



## Learning through sharing

Case studies written by schools for schools

Name:	Ivybridge Community College
Title:	A flexible curriculum to help elite athletes improve fitness whilst maintaining academic progress
Context:	Large mixed Specialist Sports College, in Dartmoor, Devon



“ The support mechanism, including the nature of the staff and opportunities in place at Ivybridge Community College allows our students to fulfil their potential both in and out of school... The achievements these students make both on the sporting front and academically are outstanding. ”

Headteacher, Ivybridge Community College

encouraging  
action leadership  
achievement  
innovation  
development

## School context

Large, mixed Specialist Sports College

Situated on the southern slopes of Dartmoor

2,200 students from 100 square miles of the South Hams

11-18 year olds

Oustanding facilities and opportunities

Over subscribed in all year groups

Targets students who compete at county level or above

## Why this project?

The rationale for the development and the identification of need were:

- We did a survey of participation and found that 12% of our students were competing in sport at area/district level or above. We wanted to improve the support for students who were excelling in the sporting sector in order to ensure they would continue to progress in both academic and sporting terms.
- The college's extra-curricular programme concentrates largely on specific sports. The best way to support them, therefore, was felt to be through additional opportunities to improve these students' general conditioning, thereby complementing their sport-specific development.
- It is well documented that young athletes such as these have many pressures on their 'free time' and so it was decided that this extra help, including access to a mentor, would come within their school curriculum time.

## The starting point

- 48 students were identified who had gained representative honours for county level or above.
- The whole teaching staff was briefed and their agreement sought, with regard to the level at which the students were competing and of the plans for support.
- Parents were informed and their agreement was sought.
- The PE 'extension sessions' were to be co-ordinated by the PE department, and to appear on the school timetable.
- The PE department currently had two members of staff who had competed at national level in their respective sports and it was felt that they would be the most likely to appreciate the demands on young people involved in elite sport. Consequently, it was they who were to deliver the PE 'extension sessions'.
- We identified a parent of talented sporting individuals with first-hand experience of supporting young elite athletes and who had experience working within the school system.

She was approached with regard to taking up the position of mentor' and consequently employed.

## Aims

We wanted to achieve the following:

- Provide timetabled opportunities for students to increase their fitness levels, including work on core-stability, flexibility and general conditioning. Further, to improve their knowledge of advanced training methods, injury prevention and recovery methods.
- To ensure continued academic progress in addition to their elite sporting achievement, with the ultimate goal of achieving their predicted GCSE grades.
- To increase the recognition these students receive for their high achievements in sport (in line with the recognition given to high achievers in other curriculum areas).

## Action

We did the following:

- A part-time mentor was employed (0.6) to be responsible for monitoring

the academic and sporting progress of the youngsters as well as overseeing their 'lifestyle management'.

- The two PE teachers were given timetabled slots in which to run the 'extension sessions'.
- Students from related sports were placed into small groups of six or less. In these groups they attended up to four 'extension sessions' per half term.
- Sports-specific 'pathways' were established to guide young athletes through progress in their sports. This included participation elements, skill development opportunities (e.g. squad membership) and academies for elite performers.
- The Junior Athlete Education (JAE) programme was introduced into our partner schools.
- School:club links were further developed.
- Our extra-curricular programme was diversified and differentiated in order to cater for a wider range of abilities than had previously been the case.

“The achievements these students make both on the sporting front and academically are outstanding”

## Results

These are our main achievements and impacts:

- The students involved in the ‘extension sessions’ now have a scheduled time to meet with the PE teachers training them in fitness etc as well as with their mentor.
- The carefully selected mentor has been vital to the success of the programme, as the students have found her approachable and understanding, and feel comfortable talking with her. She has managed to ensure that unnecessary pressure was not being put on these youngsters from a sporting perspective and that academic targets were being met. Further, she has greatly helped in communications between the various interested parties, giving a balanced view from all perspectives, ensuring the students’ well being is highest on the list of priorities. For instance the athletes now have a better understanding of the motives of the school, the PE department and the individual teachers who are helping them. She has, besides, ensured a great deal more shared understanding of the issues that arise on the part of the PE department, subject teachers and year heads.
- Students and parents have responded well to the programme, in particular, the additional training in small groups of ‘like’ sports. This training has been extended to incorporate sport-specific elements and we now have ‘academies’ established in football, tennis, rugby, weight-lifting and athletics.
- Thanks to the improvements in our extra-curricular programme we are not only providing enhanced support for the most able athletes, but also improving the inclusion of others with 59% of students involved in extra-curricular activities and 73% involved in an inter-tutorial programme.
- We have successfully formed 29 formal school/club partnerships.
- The introduction of the JAE programme to our partner schools has led to team-building events which bring together talented individuals from different schools.

## Achievements

### Sporting Achievements

**Tennis:** 8 county players; 1 Senior Ladies county player; 2 court officials; 2 DCA Level 1 coaches; finalists of the Glanville Cup for last 3 years.

**Rugby:** 10 students have signed semi-professional contracts; student representatives at every level from Devon league 3 to the Premiership; 6 students have received international caps; 1 student to represent England in the Junior Olympics; ICC won local 7’s tournament in 2004.

**Football:** 1 student has signed a semi-professional contract; county representatives at U16 & U18 level; 10 students in the Plymouth Argyle Academy.

**Weight-lifting:** 1 student achieved a gold medal at the Commonwealth Youth Games (Australia 2004); 6 junior internationals; 1 European U17 Champion; 1 European U23 Champion.

**Athletics:** 1 U18 GB international; 1 U18 Scottish international; 1 English Schools Cross Country champion (2004); 1 student competing in British Schools Championship (Dec 2004); winners of English Schools Championships in 2000 (Junior Girls Athletics), 2001 (Junior Boys Cross Country), 2002 (Inter Girls Cross Country), 2003 (Inter Girls Cross Country).

### Academic achievements

To date 23 students have passed through the project, all achieving at least 5 A\*-C at GCSE. 78% achieved as expected or better in all GCSE subjects, with 95% achieving as expected or better in 8 subjects. 91% have remained at Ivybridge Community College sixth form to continue their education. 81% are following a sport related course in the sixth form.

# challenges

## Further challenges

We would now like to achieve the following:

- More emphasis on 'performance pathways' across the spectrum of activities in the extra-curricular programme.
- Formal links with Higher Educational Institutions to help ensure the continued sporting and academic development of our athletes.
- Further collaboration with partner schools with regard to increased support and timetable flexibility for Gifted and Talented students.
- Extension of academy opportunities throughout the partnership in order to enhance the provision of elite sport within the schools.

## Sharing and celebrating success

We have promoted and disseminated this good practice to others in the following ways:

- Whole-school teaching staff have been aware of the role of the mentor and have used her effectively whenever they have had concerns over academic issues.
- The mentor has kept all staff at the college informed of the development of the programme and, as a result, staff have become more aware of the issues and more open to discussion.
- This model of support has been successfully replicated in various departments throughout the school.
- Staff from other schools have visited the college to see our model in action and to discuss the programme with the staff involved.

## Maintaining progress

Means by which we hope to ensure sustainability and the development of improved standards are outlined below:

- Further work is being carried out with our partner schools to enhance the sporting opportunities available to students.
- The role of mentor is becoming well established, well recognised and used to good effect in and around the college.
- The programme is under continual review with self-evaluation procedures in place.

# success