



Insight driving innovation and impact

Supporting Girls with Autism Case Study: Alfriston School

May 2022

Believing in every child's future

Introduction

The Youth Sport Trust national Inclusion School network has developed a toolkit for schools to Support Girls with Autism, focusing on helping to make PE and sport inclusive and enjoyable for all.

Background

Alfriston school is a day and boarding school for girls catering for pupils with a wide range of special educational needs and disabilities from aged 11 to 18. The school is located in Buckinghamshire.

Rachel Hutchinson, the Inclusion Lead, and Alfriston school has been involved with both a project, funded through Sport England entitled ' Find Your Tribe' and in the creation of a Supporting Girls with Autism toolkit. Rachel was motivated to be part of the work as she wanted to support the girls who are struggling to engage with PE in their school.

Activities

Who was involved

This year, there have been 11 young people involved in the project. Many of them lack confidence and basic fundamentals in PE.

Rachel ran the sessions together with a support assistant who works with the girls across the school. In addition, they have had some support from the wellbeing team with the external activities.

What they did

Focus groups were conducted in February. The focus groups this year were more informal as Rachel also taught the group in PE on a regular basis. This meant that she already had a good rapport with the young people taking part.

The focus groups included similar questions that had been asked to previous cohorts and focused on understanding the different activities they enjoyed and didn't enjoy and why. For Rachel the most important aspect of the sessions was to make sure that the young people felt listened to and felt comfortable to express their views. Rachel also used the time with the young people to talk about them trying the activities that others liked. As part of the focus group

Focus Group Questions (*Secondary*)

1. Tell me your name and what are your hobbies
2. What do you enjoy about your PE lessons at school?
3. Think back to your last PE lesson – can you remember how it made you feel?
4. Is there anything about physical activity and sport you don't like?
5. If you could try a new physical activity / sport, what would it be?
6. What might prevent or stop you from taking part in an activity?

sessions the young people identified three activities that they would like to try, the trampoline park, an aerial hoop class and Go Ape.

The group were excited and positive about the activities. They had chosen a mix of more relaxed and familiar activities (the trampoline park) followed by something they had never done before (Aerial hoop class) and something that challenges them out of their comfort zone (Go Ape). The activities exposed them to try things they had not tried before.

Benefits

The smaller group format encouraged the young people to feel confident to speak and say what they thought. As part of the activities the girls have begun to talk to each other and work with girls that they would not have previously. The aerial hoop class in particular helped them to see the different types of activities and ways to be active there are.

The informal settings of the activities was hugely beneficial. Rachel noticed a change in the girls with them feeling more relaxed and happier in this environment than the PE setting at school.

Alfriston have been involved in the project for a number of years and have begun to see the longer term benefits on the young people involved. Other school staff are seeing changes including increased levels of confidence and communication. For example, one of the girls involved with the project previously has applied to be Head Girl, something that Rachel doesn't believe she would have done without the confidence she has developed through this project.

'Just wanted to say a big thank you for all the fabulous work that you have done with the girls. It really has been so positive for all 3 of mine, to have that time and be able to develop their confidence.'

'Daisy has been the biggest change for me. Seeing her confidence grow to a point where she will remind me which day it is, organise lunches, hold her own in pastoral is just an absolute joy'

Inspiring future work

As a result of the successes seen in Alfriston, Rachel has now recruited a mainstream primary school to engage in similar work. Together with the primary school SENCO and lead teacher seven girls were identified to take part in the focus group sessions. They have undertaken one focus group which helped Rachel to understand their motivators and barriers. These girls ranged in age and needs and had a mixed level of engagement with PE.

Focus Group Questions (*Primary*)

1. Tell me your name and what are your hobbies
2. What do you enjoy about your PE lessons at school?
3. Think back to your last PE lesson – can you remember how it made you feel?
4. Why do you think physical activity is important for you?
5. Is there anything about physical activity and sport you don't like?
6. What is your favourite activity?
7. If you could try a new physical activity / sport, what would it be?
8. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

Using the Chateez cards helped the young people to open up and begin to feel comfortable talking to Rachel. A sense of belonging was created for the group by having a group name and coloured hoodies. The activities that the young people have chosen include ice skating, cheer leading and climbing.

YST RESEARCH

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Our specialisms include:

- Education, PE and school sport
- Community sport / clubs
- Early years settings
- Life skills and employability
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