



Common Misconceptions in PE & Sport

Nursery to Year 6 | Linked to the Park Road PE Curriculum

This document identifies common misunderstandings pupils may bring to PE lessons and suggests simple ways to expose and correct them. It is designed to sit alongside PE Passport planning and assessment rather than replace unit-specific teaching guidance.

Whole-school misconceptions to watch for

"Being good at PE means being the fastest or strongest." Success also includes control, decision making, teamwork, creativity, resilience, leadership and improvement.	"Practice means repeating the same thing as quickly as possible." Effective practice is purposeful: pupils adjust technique, use feedback and repeat accurately.	"Winning means we performed well." Performance should be judged by technique, tactics, teamwork, effort and progress as well as outcome.
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EYFS: Nursery and Reception

Unit / context	Likely misconception	Teaching response / clarification	Quick diagnostic question
Stability / balance	Balance means staying completely still.	Balance can be static or dynamic. Encourage pupils to control the body before, during and after movement.	Can you keep control while moving as well as when still?
Yoga	Yoga is only stretching or copying a pose.	Emphasise breathing, controlled transitions, body awareness and holding positions safely.	What helps you stay controlled when moving between two poses?
Target Games	Throwing harder always makes the object more accurate.	Explore force and direction separately; accuracy often needs controlled rather than maximum force.	Would you use the same amount of force for a near and a far target?
Athletics	Running, jumping and throwing are just about going as fast or far as possible.	Build safe technique, body control and coordinated movement before focusing on distance or speed.	What could help your jump be controlled as well as long?
Gymnastics - travelling / shapes / high & low	A shape is only something made while standing still.	Show that shapes and levels can appear during balances, travelling and transitions.	Can you show a low shape while travelling?
Locomotion	Moving faster always means moving better.	Focus on space, direction, control and responding safely to others and signals.	How can you move quickly without bumping into anyone?
Object Control	Catching is done only with the hands.	Teach whole-body preparation: tracking, positioning, soft hands and absorbing force.	What does your body need to do before the ball reaches your hands?
Fundamental Movement Skills	Skills such as running, jumping and throwing are separate and never used together.	Use simple combinations and games to show how movement skills link and transfer.	Where might you need to run and then throw?
Invasion Game Skills	The player with the ball should always keep it.	Introduce passing, moving into space and helping the team retain possession.	Where could you move to help the person with the ball?
Striking & Fielding	The striker's job is only to hit the ball hard.	Emphasise controlled contact, direction, running choices and the fielding team's roles.	Is a well-placed gentle strike sometimes better than a hard one?

Personal Challenges	A personal best means being better than someone else.	Clarify that personal challenges compare pupils with their own previous performance.	Who are you trying to improve against in a personal challenge?
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Key Stage 1: Years 1 and 2

Unit / context	Likely misconception	Teaching response / clarification	Quick diagnostic question
Fundamental Movement Skills 2 & 3	Once a pupil can perform a skill, it is fully mastered.	Vary speed, direction, equipment and context so pupils develop adaptable rather than rehearsed movement.	Can you use the same skill successfully in a different game or space?
Object Control 2	Good control means gripping equipment as tightly as possible.	Model relaxed, appropriate grip and body positioning for sending and receiving.	What happens if your hands or body are too tense?
Gymnastics - points, patches & pathways	A sequence is just several actions performed one after another.	Teach clear links, transitions, contrast and start/finish positions so actions become a purposeful sequence.	What makes two movements look connected?
Dance - Fire of London / Pirates	Dance is copying the teacher exactly.	Move from imitation to selecting, adapting and arranging actions to communicate an idea.	How could you change this movement to show the theme more clearly?
Yoga / Yoga Storybook	The most flexible pupil is the most successful.	Value control, breathing, safe range of motion and concentration rather than extreme positions.	What shows good control even if the pose is not very deep?
Invasion Game Skills 1 & 2	Everyone should follow the ball.	Teach width, space and simple support positions away from the ball.	Where is the useful space when lots of players are around the ball?
Net & Wall Game Skills 1 & 2	The aim is always to hit the ball as hard as possible.	Develop placement, control, readiness and recovery before power.	Where could you send the ball to make it difficult to return?
OAA	The quickest group is automatically the best team.	Reward communication, planning, listening and safe problem-solving as well as completion time.	What did your team do that helped everyone contribute?
Striking & Fielding Game Skills 2	Fielders should all chase the ball.	Develop simple roles, backing up, throwing to useful areas and communication.	Where should fielders who are not nearest the ball move?
Athletics 2	The longest run-up always produces the best jump or throw.	Teach controlled approach, take-off/release and balanced recovery.	How do you know whether your approach helped your technique?
Target Games 2 & 3	Every target needs the same technique.	Adjust force, angle, stance and choice of equipment according to distance and target size.	What would you change for a smaller or further-away target?

Tri Golf	Golf success depends mainly on hitting the ball hard.	Prioritise alignment, controlled swing, contact and judging distance.	What matters more for a short target: power or control?
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Lower Key Stage 2: Years 3 and 4

Unit / context	Likely misconception	Teaching response / clarification	Quick diagnostic question
Football / Netball / Tag Rugby / Hockey	The best attacker always moves directly towards the goal.	Teach creating and using space, support, width, timing and choosing when to pass, carry or shoot.	When might moving away from the goal help your team attack?
Dodgeball	Throwing as hard as possible is the main route to success.	Develop accuracy, timing, catching, evasion, teamwork and knowledge of rules.	Which is more useful: a powerful inaccurate throw or a controlled accurate one?
Dance - Around the World / Romans	A themed dance is accurate if pupils copy stereotypical movements.	Focus on movement qualities, composition and respectful use of researched cultural/historical ideas.	What movement quality helps communicate the theme without relying on a stereotype?
Tri Golf / Tennis	Power should be developed before consistency.	Secure contact, control, placement and recovery before asking pupils to increase force.	Can you repeat the same successful action three times?
OAA	One strong leader should make every decision.	Rotate roles and teach collaborative planning, communication, navigation and reflection.	How can a team use more than one person's idea?
Rounders / Cricket	Batters should always aim for the furthest possible hit.	Teach placement, awareness of fielders, running decisions and risk versus reward.	Where is the safest space to strike into?
Health Related Fitness	Fitness means only stamina or being able to run for a long time.	Introduce components such as strength, speed, flexibility and muscular endurance alongside cardiovascular endurance.	Which type of fitness is most important for holding a strong body position?
Athletics 3 & 4	More effort always produces better technique.	Use feedback to refine body position, rhythm, take-off, release and pacing.	What technical change improved your result rather than simply trying harder?
Year 4 Swimming	If a pupil can swim 25 metres, all swimming requirements are automatically met.	Assess distance alongside effective use of recognised strokes and safe self-rescue.	What else must a swimmer be able to do besides travel 25 metres?

Year 4 Gymnastics	More difficult movements automatically make a better routine.	Prioritise control, body tension, safe landing, quality transitions and appropriate challenge.	Would a simple movement performed with excellent control score better than an unsafe difficult one?
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Upper Key Stage 2: Years 5 and 6

Unit / context	Likely misconception	Teaching response / clarification	Quick diagnostic question
Basketball / Football / Hockey	Good tactics are fixed plans that should not change during a game.	Teach pupils to read space, opponents and teammates and adapt decisions as play changes.	What might make you change your original plan during a game?
Lacrosse / Ultimate Frisbee	Transferable invasion-game principles mean every sport is played in exactly the same way.	Compare common principles such as support and space while explicitly teaching sport-specific rules and techniques.	What is similar to another invasion game, and what must you change here?
Team Building & Problem Solving	Leadership means giving the most instructions.	Develop listening, questioning, delegation, encouragement and adapting a plan.	How can a leader help without doing all the thinking?
Dance - The Haka	The Haka is simply an energetic dance routine.	Teach it as a culturally significant Māori performance tradition; avoid reducing it to gestures without context.	Why is understanding the cultural context important when performing?
Year 5 Swimming	A technically strong swimmer does not need water-safety or self-rescue knowledge.	Treat survival skills and safe decision-making as essential alongside stroke refinement and stamina.	What should you do if you unexpectedly enter deep water?
Year 5 Gymnastics	Synchronisation means everyone must perform the same action.	Differentiate synchronisation, matching, mirroring, contrast and canon; explore when each compositional device is used.	How is canon different from moving in unison?
Leadership	A successful leader is the loudest or most confident pupil.	Assess organisation, clarity, inclusion, safety, feedback and ability to adapt.	How can a quieter leader still lead effectively?
Personal Challenges	Improvement only counts if the final score or time is better.	Recognise technical, tactical and consistency gains, even when an outcome measure changes little.	What improved in your performance even if your score stayed the same?
Cricket / Rounders	Once a tactic works, it should be repeated every time.	Encourage pupils to read field positions, game context and risk before selecting tactics.	What information should influence where you strike or throw next?

Athletics 5 & 6	Elite-looking technique is identical for every pupil.	Teach key principles while allowing appropriate individual variation; use evidence from performance to refine technique.	Which technical principle matters here, and where might individual style differ?
OAA	Navigation is mainly about following another person.	Develop independent orientation, route choice, checking position and shared decision-making.	How can you confirm your location rather than just trusting the person in front?
Dodgeball / officiating	A referee's job is to stop the game and punish mistakes.	Frame officiating as enabling safe, fair and flowing participation through clear application of rules.	What can an official do to keep a game fair and moving?
Health Related Fitness	Feeling exhausted proves a session was effective.	Teach purpose, intensity, recovery, technique and training goals; fatigue alone is not evidence of quality.	How can you tell whether an activity matched its intended fitness goal?

Using misconceptions in teaching and assessment

Before teaching	During teaching	During practice	After teaching
Use one diagnostic question or practical task to reveal what pupils already believe about the skill, rule or tactic.	Name the misconception explicitly, model the correct idea and give pupils a contrasting example to test it.	Avoid praising outcome alone. Question technique, decision making, teamwork, safety and improvement.	Revisit the diagnostic question in a game, sequence or challenge to check that pupils can apply the corrected understanding.

High-value questions across PE

- What are you trying to improve: the outcome, the technique, or both?
- What information did you use to make that decision?
- How did your body position affect the result?
- What changed when you adjusted speed, force, direction or timing?
- How did your movement help your teammate or make the task harder for an opponent?
- What would you keep the same next time, and what would you change?
- Can you apply this idea in a different sport, sequence or challenge?

Subject leader note

These misconceptions are intended as likely starting points rather than a checklist of errors every pupil will make. Teachers should use PE Passport unit content, observation and questioning to identify the misconceptions that are actually present in their class. For Years 4 and 5, relevant swimming and gymnastics misconceptions should be shared with Trafford Leisure to support consistent language and assessment.