NSW GOVERNMENT
Education

School Sport Unit newsletter

Term 1 2026

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Dear colleagues

Welcome to the new school year.

The School Sport Unit (SSU), in the Student Support and Specialist Programs directorate in Teaching, Learning and Student Wellbeing division, is committed to supporting public schools across NSW to deliver safe, inclusive and quality sport and physical activity for students.

The work that you and your staff do each week makes a real difference. Physical activity supports students to connect with peers, build confidence and skills, and is essential for young people's health and wellbeing.

In this newsletter you will find practical resources and updates to support your planning and delivery in Term 1, 2026.

Thank you for your continued commitment to helping students meet the mandatory physical activity requirements.

Peter Banks
Leader, School Sport Unit

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2025 School Sport Unit award ceremony recap

The School Sport Unit held its award ceremony online on Thursday 11 December 2025 to recognise outstanding contributions to school sport across NSW. Congratulations to the 49 award recipients and to all nominees for the work you do to provide quality sport and physical activity opportunities for students.

You can view the full list of recipients on the School Sport Unit website.

Nominations for next year's awards will open in Term 3 via the same link. We look forward to recognising more of our colleagues in 2026.

2025 NSWPSSA Executive Officer's Excellence Award recipient Jonathon Russell, King Street Public School with the school mascot, Tawny (a tawny frogmouth).

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School swimming and water safety programs

Water safety remains a priority for NSW schools, and in 2025, the School Swimming and Water Safety Program once again delivered meaningful outcomes for students across the state. Thousands of students strengthened their swimming skills, improved their water confidence and developed essential survival strategies that could one day save a life.

Now in its 72nd year, the program continues to support primary schools in delivering structured, skill-based swimming and water safety instruction that meets the diverse needs of their students. Schools choose the format that works best for their community, whether that's an intensive 5-day survival program, a comprehensive 10-day swimming and water safety program, or a combination across year groups.

Secondary schools are also encouraged to take advantage of available funding to support learn-to-swim and water safety programs for Stage 4 students. These opportunities are particularly valuable for students who may not yet have achieved minimum swimming benchmarks in primary school.

Importantly, School Managed Funding is available to help schools tailor delivery to local needs, providing flexibility to increase participation and ensure students who need support most can access the program.

Planning for this season is now underway. Registrations for Term 3 and 4 2026 and Term 1 and 2 2027 programs are still open. Schools are encouraged to secure their place by visiting the School Swimming and Water Safety registration webpage and completing their registration.

We look forward to working with schools in 2026 to continue building safe, capable and confident swimmers across NSW.

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Policy and guidelines

Permission

With the start of a new year, schools are encouraged to use the resources that are available on the School Sport Unit website when setting up permission for sport and physical activity.

Templates to support schools are divided into 3 main areas:

- Weekly school sport and physical activity permission tool, incorporating updated sport-specific mandatory permission inclusions for aquatic activities, collision sports and snow sports
- Carnivals, gala days, knockouts, external providers permission
- Representative School Sport Pathway events.

Schools are reminded that Permission must haves (DOCX 35KB) must be included on all sport and physical activity permission notes.

Swimming carnivals

Swimming carnivals are structured activities. To support schools, advice on holding swimming carnivals is available on the School Sport Unit website in Supporting tools and resources. Schools should pay particular attention to the School swimming safety guide.

Free swimming is an unstructured activity and is not recommended. However, novelty events, if teacher-led, are possible. Some suggestions for age-appropriate, safe activities are available for download.

- Aquatic activities for younger students
- Aquatic activities for older students.

Policy-related email account

The policy team has a dedicated email account for ongoing support regarding sport policy related questions and issues. Get in touch with our team directly by email at: sportandphysicalactivity@det.nsw.edu.au.

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Representative School Sport

The School Sport Unit is hosting a series of trials to select area teams for the following state selection pathway programs for primary school students:

- NSW Australian Football Primary All Schools Girls 12 Years and Under Selection Pathway
- NSW Netball Primary All Schools Boys 12 Years and Under Selection Pathway.

To participate in a trial, parents and carers must register their child. The registration form and other information for each event can be found on the NSWPSSA event calendar. Parents and carers must only register their child for one of the trials.

Please contact Darren Lang, Sport Strategy and Planning Coordinator, if you have any further enquiries by email at darren.lang@det.nsw.edu.au or phone on **0447 808 678**.

Livestreamed events in 2026

To connect school communities to their students who are competing in the Representative School Sport Pathway, the School Sport Unit has identified a range of State Championship events to be livestreamed this year. The events scheduled for livestreaming will be promoted across the School Sport Unit website, as well as the School Sport Unit Facebook page.

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Disability and inclusion

The School Sport Unit provides a range of competitive and non-competitive opportunities for students with disability.

Multi-Sport and Come-and-Try athletics events are available for students from Kindergarten to Year 12 in mainstream, support and SSP settings. Schools can bring any number of students. Events are run at locations across NSW.

Boccia and tenpin bowling competitions are available in both primary and secondary settings. Schools are encouraged to enter a team and compete for a state title. Representative pathways are also available in both boccia and tenpin bowling. To learn more, visit the Participation Opportunities and Representative Tournaments pages.

Students with disability can also compete in multi-class events at swimming, cross country and athletics championships. Pathways for students with Autism in athletics and cross country have now been introduced. These complement the existing S19 pathway in swimming. To be eligible for these competitive pathways, students must obtain a specific classification for sport. This classification process is overseen by Sport Inclusion Australia, the national organisation that manages classification for athletes, in line with criteria and guidelines set by the international governing body, Virtus. To learn more about classification and to access eligibility application forms, visit the Classification page.

If you would like to join the distribution list to receive disability and inclusion information, or have any questions, please email InclusiveSchoolSport@det.nsw.edu.au.

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Sport and physical activity professional learning

Zone support and the zone excellence framework

The School Sport Unit supports zones with the advice, resources and planning tools to help you deliver safe, inclusive and exciting sporting opportunities for students.

The Zone Excellence Framework (ZEF) is one of these tools. The ZEF helps zones reflect on what is working well, identify areas to improve and plan clear next steps based on local strengths and goals. The ZEF does not score or rate zones.

The ZEF describes 3 stages of practice: delivering (meeting core requirements), sustaining and growing (strong teamwork and effective systems) and excelling (innovation, strong leadership and inclusive opportunities for all students).

Robert Cormack, Teacher Education Officer, supports zones with guidance on the ZEF and other zone resources. You can contact Rob at robert.cormack@det.nsw.edu.au.

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Olympics Unleashed

Kick off 2025 with an Olympian visit to your classroom. Olympics Unleashed is bringing Olympians to Year 3–6 and Year 9 classes across NSW and your school can be next!

Free for schools, your students will learn directly from athletes how to set goals, overcome challenges and follow their passion to reach their own personal best.

Find out more and register at Olympics Unleashed.

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Want to inspire your students? Olympics Unleashed brings Olympians to NSW schools for free school visits.

Looking for Olympic resources?

Capitalising on excitement sparked by the Milano Cortina 2026 Olympic Games the TeamAUS Olympic Schools resource hub offers teachers a diverse range of engaging, curriculum-aligned resources designed to delve into the fundamental Olympic values.

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We recognise the Ongoing Custodians of the lands and waterways where we work and live. We pay respect to Elders past and present as ongoing teachers of knowledge, songlines and stories. We strive to ensure every Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander learner in NSW achieves their potential through education.