

# Benfield School

## The BEST Programme: The impact of a personalised learning programme for gifted and talented students

### Our headteacher said:

***“At Benfield School we believe that every child has a talent. We use personalised learning to nurture these talents so that our pupils have the best possible opportunities to succeed in their particular field.”***

*Benfield School is a mixed, 11 - 18, inner-city comprehensive school. It is located in Walkergate in the East End of Newcastle although students also live in the wards of Byker, Walker and Monkchester which are three of the 80 most deprived wards in the country. 26% of Benfield students have SEN, 29% are entitled to free school meals and over 20 different languages are spoken by students.*

### Why this project?

The school site hosts Centres of Excellence for gymnastics and for badminton which provide training for elite gymnasts and badminton players from across the region, including some Benfield students. Youngsters were training long hours, were often unable to complete homework and also suffered from lack of time for 'normal' social activities.

### Aims

To provide G & T students with a better balance between sporting, academic and social activities, thereby increasing their chances of success in both school and sporting achievement, as well as allowing them a more normal social life.

### Action

As part of the 'Benfield Excelling Student Team (BEST) Programme' we did the following:

- Personalised timetables were prepared for the identified badminton players and gymnasts giving them three sessions of specialised coaching per week which

dovetail with their school timetables.

- A teacher was given a reduced teaching timetable and a responsibility point for her role as JAE mentor. Students have a scheduled weekly meeting with her to ensure they are keeping up with academic work and to help them prepare for top-level competition.
- Subject teachers set any missed academic work and the students receive all the specialist help they need to complete this work. They often work with the mentor at a 'homework club' in the evenings, or in the library during timetabled PE lessons.
- The mentor is responsible for making sure the students' training logs and nutrition diaries are up to date and correctly filled in. She meets regularly with the coaches who deliver the sessions, giving them feedback regarding the children's welfare, state of mind and general condition. She can also arrange one-to-one appointments with sports psychologists and sports nutritionists from the University of Northumberland.
- Funding has been provided to students

to buy specialist sports equipment or to help pay for competition entry fees, through a PTA link scholarship fund.

- Specialist branded kit has been provided for all students on the programme to improve their self-esteem and to raise the status of the scheme around the school.
- At the end of the first year the programme was expanded to include three swimmers from years 7 and 8, and 14 football players from years 7, 8 and 10. Three elite gymnasts who were originally to attend different secondary schools changed their minds and went to Benfield in order to benefit fully from the BEST programme.
- 4 ice hockey players playing at national and international level have also been included in the mentoring part of the programme.

### Results

#### Sporting Achievements

- Three of the four gymnasts have risen in the national rankings and have shown improved performance in national competitions. One gymnast won a gold medal at the regional elite championships, came sixth in her first appearance at national level, and gained entry into the World Class Start programme.
- All the badminton players have progressed from the school team to the county squad. One has been accepted onto the World Class Start programme.
- Three of the ice-hockey players involved have now represented their country. Half of the football cohort have represented the city in competitive matches for the first time.
- One student was awarded the Yonex Young Volunteer Award for 2005, stating that this was as a direct result of him having been trained to coach while

on the scheme.

#### Academic Achievements

- 88% of the students on the programme believe it has helped motivate them to succeed in other areas of the curriculum. This is attributed to increased confidence, skills and work practices learnt whilst on the BEST programme.
- Teacher quote: *“It has become apparent that the students on the BEST programme have improved at meeting targets, for example meeting homework deadline dates, as a result of being on the BEST programme. As they are encouraged to discuss and identify their weaknesses in specific sports this has transpired into their other subjects when they feel they cannot meet specific targets, which means they have additional maturity than other students in their cohort.”*

#### Other Successes

- One student who had previously spent six days over a two month period in the school inclusion unit has, since joining the programme seven months ago, only had to return there once.
- Another student who had previously spent five weeks of one half term on report, has only spent four days on report in the seven months he has been on the programme.
- BEST students have an average school attendance record of 97%, whereas across the whole school attendance is 90%.
- G & T pupils from year 6 in local primary schools have been included in the programme. They attend Benfield for training sessions and have access to the mentor.
- The concept has recently been introduced to other subjects such as ICT which currently involves six students from years 9 and 10.

