Youth Sport Trust Conference Celebrates New Era for PE and School Sport as Government Extends Inclusion 2028 Grant

Thursday 5 March, 2026

- *National conference and awards championed the role of PE, sport and play in transforming young lives, including moving memorial legacy project created by pupils and staff at Southport's Churchtown Primary School.*
- *School Standards Minister used the conference to announce a major funding commitment to inclusive practice with the extension of Inclusion 2028 grant.*

Loughborough, 5th March 2026 - The Youth Sport Trust Conference 2026 brought together educators and partners from across the UK on 4th March 2026 at the Telford International Centre, for a key industry event exploring how physical education, sport and play can help young people be happy, healthy and thriving as we move into a new era for PE and School Sport.

During the event, School Standards Minister,
Georgia Gould, addressed delegates via a recorded video message, announcing an extension of the Inclusion 2028 grant, reaffirming the Government's commitment to improving access to inclusive sport and physical activity opportunities for young people across the country. The continuation of the Inclusion 2028 programme, led by Youth Sport Trust alongside a consortium of partners, will support more schools to embed inclusive practice through PE, sport and play.

An additional highlight of the event was the Youth Sport Trust Awards Dinner, held on the evening of 3rd March, hosted by TV presenter and Youth Sport Trust Early Years Champion, Radzi Chinyanganya. Schools, trusts and individuals were recognised for their commitment to creating positive change in the lives of young people through play, sport and physical activity. Red Roses legends Sarah Hunter and Abbie Ward and Managing Director of the recent Women's Rugby World Cup, Sarah Massey, also joined the event for a fireside chat to reflect on their experience of the tournament, what it means for girls in the game, and the importance of school sport.

This year's awards included a special accolade for Churchtown Primary School in Southport, which received recognition for an extraordinary community-led initiative centred around the healing and transformational power of play. Furthermore, pupils from Endeavour Learning Trust where also invited to open the event with a special performance, combining a powerful monologue with expressive dance, which honoured all of those impacted by the 2024 Southport attack.

Following the tragic loss of two much-loved pupils, Alice da Silva Aguiar and Bebe King, in July 2024, the school worked with pupils, families and the wider community to channel their collective grief into community action. Through a range of pupil-driven fundraising events, including danceathons, colour runs, and a multi-school relay, more than £380,000 was raised to fund an inclusive play space designed to honour the memory of Alice and Bebe and to provide future generations of children with opportunities for play and connection.

At the Conference, Churchtown's work stood as a moving example of the way schools can harness the power of play to build stronger, more connected communities, even in the face of unimaginable adversity, and how sport and play can influence children's emotional as well as physical wellbeing.

Ali Oliver MBE, Youth Sport Trust CEO, said, "Churchtown Primary School's inspiring story brought to life the essential connection between a school and its community, and it illustrates so powerfully how shared responsibility for children's physical social and emotional development can rebuild hope and light amidst sadness and pain. It is also a wonderful example of therapeutic and restorative power of play with the school's memorial playground providing a safe and happy place for children to enjoy being active, being together and being free. We are honoured to celebrate the efforts of the school and its local community as part of our 2026 conference awards.

"Additionally, we were incredibly pleased to hear through a conference message from the Minister of State, Georgia Gould MP, the Government has announcement the next years funding for the Department for Education Inclusion 2028 grant programme. Just days before the start of the Winter Paralympics, this reinforces a commitment to inclusive opportunities in PE and the call from the British Paralympic Association for 'equal play' for every child. Together with our Inclusion 2028 consortium partners and

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Youth Sport Trust Lead Inclusion Network, we have seen the impact this programme has made since 2017, and this sustained investment helps educators transform curricular and extra-curricular opportunities so all children can experience the life-changing benefits of PE, sport and play."

Conference keynote speakers included UK Chief Scout, Dwayne Fields and environmental activist, Rob Hopkins. Dwayne Fields explored resilience, trauma-informed practice and the life-changing role of early opportunities , while Rob Hopkins challenged attendees on the power of collective imagination to create the future we want to see for happier, healthier young people.

Elsewhere across the Conference, delegates took part in practical workshops and discussions designed to help schools translate wellbeing ambition into measurable action, building on the recent launch of the Well Check accreditation as part of the Youth Sport Trust Well Schools movement. Sessions focused on supporting educators to evidence and strengthen whole-school approaches aligned to the four pillars of the Well Schools framework - Well Culture, Lead Well, Move Well and Live Well - placing student and teacher wellbeing at the heart of school life and enabling schools to demonstrate sustained, holistic impact.

About Youth Sport Trust

Youth Sport Trust is the leading UK children's charity for improving young people's health and wellbeing through sport and play. We empower young people and equip educators to build brighter futures through the power of physical activity. Founded in 1995, we work with around 20,000 schools and provides opportunities for over two million children every year. Our vision is to create a future where every child enjoys the life-changing benefits of play and sport.

Our Well Schools movement brings together schools who are prioritising wellbeing alongside academic achievement. Schools can demonstrate their commitment to a whole-school approach through the free-to-access Well Check.

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