

KEY RULES

Game Basics: Football is played between two teams of 11 players (or smaller numbers in school formats). The aim is to score by getting the ball into the opponent's goal. Play starts with a kick-off from the centre circle. After each goal, play restarts in the same way. Players can use any part of the body except their arms and hands – only the goalkeeper may handle the ball, and only inside the penalty area.

Scoring & Offence: A goal is scored when the whole ball crosses the goal line between the posts and under the crossbar. Games are timed, the team with the most goals at the end wins. Fouls include tripping, pushing, holding, handball, or dangerous play. Free kicks or penalties are given for these offences.

Passing & Movement: Players must pass, dribble, and shoot to move the ball and create scoring chances. Offside occurs when an attacker is closer to the opponent's goal line than both the ball and the second-last defender when the ball is played to them (not applied in KS2 small-sided games). Throw-ins are used to restart play when the ball crosses the sideline.

Goalkeeping & Set Pieces: Goalkeepers can catch or throw the ball within their area but cannot pick up a deliberate pass from a teammate's foot. Corners, goal kicks, and free kicks restart play when the ball leaves the field. All opposing players must stand 4.5 metres away for free kicks and corners.

Fair Play & Safety: Slide tackles and dangerous challenges should be avoided in primary football.

Show respect to teammates, opponents, and referees always. Games can be played on grass or hard surfaces, but safe footwear and shin pads must always be worn.

NATIONAL GOVERNING BODY (NGB)

The Football Association (The FA): Governs football in England, including rules, coaching, and grassroots competitions.

The Scottish Football Association (SFA): Oversees football development and education across Scotland.

The Football Association of Wales (FAW): Governs football in Wales, supporting clubs, schools, and community initiatives.

The Irish Football Association (IFA): Manages football across Northern Ireland, including school and youth programmes.

USEFUL LINKS

The FA: <https://www.thefa.com>

Scottish FA: <https://www.scottishfa.co.uk>

FA Wales: <https://www.faw.cymru>

Irish FA: <https://www.irishfa.com>

FIFA (International Federation of Association Football): <https://www.fifa.com>

Your School Games Football: <https://www.yourschoolgames.com/taking-part/our-sports/football>