

Case Study 1: Stratford upon Avon High School

Case Study Summary

Stratford upon Avon High School developed a PE-based project within its LEAP (Learning and Employability Programme) to address disengagement among Key Stage 4 students at risk of exclusion and poor post-16 outcomes. Many students presented with low self-esteem, limited aspirations and difficulty engaging with both learning and relationships, with traditional classroom approaches proving insufficient.

The project focused on developing self-confidence, self-efficacy and employability-related skills by placing students in positions of genuine responsibility. Students were given control of a £500 budget and tasked with planning and organising their own programme of physical activity in the community. This included researching options, communicating with providers, making bookings and presenting plans to senior staff.

As a result, students demonstrated increased confidence, improved communication skills and greater willingness to engage with structured tasks. One student, previously perceived as disruptive, took on a leadership role and is now progressing to college with greater clarity and optimism.

This case highlights the impact of combining physical activity with authentic responsibility. When students are trusted with meaningful tasks in a structured environment, it can significantly improve engagement, confidence and readiness for life beyond school.

Context

Stratford upon Avon High School is a large, mixed secondary school located in Warwickshire, serving students aged 11–18. The school has a broad and inclusive intake, drawing from both the town and surrounding rural areas. It places a strong emphasis on academic achievement alongside personal development, with a stated commitment to supporting students to become confident, responsible and resilient individuals.

The school has a well-established internal alternative provision for students in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, designed to support those at risk of disengagement or exclusion.

At Key Stage 3, the provision offers short-term (4–6 week) interventions aimed at stabilising engagement and supporting pupils to remain in mainstream education. At Key Stage 4, the school recognises that, for some students, a longer-term alternative approach is more appropriate. This is delivered through LEAP (Learning and Employability Programme).

LEAP provides a modified curriculum, a smaller and more consistent staff team, and a different learning environment. Teaching is delivered by staff with expertise in alternative provision, alongside high-quality subject-specific teaching in English, mathematics and PE. The programme also includes opportunities for off-site vocational learning, creating a more structured and

supported pathway for students who are unlikely to succeed within a conventional mainstream model.

What challenge was the school trying to address?

Students on the LEAP pathway at Key Stage 4 present with a range of individual needs but share several common challenges linked to disengagement from education. These include low levels of engagement in learning, poor self-esteem, and limited aspirations for the future. This is often reflected in both withdrawn and disruptive behaviours, as well as difficulty forming positive relationships with peers and adults.

As a result, many of these students are at increased risk of becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET) post-16. For many, traditional classroom approaches had not successfully developed these skills.

The project was designed to address these challenges by developing employability-related skills as a means of improving engagement, building confidence, and supporting more positive participation in education.

What did the school deliver and why?

For the PE project, the school worked primarily with a group of Key Stage 4 students on the LEAP pathway. The project was designed to develop self-confidence and self-efficacy, alongside key employability-related skills including communication, organisation, professional behaviour and leadership.

Students were given access to the £500 project fund and tasked with planning and organising their own programme of physical activity and sport in the community. Rather than simply participating, they were responsible for researching options, making phone calls, completing bookings, communicating with providers, and presenting their plans to senior staff.

For many students, this represented a significant shift from previous experiences of education, where expectations around independence and accountability had been limited. The approach was deliberately structured to place responsibility with students, requiring them to engage with real-world processes before accessing the activity itself.

What changed for young people?

While individual experiences varied, staff reported consistent improvements in confidence, communication and willingness to engage with structured tasks. Students who had previously avoided challenge were observed taking greater responsibility for planning and decision-making and were more able to sustain focus when tasks had clear purpose and outcome. *(Self-regulation, Engagement and behaviour, Readiness for learning)*

One of the most striking examples of impact was seen in Neveah, a Year 11 student on the LEAP pathway who played a central role in the project.

As part of the programme, she wrote emails, held phone conversations with activity providers, and took on a leadership role within sessions, acting as a mentor and role model for younger students. Staff noted that, prior to the project, she had not engaged in professional communication with adults in this way.

Teachers described a significant shift in her confidence and behaviour. Previously perceived as disruptive and challenging, she is now planning her next steps with greater clarity and optimism, including applying for college courses. *(Self-regulation, Emotional wellbeing and confidence, Readiness for learning)*

During the visit, Neveah spoke confidently about her experience and supported her peers to articulate their own, prompting and guiding them to reflect more clearly. She was also observed to have a positive influence on younger students attending LEAP activities. *(Relationships, Engagement and behaviour)*

Another student, Gerald, highlighted the importance of being trusted. He described how being given responsibility for planning activities and managing a significant budget changed how he approached the work, increasing his sense of accountability and engagement. He is currently undertaking a work placement as part of his LEAP programme and felt that his involvement in the project had developed his communication skills in particular. *(Emotional wellbeing and confidence, Engagement and behaviour)*

What made this work in practice?

Several features of the project appear to have been critical to its success.

First, the project placed genuine responsibility with students. Rather than simply participating in activities, students were required to plan, organise and communicate with external providers. This created meaningful accountability and required them to engage with real-world processes.

Second, the work was purposeful and authentic. Tasks such as making phone calls, writing emails and presenting plans to senior staff had clear consequences and relevance, increasing motivation and investment.

Third, the structure of the LEAP provision enabled consistent relationships with a small staff team, alongside staff with both alternative provision expertise and subject knowledge. This created a balance of support and expectation.

Finally, the project created opportunities for leadership and peer influence, reinforcing development for older students while positively influencing younger peers.

What can other settings learn?

This case highlights the importance of designing physical activity and sport provision that goes beyond participation to include structured responsibility and real-world application. Giving students genuine ownership, including control over decision-making and accountability for outcomes, can significantly increase engagement and motivation.

It also demonstrates the value of authentic tasks. Activities such as communicating with external providers and presenting to senior staff created purpose and relevance, helping students develop confidence and transferable skills in a way that classroom-based approaches had not.

It reinforces the role of consistent relationships within a small staff team, combined with staff who understand both behaviour and learning. This balance of support and expectation enabled students to take risks and succeed.

This approach is less about the activity itself, and more about how it is used to create responsibility, relevance and connection. However, it requires careful planning, clear boundaries and sufficient staff capacity. It is most effective where responsibility is deliberately structured and supported, rather than assumed, for example through preparing external providers in advance to engage appropriately with students.