



Department
for Education

Evidence on enrichment in schools and colleges

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Contents

Contents	2
Summary	3
Enrichment in schools	3
What does current provision look like?	3
What does the evidence base show?	3
Enrichment in further education	5
Current provision in FE settings	5
What does the evidence base show?	6
Perspectives on enrichment	6
Children and young people	6
Parents	7

Summary

This publication includes information on current evidence on enrichment in schools and colleges.

Enrichment in schools

What does current provision look like?

Nearly all schools offer some form of enrichment to their pupils. In the 2024 to 2025 academic year, research suggests some clear trends in the types of activities offered. Across all schools, competitive team sports were the most commonly offered activity (88%) in 2024 to 2025. This was followed by activities involving positions of responsibility (such as mentoring) (79%) and musical performance (such as orchestra and choir) (75%)¹.

Among mainstream primary school pupils (Key Stages 1 and 2), 72% were reported by their parents to have taken part in at least one activity in the summer term of 2024 to 2025. Similar participation rates were reported by pupils in Key Stage 3 (also 72%), while a lower proportion of pupils in Key Stage 4 said they took part (60%). Slightly under half of pupils attending special schools (primary and secondary) were reported by their parents to have taken part in extracurricular activities that term (45%)².

What does the evidence base show?

This section highlights studies, conducted in England and internationally, that have investigated participation in enrichment and its association with outcomes for school-aged children. Enrichment encompasses a wide variety of activity types and delivery methods and children who take part in enrichment have different needs, interests and experiences. As a result, the potential impacts of enrichment activities can vary. However, the evidence suggests that participation can be associated with a range of positive outcomes.

School engagement and education outcomes

A school's enrichment offer forms part of its wider environment and can play a part in pupils' perception of being at school. As such, enrichment has been associated with pupils' sense of school belonging³⁴, defined as "the extent to which students feel

¹ [School and college voice: omnibus surveys for 2024 to 2025](#), data tables, June 2025

² [Parent, pupil and learner voice: omnibus surveys for 2024 to 2025](#), parent data tables, June 2025

³ O'Donnell, AN and others. [Extracurricular activity participation, school belonging, and depressed mood: a test of the compensation hypothesis during adolescence](#). *Applied Developmental Science* 2024: volume 28, pages 596–611 (viewed 20 April 2026)

⁴ Allen, KA., Vella-Brodrick, D., Waters, L., [Fostering School Belonging in Secondary Schools Using a Socio-Ecological Framework](#). *The Educational and Developmental Psychologist* 2016: volume 33, pages 97–121 (viewed on 20 April 2026)

personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment”.⁵

While it is difficult for studies to untangle cause and effect, belonging is shown to be positively correlated with a range of outcomes, including academic attainment and school attendance⁶. In addition, studies examining participation in extracurricular activities in their own right have found that such participation is similarly associated with higher educational attainment.⁷⁸⁹¹⁰

Enrichment may also be used by schools to encourage educational engagement. Whilst the international evidence base of a relationship between enrichment and attendance is mixed, there are emerging reports from case studies in England suggesting a promising link between enrichment and whole school attendance.¹¹¹²

Enrichment activities may be designed to complement the curriculum and promote subject interest.¹³ For example, research suggests that STEM enrichment, within or outside of the school environment can have a positive effect on students’ interests and attitudes in STEM.¹⁴¹⁵¹⁶

Wellbeing and soft skills

Enrichment activities provide children and young people with opportunities to explore their interests, spend time with friends and meet new people.¹⁷

⁵ Goodenow, C., [The psychological sense of school membership among adolescents: Scale development and educational correlates](#). Psychology in the Schools 1993: volume 30, pages 79–90 (viewed on 20 April 2026)

⁶ Korpershoek, H., Canrinus, E.T., Fokkens-Bruinsma, M., de Boer, H. [The relationships between school belonging and students’ motivational, social-emotional, behavioural, and academic outcomes in secondary education: a meta-analytic review](#). Research Papers in Education 2020. Volume 35, pages 641–680 viewed on 20 April 2026.

⁷ Shulruf, B. 2010. [Do extra-curricular activities in schools improve educational outcomes? A critical review and meta-analysis of the literature](#). International Review of Education 2010. Volume 56, pages 591–612 viewed on 20 April 2026.

⁸ Farb, A.F., Matjasko, J.L., [Recent advances in research on school-based extracurricular activities and adolescent development](#). Developmental Review 2012. Volume 32, pages 1–48 viewed on 20 April 2026.

⁹ Babbini, N., Tuckett, S., [Laurus Trust - Student outcomes and Progression](#). Education Policy Institute 2024. Viewed on 20 April 2026.

¹⁰ Chanfreau, J and others. [Out of school activities during primary school and KS2 attainment](#). 2016. Viewed on 20 April 2026.

¹¹ Babbini, N., Tuckett, S., [Laurus Trust - Student outcomes and Progression](#). Education Policy Institute 2024. Viewed on 20 April 2026.

¹² Centre for Young Lives, Leeds Beckett University and YMCA George Williams College [Beyond the classroom: The role of enrichment in tackling the school absence crisis](#). 2025. Viewed on 20 April 2026.

¹³ The Institute for Research in Schools. [The R&I Framework: Pilot Project. Growing Research and Innovation in Schools](#). 2025. Viewed on 20 April 2026.

¹⁴ Young, J., Ortiz, N., Young, J. [STEMulating Interest: A Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Out-of-School Time on Student STEM Interest](#). International Journal of Education in Mathematics, Science and Technology 2017. Volume 5, pages 62–74 viewed on 20 April 2026.

¹⁵ Xia, X., Bentley, L.R., Fan, X., Tai, R.H., [STEM Outside of School: a Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Informal Science Education on Students’ Interests and Attitudes for STEM](#). International Journal of Science and Mathematics Education 2024. Volume 23, pages 1153–1181 viewed on 20 April 2026.

¹⁶ The Institute for Research in Schools. [The R&I Framework: Pilot Project. Growing Research and Innovation in Schools](#). 2025. Viewed on 20 April 2026.

¹⁷ [Barriers and enablers to participation in youth activities research - GOV.UK](#). 2025. Viewed on 20 April 2026.

Engagement with the arts during childhood and adolescence has been found to play a role in wellbeing and factors relating to social cohesion.^{18,19} Qualitative research with young people found that extracurricular activities can boost young people's confidence to interact socially with others and extend their social networks²⁰. Analysis of longitudinal data found that participation in school-based extracurricular activities promoted friendships with other participants.²¹

Participation in after-school extracurricular activities has been associated with higher levels of life satisfaction, optimism and better mental health.²² One study found that participating in a greater breadth of extracurricular activity predicted pupils' school belonging two years later and, through school belonging, decreased depressed mood.²³ Similarly, moving from non-participation to participation in extracurricular activities during the transition to early adolescence has been associated with better mental health, mediated by feelings of belonging.²⁴

Enrichment may also provide the context for trusted relationships with adults, and an opportunity to provide targeted support for vulnerable children, including those considered at risk of violence or who may need support with their behaviour. The Youth Endowment Fund suggests that sports programmes may support children vulnerable to involvement in violence, with desirable impacts reported on wellbeing and behavioural difficulties including reducing aggression²⁵. Similarly, mentoring, which may be delivered as part of enrichment programmes, was reported to have a moderate impact on violent crime as well as behavioural difficulties and educational outcomes.²⁶

Enrichment in further education

Current provision in FE settings

A [2026 survey of Association of Colleges members](#) found that:

- 66% of respondents report having a whole-college strategy for enrichment with clear aims and objectives
- 90% encouraged all learners to be involved in at least one enrichment activity

¹⁸ [Evidence summary for policy: The role of arts in improving health and wellbeing - GOV.UK](#). 2020. Viewed on 20 April 2026.

¹⁹ [Youth provision and life outcomes research - GOV.UK](#). 2024. Viewed on 20 April 2026.

²⁰ Social Mobility Commission. [An unequal playing field: extra-curricular activities, soft skills and social mobility - GOV.UK](#). 2019. Viewed on 20 April 2026.

²¹ Schaefer, D.R., Simpkins, S.D., Vest, A.E., Price, C.D. [The Contribution of Extracurricular Activities to Adolescent Friendships: New Insights through Social Network Analysis](#). *Developmental Psychology* 2011. Volume 47, pages 1141–1152 viewed on 20 April 2026.

²² Oberle, E and others. [Screen time and extracurricular activities as risk and protective factors for mental health in adolescence: A population-level study](#). *Preventive Medicine* 2020. Volume 141, 106291 viewed on 20 April 2026

²³ O'Donnell, A.W and others. [Extracurricular activity participation, school belonging, and depressed mood: a test of the compensation hypothesis during adolescence](#). *Applied Developmental Science* 2024. Volume 28, pages 596–611 viewed on 20 April 2026.

²⁴ Oberle, E and others. [Benefits of Extracurricular Participation in Early Adolescence: Associations with Peer Belonging and Mental Health](#). *Journal of Youth Adolescence* 2019. Volume 48, pages 2255–2270 viewed on 20 April 2026.

²⁵ Youth Endowment Fund. [Toolkit – Sports programmes](#). Viewed 20 April 2026

²⁶ Youth Endowment Fund. [Toolkit – Mentoring](#). Viewed 20 April 2026.

- 63% report offering all their students access at least 80 hours of enrichment activity per year

Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) is not part of the core curriculum for students and forms part of colleges' enrichment provision. The Association for Colleges survey reports that 93% of college respondents say they include physical or sexual health promotion projects in their enrichment offers.

What does the evidence base show?

Whilst there is a lack of research specifically on the role of enrichment in further education in England, the [Valuing Enrichment project](#), a four year collaboration between the Association of Colleges, the University of Derby, and funded by NCFE, has provided valuable qualitative insights. The project involved a literature review and a mixed-methods approach to explore what enrichment means within colleges and how it impacts learners.

This sector insight within the valuing enrichment project suggests that colleges may offer enrichment as part of the wider support in developing broader life skills and progressing into future education and employment. Some colleges reported providing additional activities for learners with SEND, aimed at supporting the development of independence skills and cultural capital. Through qualitative case studies and engagement with staff and students, the project found that enrichment provided opportunities for learners to extend their knowledge beyond the general education curriculum. By taking active roles in enrichment activities, learners were reported to have developed soft skills such as teamwork and communication. Enrichment was also perceived to enhance learners' effort and persistence in their studies.

However, research suggests that participation in enrichment activities varies by institution and course type. A 2018 Department for Education [survey of post-16 learners](#) found higher participation in most non-qualification activity types among school sixth form learners, than those in other institutions. This included across careers guidance and support, school clubs and certificates such as The Duke of Edinburgh's award. Across organisations, participation was significantly higher among post-16 students whose main qualification was academic (as opposed to technical) across school clubs (59% compared to 26%) and organised certificates such as The Duke of Edinburgh's award (36% compared to 13%).

Perspectives on enrichment

Children and young people

Survey research exploring [young people's participation in youth activities](#) (within and out of school) found that the most commonly cited motivations for taking part included:

- enjoyment
- learning new skills
- keeping fit
- spending time with friends

Exploring young people’s experiences further, qualitative research highlighted that young people emphasised the importance of activities aligning with their interests and motivations²⁷. Participants also described a range of perceived benefits through engaging with activities, including improved mental and physical wellbeing, and positive impacts on future prospects.

Parents

While there is limited research that captures parental attitudes towards all types of enrichment, research suggests broad parental support for enrichment activities. [One poll](#) found 51% of parents supported the idea of extending the school day to create more time for enrichment. Qualitative research similarly has found parents value extracurricular activities, with reports of a range of perceived benefits, such as self-confidence and social skills.²⁸²⁹

Evidence on the availability and uptake of activities broadly reflects these attitudes. A recent poll of parents of school-aged children in state, grammar and private schools in England, conducted as part of the [Parent Voice Project](#), found that the majority believed that their child’s school offered a broad or very broad range of activities (62%). However, the survey found that 75% of non-grammar state school parents and 81% of grammar school parents reported barriers to their child participating in these opportunities, compared with 63% of private school parents. Across all parents, the child not wanting to take part was the most commonly cited barrier.

These findings are reflected in a DfE [survey of primary and secondary school parents](#). Among parents whose children participated in activities, most commonly reported motivations included:

- their child liking the activity (88%)
- opportunities to develop skills (55%)
- building confidence (54%)
- the physical health benefits (53%)

²⁷ [Barriers and enablers to participation in youth activities research - GOV.UK](#) 2025. Viewed 20 April 2026.

²⁸ Social Mobility Commission. [Extra-curricular activities, soft skills and social mobility](#). 2019. Viewed on 20 April 2026.

²⁹ Holloway, S.L., Pimlott-Wilson, H. [Enriching Children, Institutionalizing Childhood? Geographies of Play, Extracurricular Activities, and Parenting in England](#). *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 2014. Volume 104, pages 613–627 viewed on 20 April 2026.

In contrast, among parents of pupils who did not participate, the most frequently cited reasons included:

- the child not wanting to take part (38%)
- schools not offering activities which interested their child (27%)
- the child attending activities outside of school instead (27%)



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