

Insight driving innovation and impact

Set for Success Case Study: Willows High School

Improving aspirations and interpersonal skills of young people at risk.

December 2021

Introduction

Willows High school is an English-medium mixed secondary school for 586 pupils aged 11 to 16 in the Tremorfa area of Cardiff, Wales.

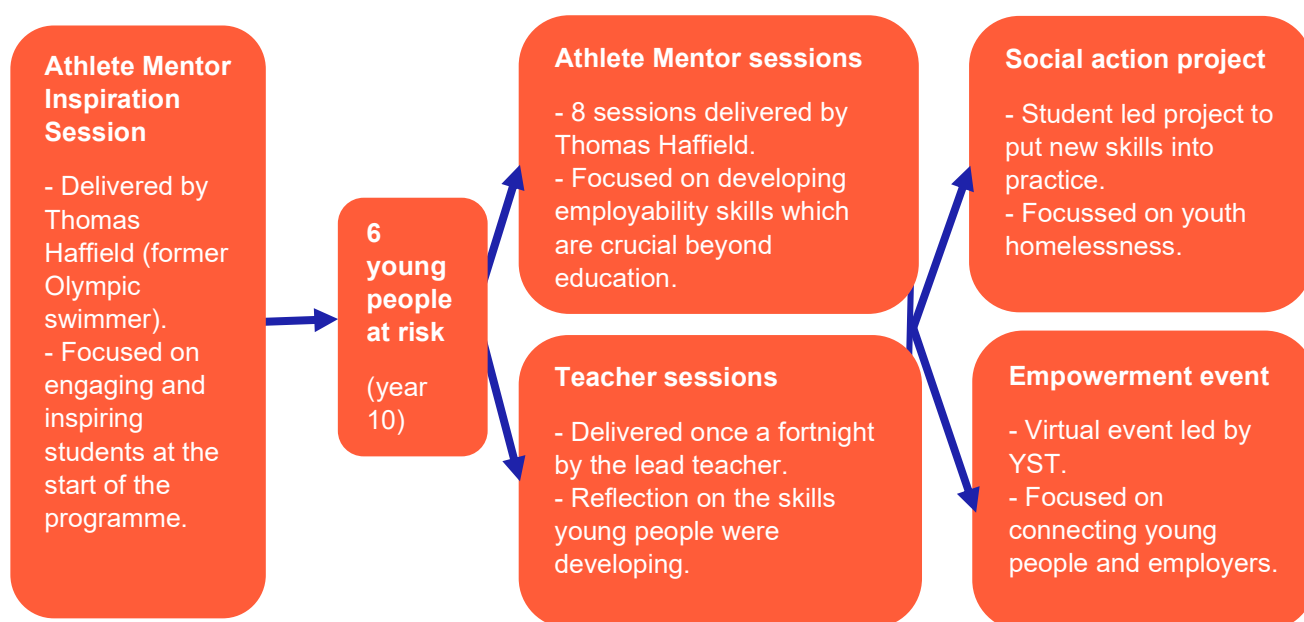
In 2020, Willows High School joined Set for Success, a two-year youth leadership initiative that aims to provide young people from disadvantaged backgrounds with the opportunity to develop valuable life and leadership skills through mentoring sessions delivered by inspirational athletes. Set for Success is funded by the Wimbledon Foundation and delivered by the Youth Sport Trust (YST).

Background

Set for Success offered a valuable opportunity for Willows High school to offer extra support to young people at risk, notably those who were at risk of being not in employment education or training (NEETs) or those whose attendance was poor. This was also of particular interest for young people who have low aspirations and self-esteem/confidence or have additional learning needs. The data from an Estyn inspection report showed that 68% of pupils at the school live in the 20% most deprived areas in Wales¹. Around 44% of the pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is well above the national average of 17%¹. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is around 41%, which is also higher than the national average of 22%¹. The Set for Success model gave students the opportunity to achieve a leadership qualification and develop wider interpersonal and intrapersonal skills.

Activities

Covid-19 led to delays to delivery at the start, so the programme activities were extended into the 2021/22 academic year. The key activities that had been delivered at the time of writing this case study are highlighted in the diagram below.



¹ Estyn (2018) A report on Willows High School, Willows Avenue Tremorfa. Available at: <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/system/files/2020-08/Willows%2520High%2520School.pdf>

“Thank you to Thomas Haffield for hosting our Inspiration Day, the pupils were fully engaged and asked pertinent questions about your successes, disappointments and you’ve inspired them to aim high, show resilience and follow their dreams.”

SOURCE: WILLOWS PE TWITTER

The [inspiration day](#) that was delivered by Thomas Haffield, a former Olympian swimmer, at the start of the programme effectively engaged students across different year groups. The lead teacher stated that you could tell students were engaged due to the questions they asked. They enjoyed Tom’s honest stories about his sporting career.



Thomas Haffield had also 8 [workshops](#) with the young people. The topics of the workshops were centered around developing communication skills, self-belief, self-management, and goal setting. Students also engaged in swimming (a sport they would not normally do at school) and badminton. Having an Athlete Mentor as part of the programme supported buy-in from the students and provided a positive role model for them. The Athlete Mentor sessions were considered to be a strong element of the programme as they were delivered by someone new. The



lead teacher did not believe it would be the same if the programme was purely delivered by school staff. The pupils were excited to have an Athlete Mentor at their school. In particular, they appreciated that Thomas would treat them like “actual adults” and offered honest and direct feedback on how to improve.

“Tom is good at letting the children lead their learning and pupil voice is a positive feature of each session.”

MISS MOORE, LEAD TEACHER, WILLOWS HIGH SCHOOL

The young people were already in the process of doing research into youth homelessness for their Welsh baccalaureate. It was decided as a group that their Set for Success [social action project](#) was going to support the Welsh homeless charity Llamau. A PowerPoint presentation was created by the young people, and they were also planning to make a short video and present this at the assembly. The young people also engaged in cake sales and raffles, e-mailing supermarket companies such to ask for donations for recipe ingredients. The Set for Success social action project complemented the Welsh baccalaureate and allowed the pupils to build on their school work and to put their new skills into practice.

The young people also took part in a virtual [empowerment event](#), where employers joined the young people with their Athlete Mentors to share information about their career paths. The young people appreciated finding out about the array of careers that were introduced to them, ranging from the film industry to estate agents and the Navy.

Interestingly, the young people mentioned that it was the length of the programme that really supported them to develop their skills. They also appreciated that the sessions were spaced out throughout the terms as it allowed them to think and reflect about what they had learned about.

“When something is drilled into you in one day you won’t retain it like you want to. If it’s over 18 months, multiple times and you’re convinced by the talk and you understand what you’re doing, you will retain that information for life.”

YOUNG PERSON

Benefits

A clear advantage of having a small group of pupils was that everyone in the group felt comfortable to contribute. According to the lead teacher, some pupils would not have spoken out in bigger groups. Being given the opportunity to flourish in a smaller group setting has led to improved confidence, participation, and engagement in the programme.

“Everything we learned are life skills that we need every day of our life. Communication and teamwork; not only will we need for college when doing group projects and talking to classmates, but there are very few jobs where you’re alone the entire time.”

YOUNG PERSON



Increased
communication skills
and confidence to
speak out



Improved team-
work

The programme also gave the young people a platform to work with people they normally would not work with, which helped to develop their teamwork and communication skills.

The programme also encouraged more conversations surrounding careers that aimed to get students thinking about their future and their transferrable skills that make them more employable. One young person

in particular already knew that he wanted to work as a royal engineer in the Army, but the Set for Success programme changed his mind on how he will enter this career path. The empowerment day, in particular, taught the young people about trial and error and how there is not always a straight path to reach your career goals after school. It also informed them about what kind of qualifications are needed for certain jobs. Importantly, it reinforced the importance of the skills that they had learnt during their Athlete Mentor workshops.



Increased ability to
set goals for the
future

“The job I want has been the same since I was 8 years old so that wouldn’t have changed but how I am going to go into it changed. I could have gone into the military in year 10 but I chose to stay and get qualifications first. Tom (the Athlete Mentor) in general helped me to make that decision. I was still undecided [about next year] but the night of the empowerment day, I applied to college.”

YOUNG PERSON

Future

From the start of 2022, Willows High School is delivering Set for Success with a new cohort of young people from year 10.

Top Tips

- ✓ Consider the group size to maximise benefits; for this school, a smaller group size led to increased participation and engagement.
- ✓ Use the logbook to provide focus for the young people at the start of each session and to help them to understand the bigger picture.
- ✓ Plan the sessions to ensure sufficient time between the Athlete Mentor sessions and teacher sessions to allow young people to reflect upon the progress they are making.
- ✓ Carefully consider the pupils that take part in the programme to ensure the necessary teacher support can be provided; for year 2 of delivery, this school will choose students from the lead teacher’s form.
- ✓ Ensure the Athlete Mentor sessions are spread out across the academic year to allow the young people to reflect on the sessions and to help embed the learning.



Willows PE
@PEWillows

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Great first session with our Athlete Mentor [@ThomasHaffield](#) to kick start the 'Set for Success' programme [@YouthSportTrust](#) [@WimbledonFdn](#)



Willows PE
@PEWillows

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Great second session with [@ThomasHaffield](#) on developing communication skills, Da iawn 10Banksy [@YouthSportTrust](#) [@WimbledonFdn](#) [#setforsuccess](#)



Willows PE
@PEWillows

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Fantastic Session 3 [@ThomasHaffield](#) developing self-belief with members of 10BA [@YouthSportTrust](#) [@WimbledonFdn](#)



Willows PE
@PEWillows

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Session 5 complete with [@ThomasHaffield](#) discussing self-management & goal setting in an open & relaxed learning environment, followed by some competitive badminton [@YouthSportTrust](#) [@WimbledonFdn](#)





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