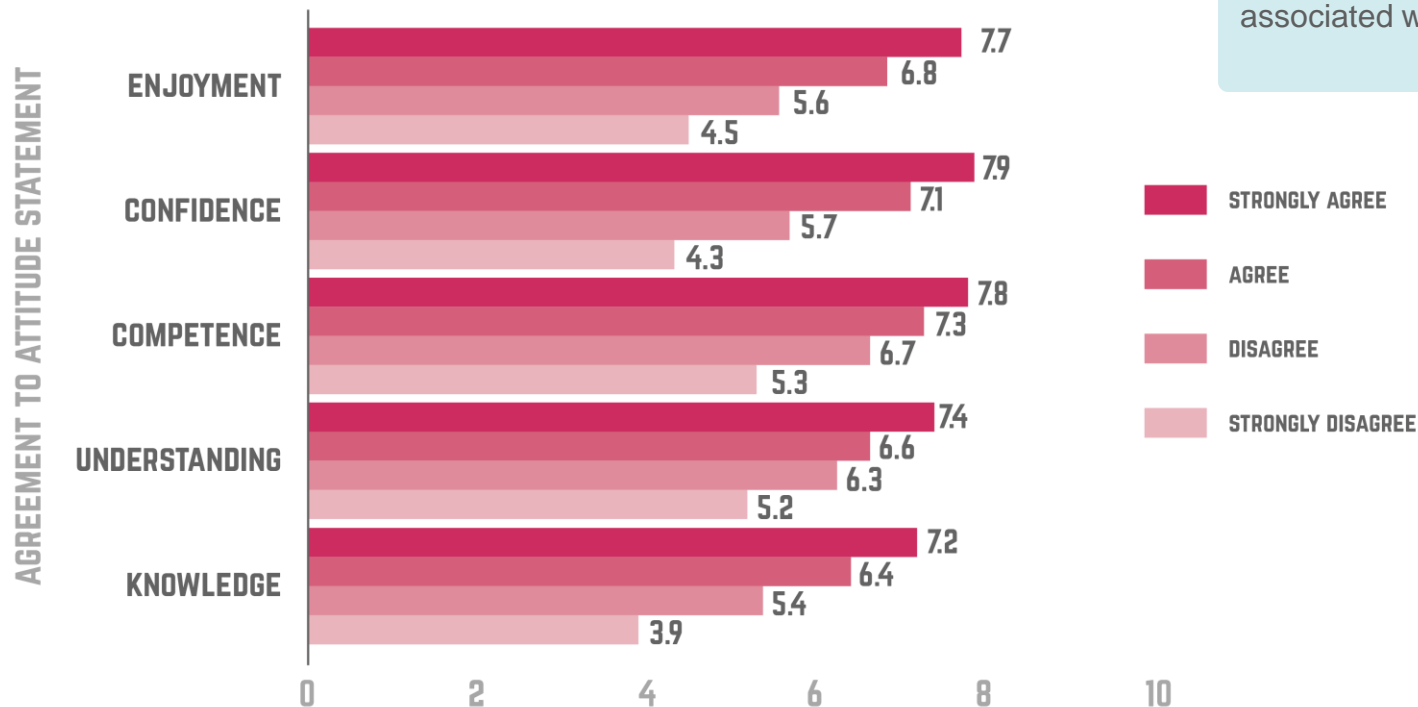


# ATTITUDES AND MENTAL WELLBEING

## PHYSICALLY LITERATE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE HAPPIER

Those who strongly agree that they enjoy taking part have an average happiness score of 7.7 out of 10. This falls to 4.5 for those who strongly disagree. A similar pattern is seen for all the other attitudes.

### “HOW HAPPY DID YOU FEEL YESTERDAY?” YEARS 3-11 (AGES 7-16) (MEAN SCORE OUT OF 10, WHERE 10 IS VERY HAPPY AND 0 IS NOT HAPPY AT ALL)



#### Years 1-2 (ages 5-7) children

All attitude statements are positively associated with happiness.



# ATTITUDES AND MENTAL WELLBEING

## THE MORE ELEMENTS OF PHYSICAL LITERACY PRESENT, THE HIGHER THE LEVELS OF HAPPINESS

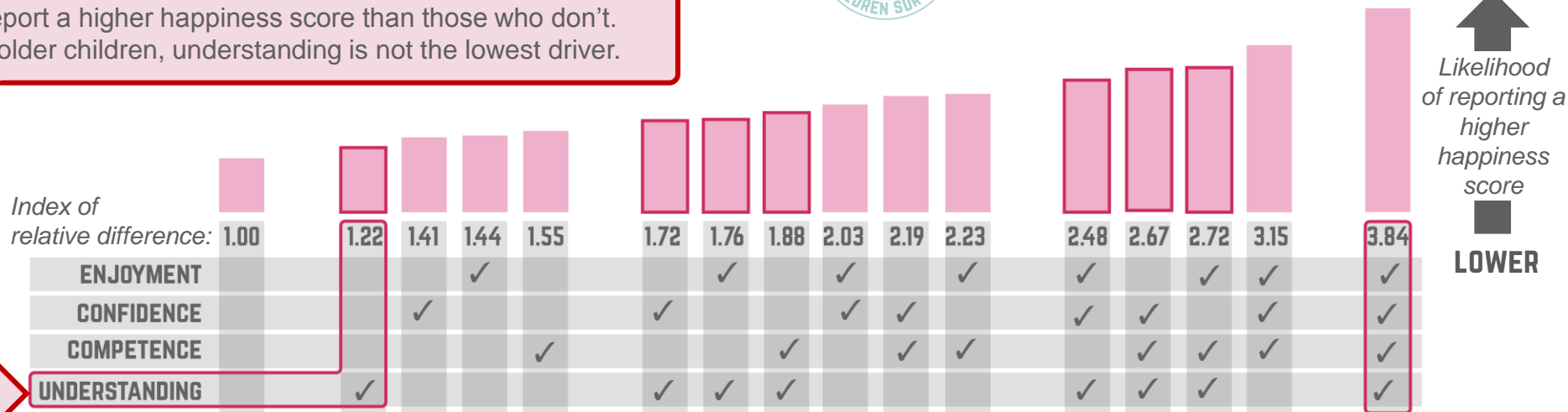
Further analysis highlights the importance of the combination (and number) of attitudes present. For Years 3-6 (ages 7-11), understanding why taking part is good for them is the lowest driver of happiness (see darker outlines).

**Understanding the chart**

The ticks in the table represent which attitudes are present. The numbers indicate the likelihood of reporting a higher happiness score. See [page 29](#) for more details.

### YEARS 3-6, HAPPINESS BY POSITIVE ATTITUDES

For younger children, understanding has less impact than the other attitudes – those who strongly agree that they understand why sport is good for them are 22% more likely to report a higher happiness score than those who don't. For older children, understanding is not the lowest driver.



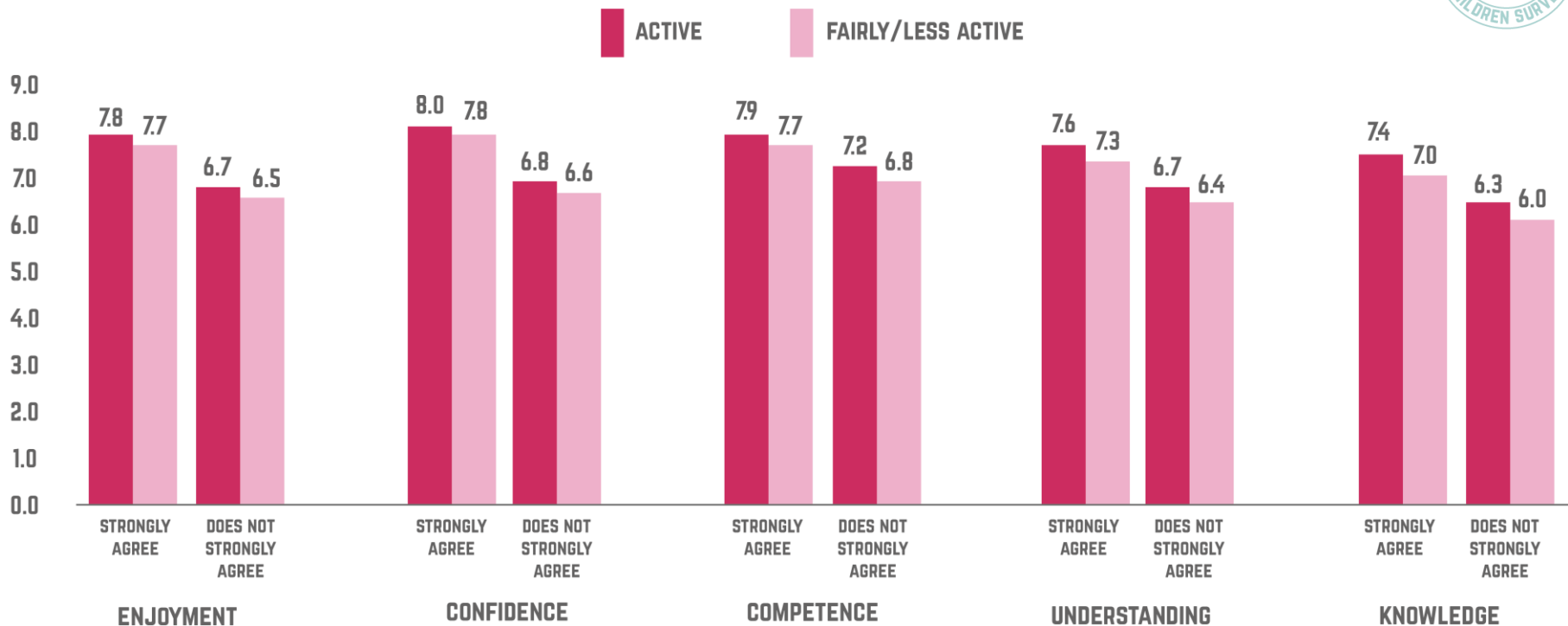
Younger children with all four positive attitudes (and older children with all five positive attitudes) are three times as likely to report a higher happiness score than those with none.

# ATTITUDES AND MENTAL WELLBEING

## POSITIVE ATTITUDES ARE A STRONGER DRIVER OF HAPPINESS THAN ACTIVITY LEVELS

The highest happiness levels are seen where children and young people have both positive attitudes and are active (either every day or across the week). However, when a positive attitude is not present, there's little difference in happiness, regardless of whether a child or young person is active or not.

### IMPACT OF ATTITUDES AND ACTIVITY LEVELS ON HAPPINESS: YEARS 3-11 (AGES 7-16) (MEAN SCORE OUT OF 10, WHERE 10 IS VERY HAPPY AND 0 IS NOT HAPPY AT ALL)



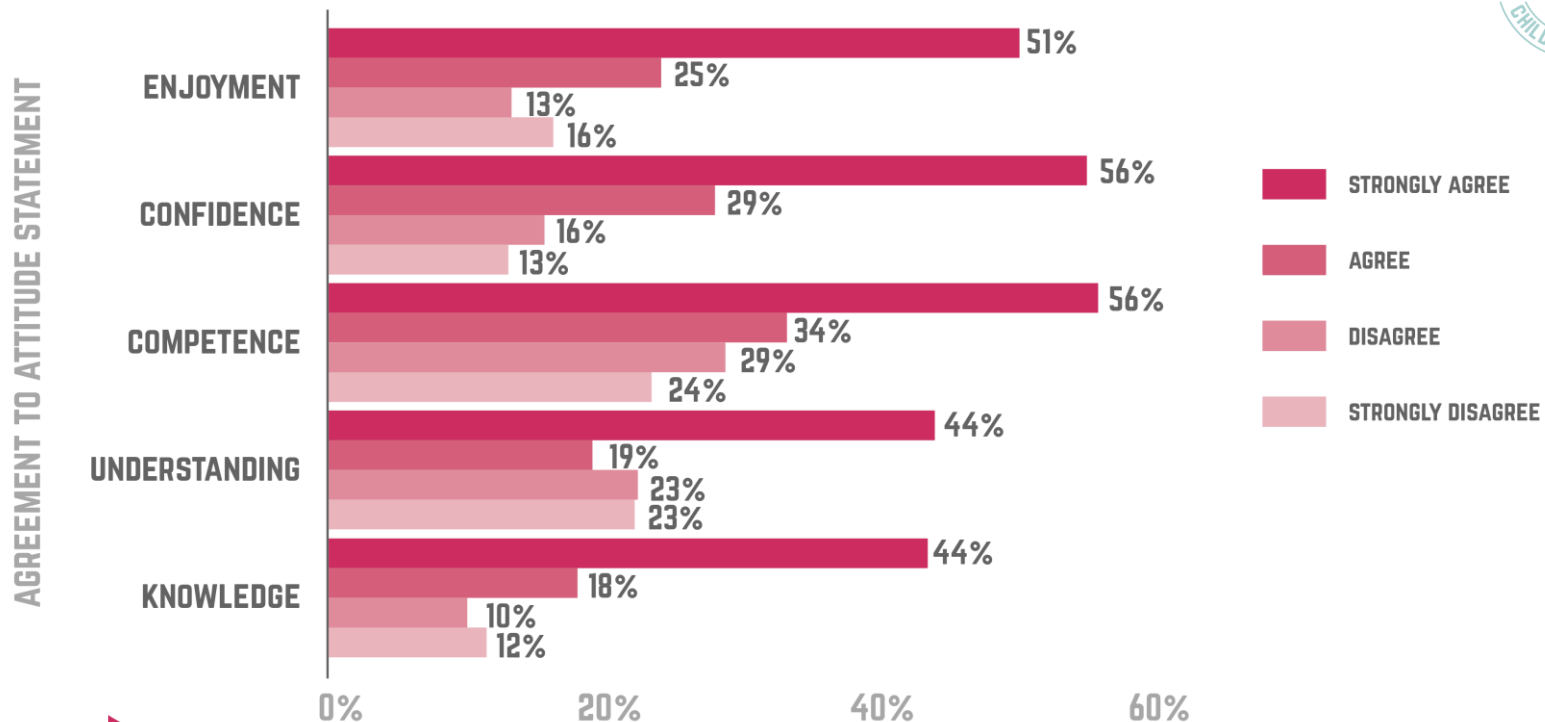
# ATTITUDES AND RESILIENCE

## PHYSICALLY LITERATE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE MORE RESILIENT

Of children and young people who strongly agree that they find sport and exercise enjoyable, 51% report high levels of resilience. This falls to 16% for those who strongly disagree. The same pattern is seen for the other attitudes.

There's similarly a strong association between the number of positive attitudes and resilience.

### “IF I FIND SOMETHING DIFFICULT, I KEEP TRYING UNTIL I CAN DO IT” YEARS 3-11 (AGES 7-16) (PROPORTION WHO STRONGLY AGREE)





# ATTITUDES AND RESILIENCE

## THE MORE ELEMENTS OF PHYSICAL LITERACY PRESENT, THE HIGHER THE LEVELS OF RESILIENCE

Further analysis highlights the importance of the combination (and number) of positive attitudes present. For Years 3-6 (ages 7-11), feeling confident when taking part and understanding why taking part is good for them are the key drivers of resilience (see darker outlines).

### Understanding the chart

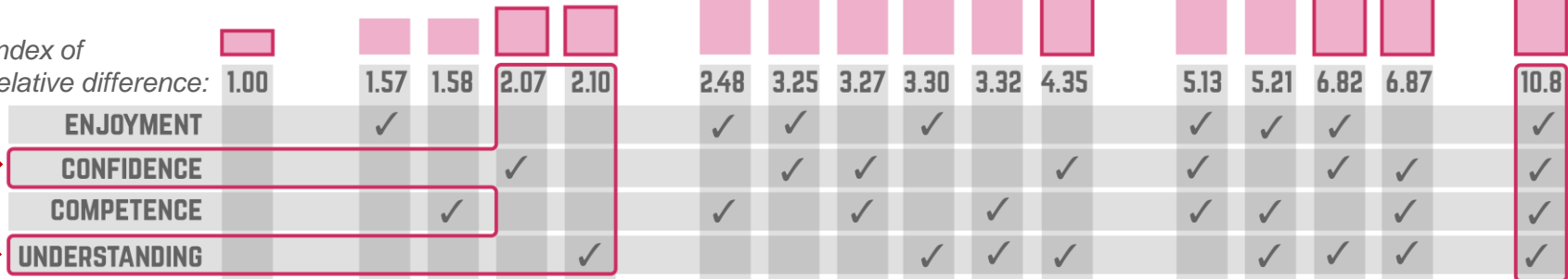
The ticks in the table represent which attitudes are present. The numbers indicate the likelihood of reporting resilience. See [page 29](#) for more details.

### YEARS 3-6, RESILIENCE BY POSITIVE ATTITUDES

For younger children, confidence and understanding have a greater impact than the other attitudes – those who strongly agree that they're confident when taking part or understand why taking part is good for them, are twice as likely to report being resilient than someone without any positive attitudes. For older children, knowing how to get involved or improve is the key driver of resilience.



Index of relative difference:



HIGHER

Likelihood of reporting resilience

LOWER

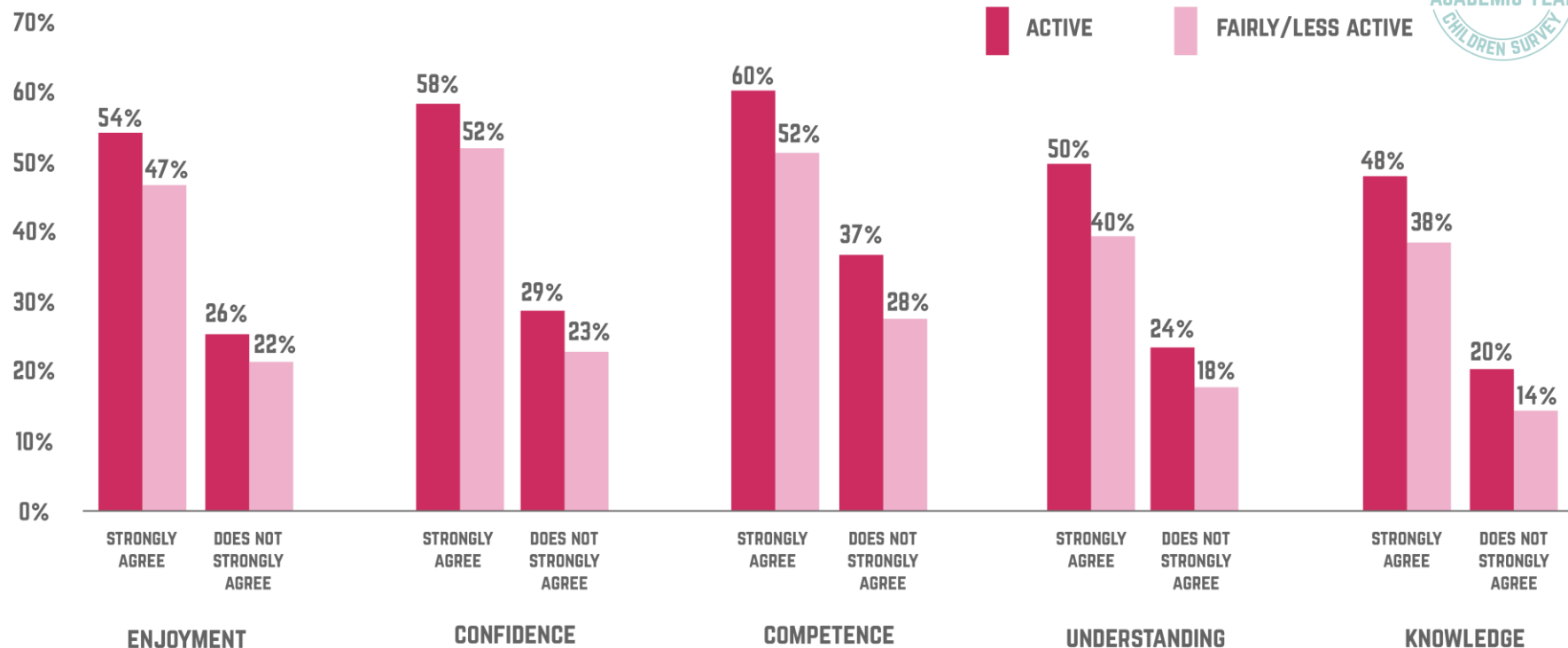
Children and young people with all four positive attitudes are 10 times as likely to report being resilient than someone without any positive attitudes.

# ATTITUDES AND RESILIENCE

## POSITIVE ATTITUDES ARE A STRONGER DRIVER OF RESILIENCE THAN ACTIVITY LEVELS

Children and young people who have positive attitudes and are active (both every day and across the week), are more likely to be resilient. However, when a positive attitude is not present, there's little difference in resilience, regardless of whether children and young people are active or not.

### IMPACT OF ATTITUDES AND ACTIVITY ON RESILIENCE: YEARS 3-11 (AGES 7-16) (PROPORTION WHO STRONGLY AGREE)



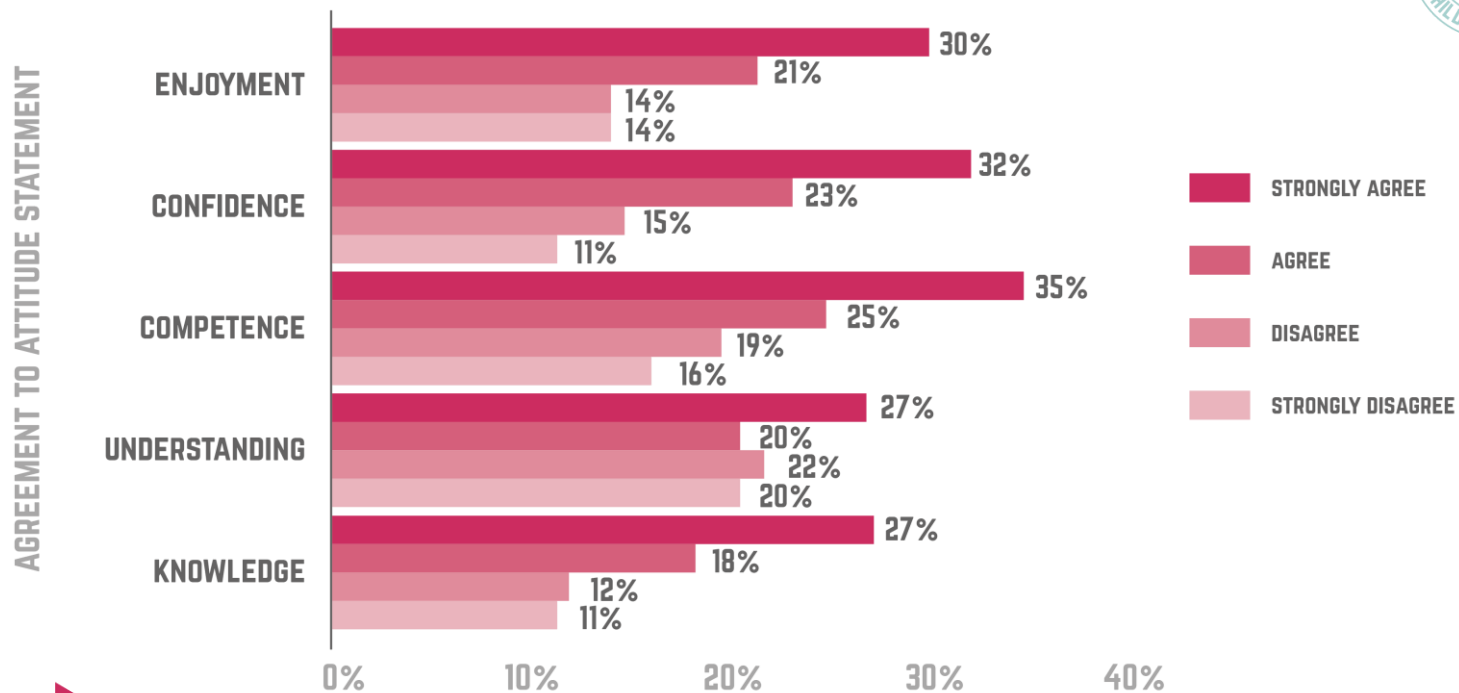
# ATTITUDES AND SOCIAL TRUST

## PHYSICALLY LITERATE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE MORE TRUSTING OF EACH OTHER

Around 30% of children and young people who have a positive attitude to any of the statements have high levels of social trust. This falls to around 20% for those who only agree to the statement.

There's similarly a strong positive association between the number of positive attitudes and social trust.

**“HOW MUCH DO YOU FEEL YOU CAN TRUST PEOPLE OF A SIMILAR AGE TO YOU?” YEARS 3-11 (AGES 7-16)**  
(PROPORTION WHO SAID ‘A LOT’)



[LINK TO DATA TABLES](#)

# ATTITUDES AND SOCIAL TRUST

## THE MORE ELEMENTS OF PHYSICAL LITERACY PRESENT, THE HIGHER THE LEVELS OF SOCIAL TRUST

Further analysis highlights the importance of the combination (and number) of positive attitudes present. For Years 3-6 (ages 7-11), understanding why taking part is good for them is the key driver of social trust (see darker outlines).

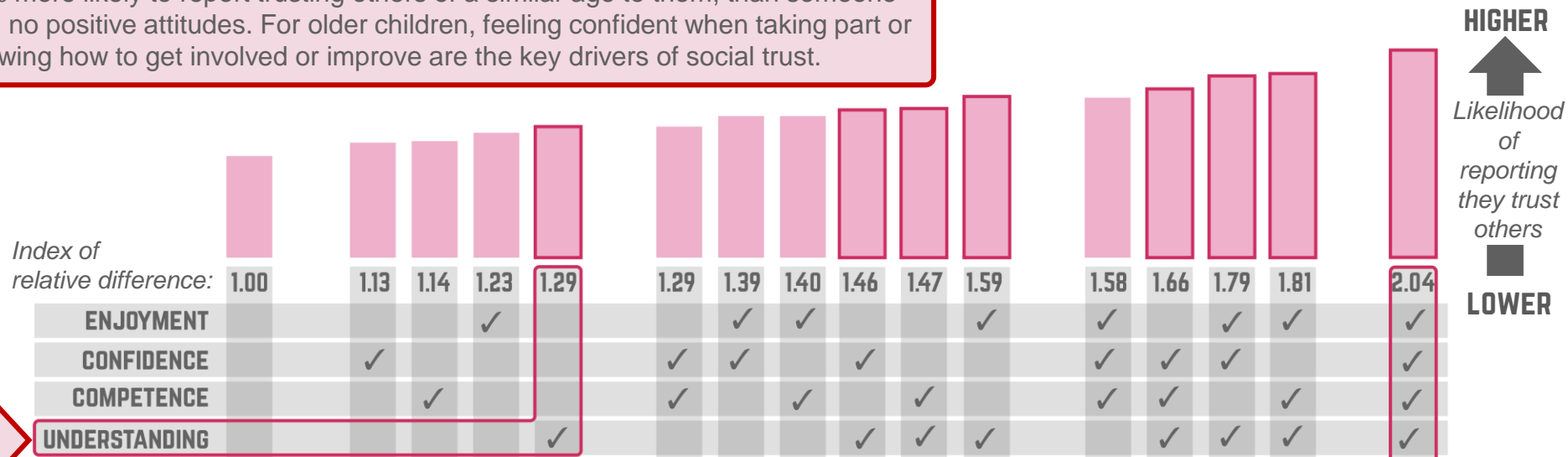
### YEARS 3-6, SOCIAL TRUST BY POSITIVE ATTITUDES

For younger children, understanding has a greater impact than the other attitudes – those who strongly agree that they understand why sport is good for them are 29% more likely to report trusting others of a similar age to them, than someone with no positive attitudes. For older children, feeling confident when taking part or knowing how to get involved or improve are the key drivers of social trust.



#### Understanding the chart

The ticks in the table represent which attitudes are present. The numbers indicate the likelihood of reporting they trust others. See [page 29](#) for more details.



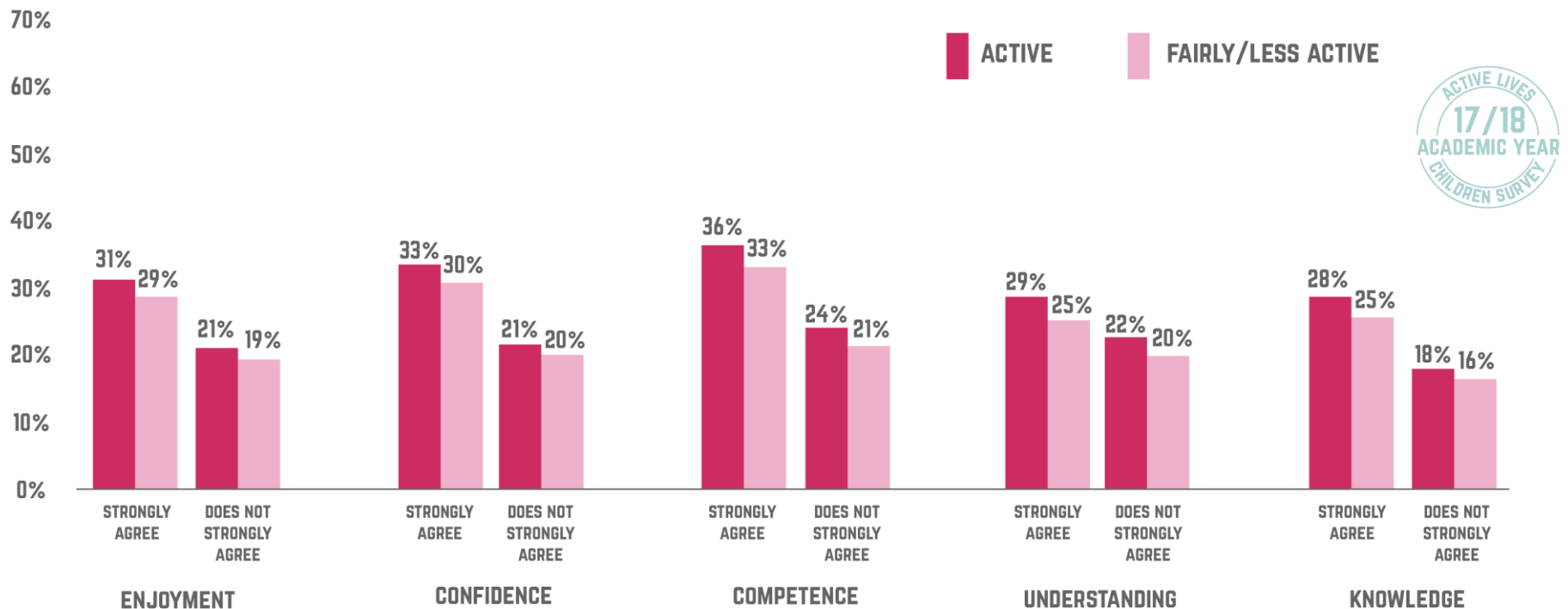
Children and young people with all four positive attitudes are twice as likely to report they trust others of a similar age to them than someone with no positive attitudes.

# ATTITUDES AND SOCIAL TRUST

## POSITIVE ATTITUDES ARE A STRONGER DRIVER OF SOCIAL TRUST THAN ACTIVITY LEVELS

The highest social trust levels are seen when children and young people both have positive attitudes and are active (both every day and across the week). However, where a positive attitude is not present, there's little difference in levels of social trust, regardless of whether children and young people are active or not.

### IMPACT OF ATTITUDES AND ACTIVITY LEVELS ON SOCIAL TRUST: YEARS 3-11 (AGES 7-16) (PROPORTION WHO SAID 'A LOT')



# SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC VARIATIONS

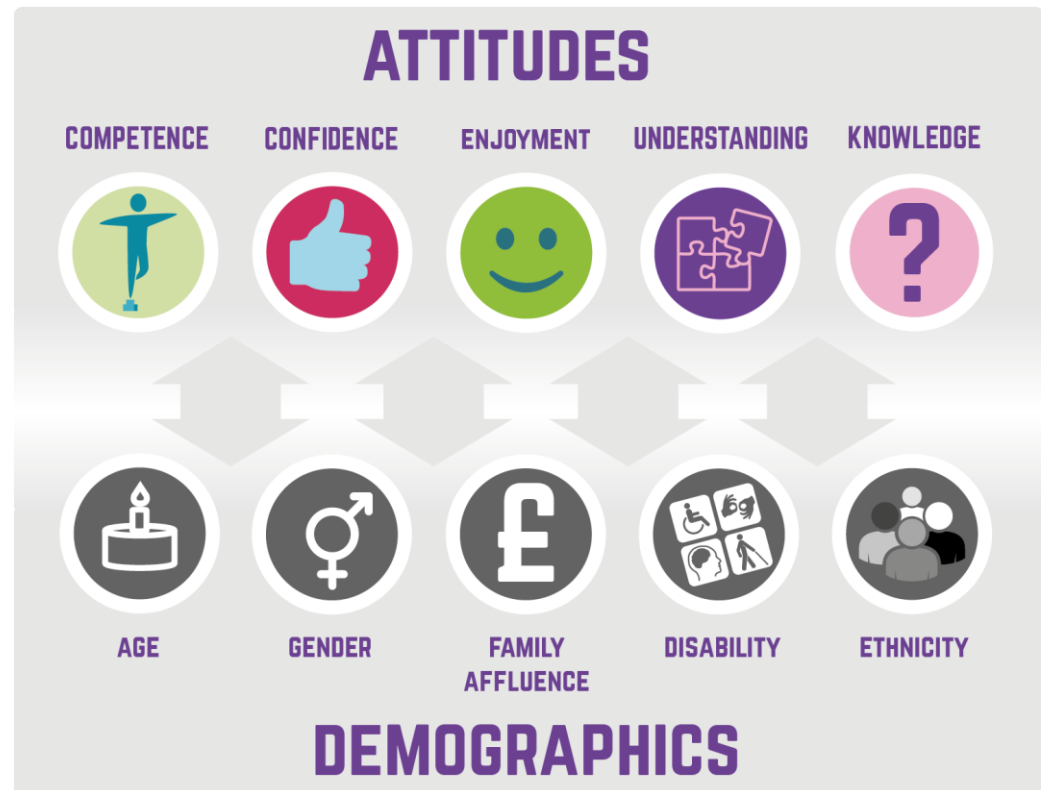
## DEFINITIONS

The following groups are covered:

- Age using school year
- Gender
- Socio-economic status using the family affluence scale
- Disability using 'needs extra help'
- Ethnicity.

See [notes page](#) for further details on these demographic groups.

The previous chapters show the clear associations between attitudes and both activity levels and health and social outcomes. It's also important to understand how attitudes are distributed across demographic groups to highlight the important inequalities that should be tackled.



LINK TO DATA TABLES





# DIFFERENCES BY SCHOOL YEAR

## PHYSICAL LITERACY DECLINES WITH AGE

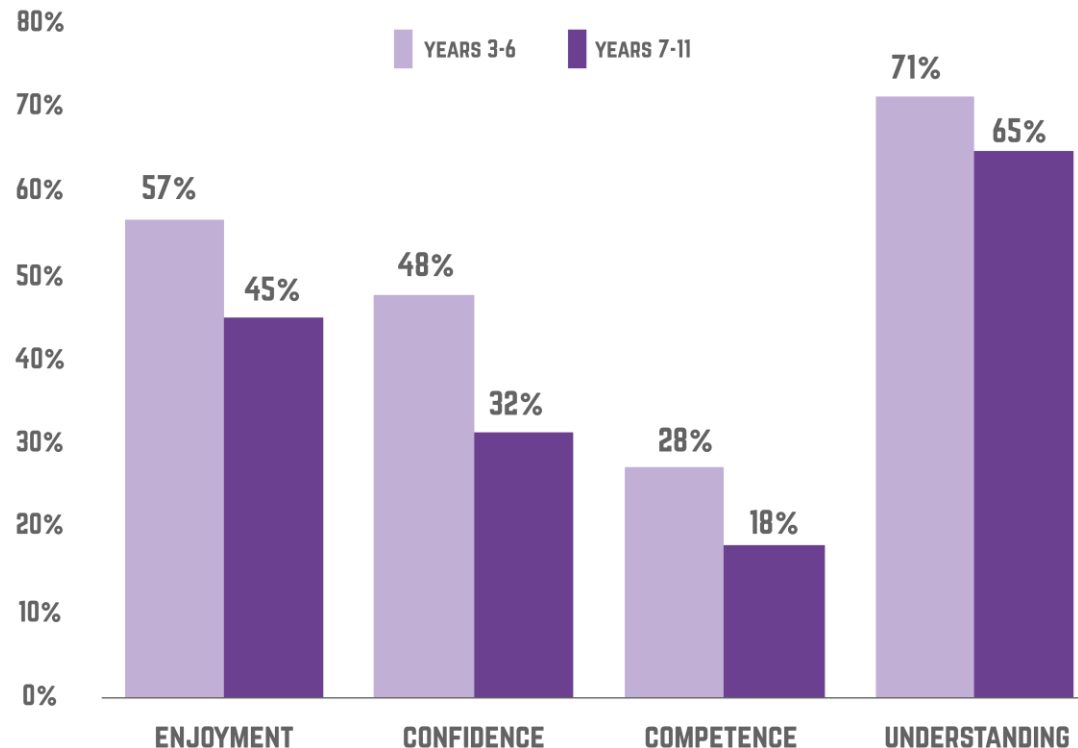
Younger children are more likely to report a positive attitude than older children.

- The majority of younger children strongly agree to between one and three of the attitudes.
- Older children are most likely to strongly agree to just one or fewer.

This gap is widest for feeling confident when taking part, and is slightly narrower for understanding why taking part is good for them.



### THE PRESENCE OF POSITIVE ATTITUDES: YEARS 3-11 (AGES 7-16) (PROPORTION WHO STRONGLY AGREE)

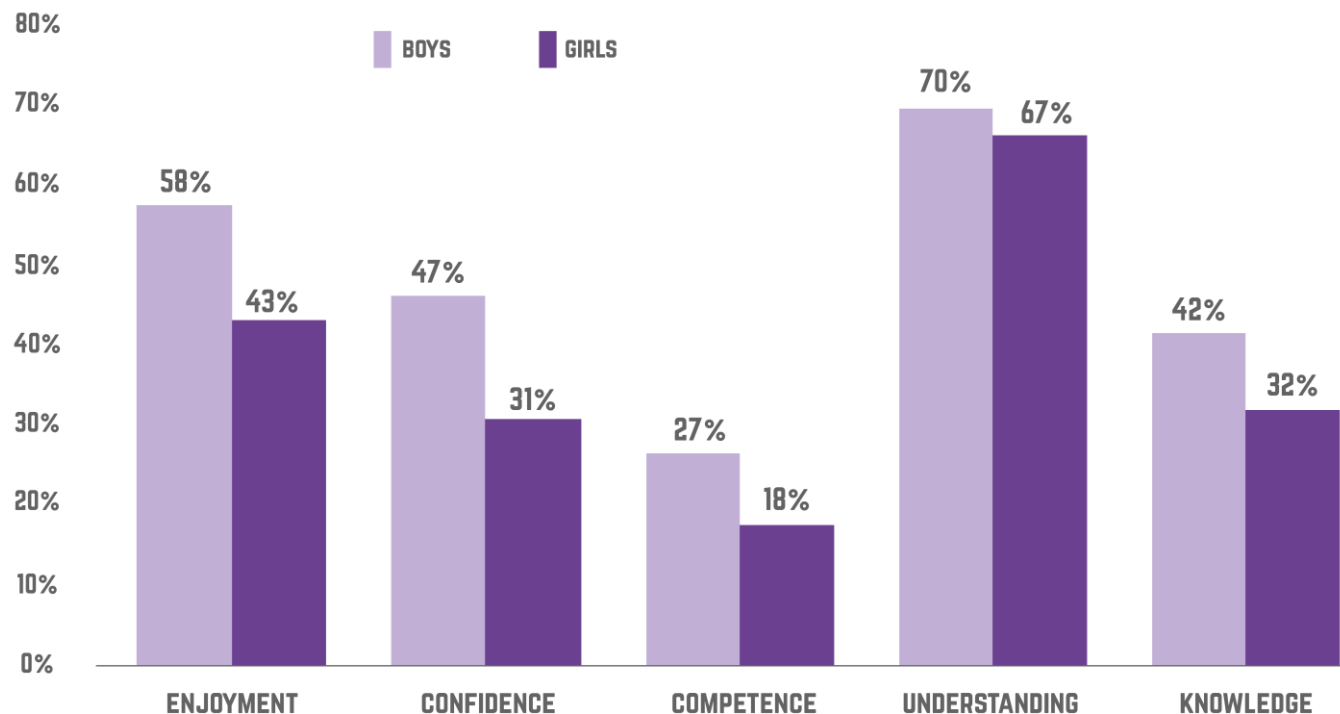


# DIFFERENCES BY GENDER

## GIRLS ARE LESS LIKELY TO ENJOY BEING ACTIVE THAN BOYS

Boys are more likely to report a positive attitude than girls across all statements. This gap is widest for finding sport and physical activity enjoyable and feeling confident when taking part.

### THE PRESENCE OF POSITIVE ATTITUDES: YEARS 3-11 (AGES 7-16) (PROPORTION WHO STRONGLY AGREE)



#### Years 1-2 (ages 5-7) children

Boys are more likely to love playing sport, while girls are more likely to love being active.

Boys are slightly more likely than girls to say they find sport easy.

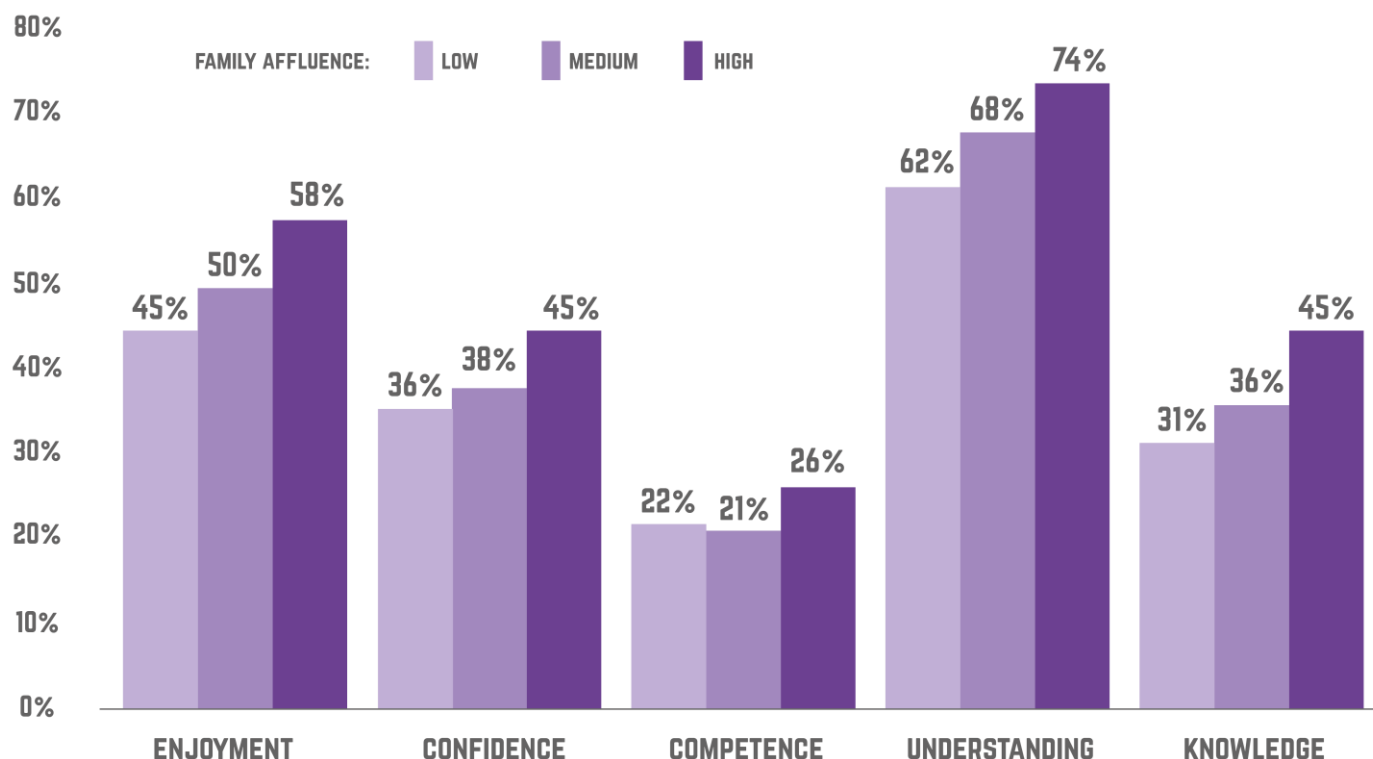


# DIFFERENCES BY FAMILY AFFLUENCE

## THOSE FROM THE LEAST AFFLUENT FAMILIES ARE LESS LIKELY TO ENJOY BEING ACTIVE

Those from the least affluent families are less likely to report positive attitudes to sport and exercise. The gap is narrowest for finding sport easy (competence).

### THE PRESENCE OF POSITIVE ATTITUDES: YEARS 3-11 (AGES 7-16) (PROPORTION WHO STRONGLY AGREE)



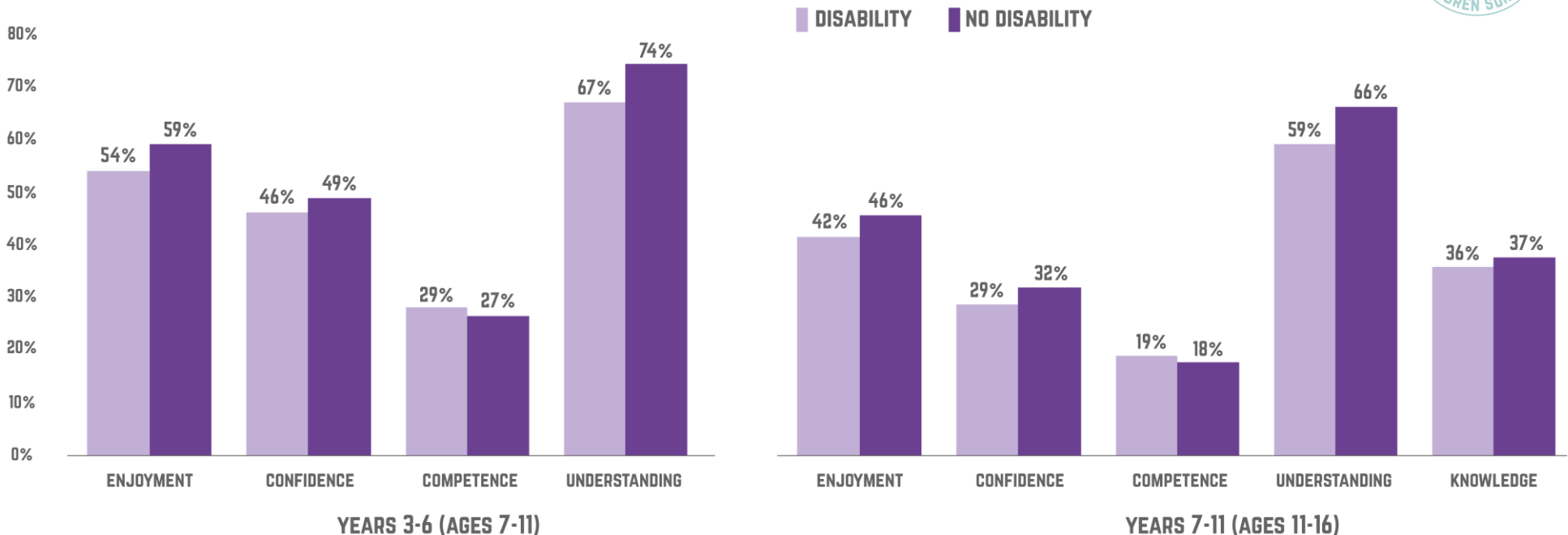
# DIFFERENCES BY DISABILITY

## UNDERSTANDING OF WHY TAKING PART IS GOOD FOR THEM IS LOWER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

Children and young people with a disability are less likely to report they enjoy taking part, they feel confident when taking part and they understand why taking part is good for them, than those without a disability. There's no difference for finding sport easy (competence) and knowing how to get involved or improve.



### THE PRESENCE OF POSITIVE ATTITUDES: YEARS 3-11 (AGES 7-16) (PROPORTION WHO STRONGLY AGREE)



[LINK TO DATA TABLES](#)



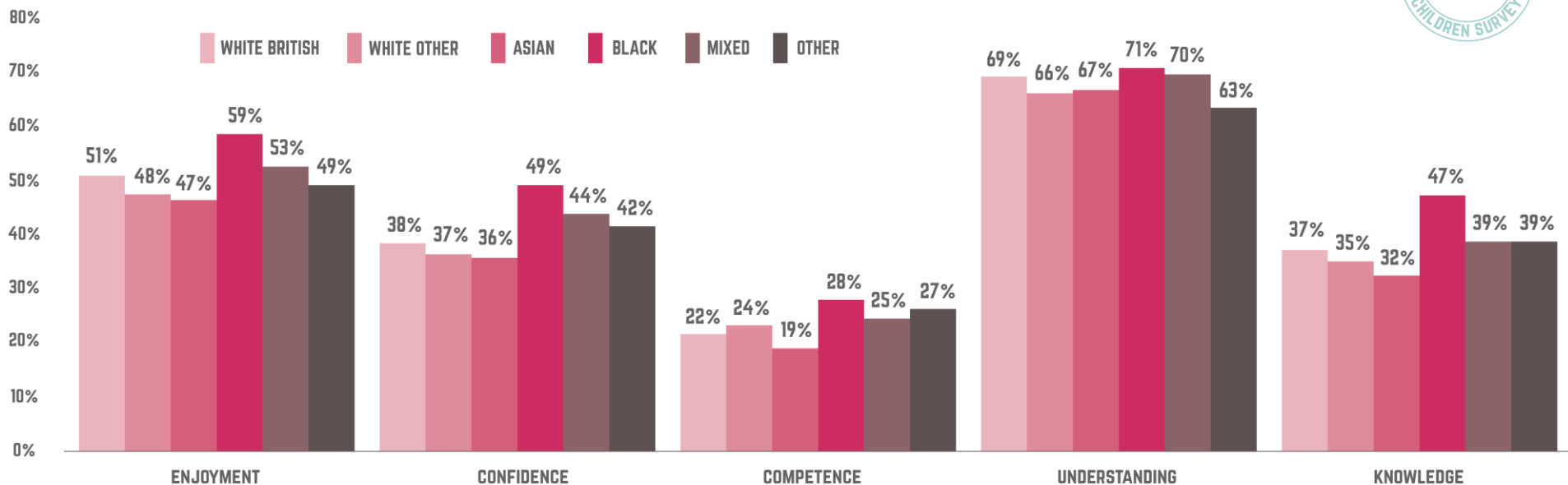
# DIFFERENCES BY ETHNICITY

## BLACK CHILDREN ARE MORE PHYSICALLY LITERATE THAN ALL OTHER ETHNIC GROUPS

Black children and young people are more likely to report they enjoy taking part, they feel confident when taking part and they know how to get involved or improve, than those from other ethnic groups.

In contrast, Asian children and young people are less likely to report they find sport easy (competence) than those from other ethnic groups.

### THE PRESENCE OF POSITIVE ATTITUDES: YEARS 3-11 (AGES 7-16) (PROPORTION WHO STRONGLY AGREE)



[LINK TO DATA TABLES](#)



# SEGMENTATION

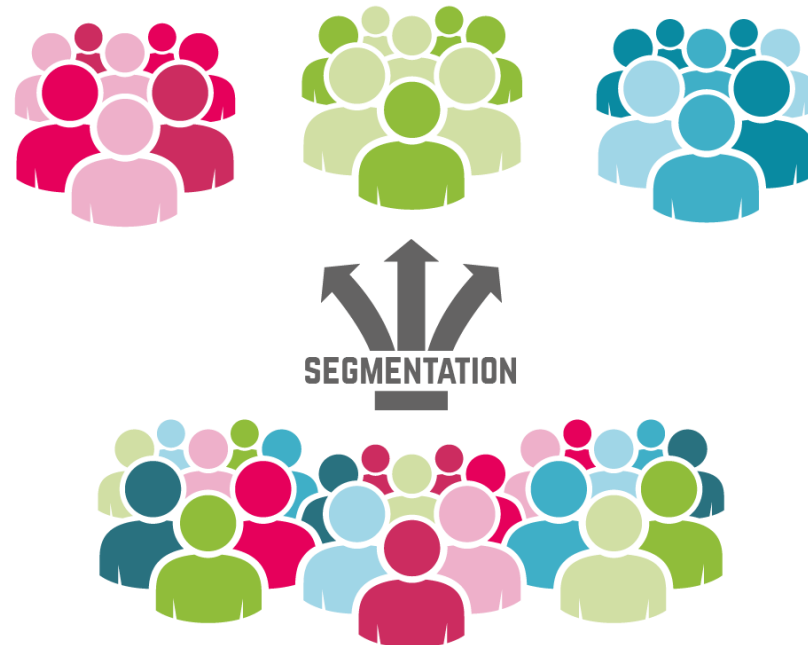
Market segmentation is the process of dividing the population into groups, or segments, based on different characteristics – in this case their attitudes towards sport and physical activity.

Grouping individuals in this way will let us tailor delivery in a more informed way to maximise the impact we have.

# NEXT STEPS

We'll build on this analysis by creating a market segmentation of children and young people in England. This will be based on their sport and physical activity behaviours and attitudes, supplemented by wider market insight.

We hope to start sharing resources from this later in 2019.





# NOTES

## THE ACTIVE LIVES CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SURVEY IS AN ONLINE SURVEY

Carried out by Ipsos MORI, it involves online questionnaires being completed in school during lesson time. Parents of Years 1-2 children are asked to complete a separate online questionnaire providing behavioural data for these children – the children themselves answer basic questions about their attitudes only.

More information on the survey can be found [here](#).

LINK TO MORE INFORMATION ON MEASURES AND DEMOGRAPHICS



## DATA CONSIDERATIONS

### THE ACHIEVED SAMPLE

Attitudinal responses: 130,194 (pupils in Years 1-11)

Behavioural responses: 109,503 (parents of pupils in Years 1-2 and pupils in Years 3-11).

**DATA HAVE BEEN WEIGHTED** to Department for Education pupil population estimates from the January 2016 school census for geography and key demographics.

**CONFIDENCE INTERVALS** can be found in the linked tables. These indicate that if repeated samples were taken and confidence intervals computed for each sample, 95% of the intervals would contain the true value. Only significant differences are reported within the commentary. Where results are reported as being the same for two groups, any differences fall within the margin of error.

## DEFINITIONS

**MODERATE ACTIVITY** is defined as activity where you raise your heart rate and feel a little out of breath (children were asked whether it made them breathe faster).

**AT SCHOOL** refers to activity done while at school, during normal school hours. It includes activities in PE lessons and break times, but excludes activities at before and after school clubs, even if these take place at school.

**OUTSIDE SCHOOL** refers to activity done outside of school hours. It includes anything done before getting to school and after leaving school (including travel to/from), as well as activity done at the weekend, on holiday days and at before and after school clubs, even if these took place at school.

### ASSOCIATIONS

Where associations between attitudes and activity levels, mental wellbeing, individual development or community development are referenced, this doesn't tell us about causality. We don't know the direction of the association or whether we're seeing a direct or indirect link.

# NOTES

Standard demographic breakdowns are not applicable for children of all ages, therefore simpler questions were often used.

[LINK TO MORE INFORMATION ON MEASURES AND DEMOGRAPHICS](#)



## DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS FOR CHILDREN

### AGE

The survey is undertaken in schools, therefore we have used school year as the main age variable. This is split into three groups:

- Years 1-2 (ages 5-7)
- Years 3-6 (ages 7-11)
- Years 7-11 (ages 11-16).

### GENDER

Children and young people were given the option to select boy, girl, other or prefer not to say. Responses to 'other' are included in the data tables but not presented in this report due to low sample sizes.

### FAMILY AFFLUENCE SCALE

The Family Affluence Scale provides an indication of the social status of children and young people's families. The scale is derived from a series of questions about their home and family such as car ownership, computers, and foreign holidays. Care should be taken when looking across year groups, as the age of the child is likely to impact on certain elements of the scale (e.g. families with older children may be more likely to own digital devices and travel abroad).

### DISABILITY

Limiting disability is defined as an individual reporting they have a physical or mental health condition or illness that has lasted or is expected to last 12 months or more, and that this has a substantial effect on their ability to do normal daily activities. Here, we just ask about disability without the reference to it being limiting or long term. A slightly adapted version of the standard Office for National Statistics (ONS) harmonised disability question (to make the language appropriate to children) is asked to parents of children in Years 1-2 and to young people in Years 7-11. However, comparisons shouldn't be made as parents and young people are likely to respond differently. A simpler question, 'do you need additional help', is asked of Years 3-6 children. This gets higher levels of agreement.

### ETHNICITY

Children and young people in Years 3-11 were asked a simplified question about ethnicity, while parents of Years 1-2 children were asked the full ONS standard question. For the purposes of analysis, Chinese has been grouped with 'Other' from the parent responses.

## DRIVERS ANALYSIS

### DATA CONSIDERATIONS

1. Analysis was only undertaken on data with complete information.
2. Analysis was split by Years 1-2, Years 3-6 and Years 7-11 age groups.
3. Moderate minutes of sport and physical activity were analysed by both at school and outside school separately.
4. Happiness was analysed on a 10-point scale. For infant, happiness was analysed by agree vs neutral/disagree.
5. Resilience and trust were analysed by strongly agree vs do not strongly agree.
6. Attitudes were analysed by those who strongly agree vs those who do not strongly agree. For infant, 'find sport easy' was analysed by yes vs no.

SEE APPENDICES



The analytical technique used to establish drivers of behaviours is regression analysis. This is a statistical technique which reveals associations between children's activity levels (or outcomes) with each of their personal socio-demographic characteristics and their agreement or not to the attitude statements. It reveals which characteristics are influential for the activity time being modelled.

Characteristics may show complex relationships with each other. For example, the effect of an attitude may be different for boys and girls, therefore 'main effects' were calculated for each attitude indicating the impact of the presence of that attitude, regardless of the other attitudes and socio-demographic characteristics.

Specifically:

- A reference group was set (with index 1.00) based on those who do not strongly agree to all attitude statements AND those who are male, from high affluence families, do not have a disability, are from white British backgrounds and are in Years 6-7 (primary/secondary analysis).

- The main effects were translated into indices to be compared to the reference group. An index of 1.25 indicates a 25% greater likelihood to report the measure in question (i.e. minutes of activity, happiness, resilience or trust).
- Main effects were also combined to look at the impact of combinations of attitudes on the measure, again being translated into indices to aid interpretation.

We should consider findings as giving us broad indications, rather than seeing it as a cause and effect model.