

Insight driving innovation and impact

Birmingham Connect Case Study: Queensbridge School

Building young people's confidence and strengthening relationships between schools.

July 2022

Introduction

Queensbridge School is a mixed comprehensive school located in the Moseley area of Birmingham. It has around 860 pupils aged 11 to 16.

In 2019, the school joined Birmingham Connect which uses the power of sport, and excitement of the Commonwealth Games (CWG) Birmingham 2022, to promote social integration of young people aged 12-14 years in Birmingham. However, Covid-19 resulted in the programme being suspended. The programme, which is delivered by the Youth Sport Trust (YST) and funded by the Commonwealth Sport Foundation (CSF) via Birmingham 2022 and Sport England, re-started again in 2021 and the school retained its involvement.

Background

The Head of PE hosted an assembly for pupils to make them aware of Birmingham Connect. Young people who were interested in becoming a young leader on the programme, known as a Connector, were asked to write an application. The lead practitioner selected seven young people to join the programme as Connectors; four were girls and three were boys, and all of them were from year nine and between the ages of 13-14 years. The Head of PE reported that the Connectors are a mixed group where a couple are “sporty kids”, including a county basketballer, someone with a black belt in Taekwondo and a cricketer. The remaining Connectors were chosen because they were engaged in PE at school but did not participate in any physical activity outside of school.

The school was keen to take part in the programme to help promote greater social integration, increase understanding of people from different backgrounds, and to improve attitudes and perceptions to sport. Additionally, the Head of PE highlighted that the benefits that she could see in the Connectors pre-Covid, increased confidence and friendships, served as a real motivation to continue Birmingham Connect after Covid restrictions lifted and the programme re-started.

Activities

Virtual training

A member of staff at the school and the seven Connectors attended virtual training courses that were hosted by the Youth Sport Trust (YST), supported by YST Athlete Mentors¹ and Team England Ambassadors.

YST led events

The Connectors attended two events that were delivered at Birmingham University and run by the YST. These events provided an opportunity for the Connectors to experience a range of different sports and activities, to develop their leadership skills, and to mix with other young people involved in the programme. In particular, the young people enjoyed taking part in judo and diving. The Head of PE highlighted that while these sports are difficult to implement in their school, the young people enjoyed doing something completely different which they normally would not get the chance to experience. Boxing was also perceived positively, and as a result, the staff delivering the boxing session is now coming into

¹ YST Athlete Mentors are some of Britain’s most successful world class athletes that inspire young people.
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Queensbridge School to deliver to a group of lower achieving year 10 boys. The lead practitioner has shared a video of the event to the year 9 to raise awareness of the programme among other pupils and staff.

“Any opportunity to do something different really hooks the kids in.”

SARAH CROSS-FELLOWS, HEAD OF PE AT QUEENSBRIDGE SCHOOL

School led events

Queensbridge School has delivered one out of two school led events so far with their local partner school Bishop Challoner Catholic College. The Connectors from the two schools worked together to deliver Danish long ball and rounders. Like the YST run events, they mixed the young people up for the activities to encourage greater social mixing. This worked very well, as according to the Head of PE, the Connectors took the activities in turn and worked as one team, some of them did the warm up, some did the umpiring, some did the coaching, then they rotated around.

“They all just seemed to come together as one team.”

SARAH CROSS-FELLOWS, HEAD OF PE AT QUEENSBRIDGE SCHOOL

Benefits

Increased confidence and life skills



The Head of PE highlighted that the programme has been “really aspirational” for the young people and that Birmingham Connect has helped the Connectors to build their confidence and self-belief. As an example, she highlighted that the Connectors who were more shy and quiet at the beginning of the programme were the ones who started to take a lead and put themselves forward the most, a process that the

Head of PE says she will not forget. The fact that their work was being recognised within the school made the Connectors feel “really proud” and “special”.

“Our Connectors are not necessarily our sporty kids [...] and it’s been really fascinating to see just how their confidence has grown around school.”

SARAH CROSS-FELLOWS, HEAD OF PE AT QUEENSBRIDGE SCHOOL

Moreover, the Head of PE reported that the Connectors have “massively improved” their organisational skills, as they are the ones who keep her in check now and regularly come up to ask when the next meeting is and what needs to be done.

More engagement in extra-curricular activities



The Head of PE reported that three Connectors who were not involved in any extra-curricular clubs prior to Birmingham Connect, have now started to attend the extra-curricular cricket club. The programme and the new responsibilities that come with being a Connector has given them a sense of responsibility:

“They’re starting to really take ownership and think: well, if we’re leading, we need to be a part of it as well.”

SARAH CROSS-FELLOWS, HEAD OF PE AT QUEENSBRIDGE SCHOOL

Improved relationships between schools and new friendships



Through the programme, Queensbridge School was partnered with Bishop Challoner Catholic College. Prior to Birmingham Connect, the two schools had already worked together and established a good relationship, being located at either end of the same high street and sharing a field, and also being in the same school sports partnership.

However, the Head of PE reported that their relationship was more of a “rivalry rather than a collaboration”, as they often played against each other at local competitions. There was a sense of competitiveness between the two schools, among both young people and school staff. It was the joint school events as part of Birmingham Connect that facilitated opportunities where both schools could work together in one team, as opposed to against each other. Despite staff turnover at Bishop Challoner, the Head of PE at Queensbridge plans to maintain a relationship beyond the programme with their partner school as she highlighted that this investment has to come from staff to keep growing this philosophy.

“The biggest success would be the relationship that the Connectors have got, not just from my school but with Bishop Challoner’s Connectors as well - how that has grown and flourished. The way that they talk together and work together, just seeing that relationship gradually mould, that’s been really lovely to watch.”

SARAH CROSS-FELLOWS, HEAD OF PE AT QUEENSBRIDGE SCHOOL

Future

The Head of PE of Queensbridge School is motivated to maintain the good relationships with Bishop Challoner beyond this academic year, which is facilitated by the shared facilities.

Top Tips

- ✓ Always stay in communication and ask questions throughout the programme. Do not be afraid to ask for help and have trust that you can receive support along the way.
- ✓ Be organised between the two partner schools; each school will have time constraints and different time tables but it is important to find the time together and collaborate to ensure the young people can get the most out of the programme.
- ✓ Staff being invested in the programme is just as important as having the young people being invested. They need to grow the philosophy.



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