

Insight driving innovation and impact

# **Supporting Girls with Autism Toolkit: Top Tips for implementation**

July 2022

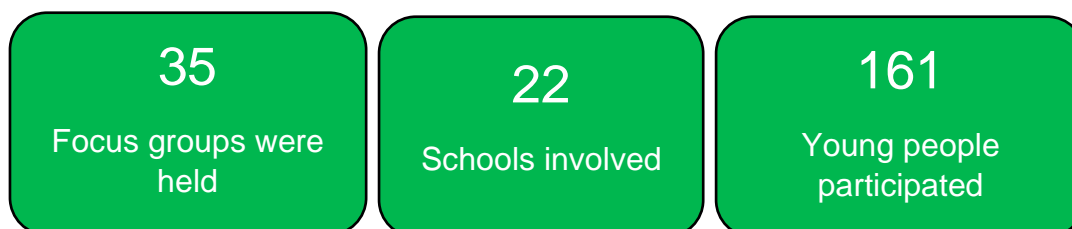
Supporting Girls with Autism Toolkit: Top Tips for implementation

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## Introduction

The Supporting Girls with Autism project worked with 11 Youth Sport Trust Lead Inclusion Schools during the academic year 2021/22. Each Lead Inclusion School was able to work with multiple schools on this project where appropriate.

This year in total;



Of those young people, 91% (146) had additional support needs, 55% (89) were eligible for free school meals, 30% (48) were from ethnically diverse communities. However, four of the eleven Lead Inclusion Schools have struggled to run the programme this year due to COVID-19 and staffing issues.

## Impact of the Supporting Girls with Autism Project

Leads were very positive about the project, giving it an average net promoter score of 9.3 out of 10. Eight out of ten of the leads gave the project the top score of 10. Leads relished the opportunity this project has given them to focus on youth voice and work with targeted groups of young people.

‘Great opportunity to have time set aside to talk to the young people as normally in the rush of everything we can't always take this time and hear their views.’

Leads were also very positive about the toolkit as a resource.

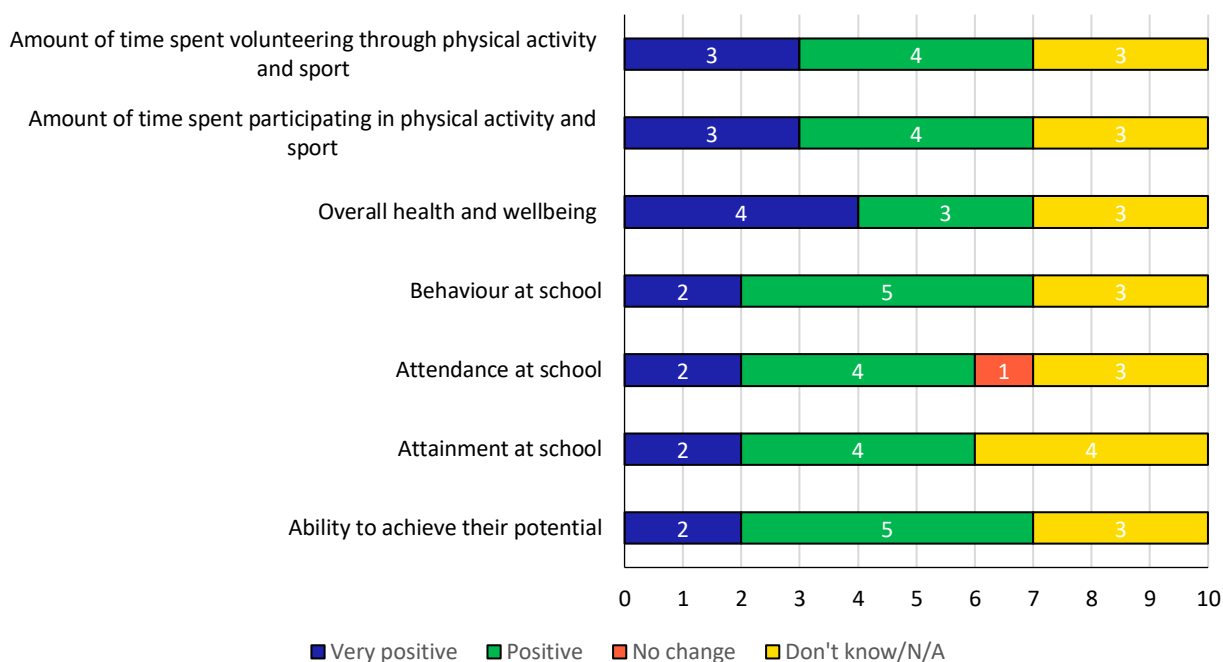
‘The toolkit is **absolutely incredible** and a **massive support** for the schools we have worked in.’

‘We are always referring to the toolkit for **guidance, advice and information** to help us to support the girls with autism.’

‘The toolkit is an **amazing resource** that we keep going back to refresh before sessions. Also if we have queries about autism we always forward the toolkit, it really is a **fantastic resource**.’

When asked about the impact of the project on young people, in particular leads felt that it had an impact on young people’s overall health and wellbeing and the amount of time they spend being active and volunteering.

## Did the Supporting Girls with Autism project have any impact on the following areas for young people?



**'The benefits of this project were absolutely huge.** The girls were worried about the lack of understanding of how autism can present in girls socially. They loved the group sessions as it put their minds at rest that there were other girls around who are similar to them. They felt that they didn't have to mask things when they were in the group and **they could be open and honest about their emotions, thoughts and feelings.** The project was a massive help to give them information and understanding of support needs and how they could get help. They loved meeting other girls with autism as they had never been introduced to friends with autism before. **They felt very supportive of one another and included** which was something they had never felt before.'

'This project has supported the school to identify a key target group that **previously were not engaging** in enrichment opportunities and extra-curricular clubs and has supported the school to reach **90%+ of students taking up these opportunities.**'

### Top Tips

The following set of top tips have been developed informed by consultations with the Lead Inclusion schools piloting the Supporting Girls with Autism toolkit.

# TOP 10 TIPS for using the Supporting Girls with Autism Toolkit



1

**Know the group you are working with.** If they are a new cohort of young people that you have not worked with before, build in time to build rapport with them so they feel comfortable opening up.



2

**Student voice is key.** Reinforce verbally and through actions to show you value what they are saying and that they can cause change to happen. Where change is not possible ensure that this is explained. Make sure the young people feel that their views matter.



3

**Aim to get young people out of the school setting.** Informal, neutral settings mean that young people are more likely to open up and feel comfortable to talk. This could be something informal, such as going for a walk in the woods.



4

**Provide an appropriate level of challenge so that the girls can experience success.** This will build their confidence to try new things.



5

**Dedicate time to the project.** The planning and thinking takes time to make the sessions a success. Make sure you allocate appropriate time to make the young people feel listened to and not rushed.



6

**Refresh yourself of the toolkit before you conduct the focus groups.** There are some really good tips that will help make sure the discussion is a success. Become adept at using it and feel confident to run the focus groups yourself.



7

**Encourage the young people to take ownership,** empower them through the process of consultation.



8

**Ensure that there is a social element to the activities** to help provide opportunities for the group to get to know each other better, for example providing lunch.



9

**Celebrate the success of participating.** Whether that is verbally or through physical resources like certificates and awards



10

**Keep the sessions short** especially if you are working with young people who struggle to maintain focus and attention

## Toolkit Development – Future Recommendations

Through this work, areas have been identified where the toolkit can be improved further.

- Consider explicit opportunities to understand the themes of empathy, friendship and respect in the target audience
- Consider what other barriers young people with autism might be experiencing and build these into the toolkit e.g. impact of friendships
- Provide explicit examples of questions schools could pick up and use
- Explore how peers can be empowered through the toolkit to run sessions themselves e.g. older leaders running focus groups with younger students in the school
- Explore further the evidence on the return on investment with the toolkit. Evidence on this will support other schools to see the value of using the toolkit.

## YST RESEARCH

The Youth Sport Trust (YST) is a national children's charity passionate about creating a future where every child enjoys the life-changing benefits that come from play and sport. YST Research offers research, analysis, insight and evaluation services to organisations with an interest in the wider children and young people's sector. Our research expertise is focussed on improving the wellbeing of children and young people through sport and physical activity.

Our specialisms include:

- Education, PE and school sport
- Community sport / clubs
- Early years settings
- Life skills and employability
- Activism and volunteering
- Health (physical, social and emotional)

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