

Insight driving innovation and impact

Birmingham Connect Case Study: King Edward VI Sheldon Heath Academy

Improving connections and confidence through new sports opportunities.

June 2022

Introduction

King Edward VI Sheldon Heath Academy, known locally as Kesh, is a mixed secondary school and sixth form located in the Sheldon area of Birmingham. It has around 1,200 pupils.

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 lead practitioner hosted an assembly for pupils in year seven to year nine 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. They received over 50 applications, and with the support of some of their sixth form students, the lead practitioner selected seven young people to join the programme as Connectors. They looked for a diverse group of young people who had the potential to develop their leadership skills; four were from year eight and three were from year nine, five were girls and two were boys, and none of them had previous leadership experience.

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.

“I just wanted everybody to be aware of what sport can give you.”

(KAREN MORROLL, HEAD OF DEPARTMENT AT KING EDWARD VI SHELDON HEATH ACADEMY)

Activities

Virtual training

A member of staff at the school and the seven Connectors attended virtual training courses that were hosted by the YST, supported by YST Athlete Mentors¹ and Team England Ambassadors. Both the teacher and the Connectors spoke highly of the training session and felt inspired after attending. In particular, the young people reported feeling “grown up” and that people in the session listened to their ideas.

¹ YST Athlete Mentors are some of Britain’s most successful world class athletes that inspire young people.
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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. At the second event, 19 pupils from year seven also attended to take part in the activities. The Connectors enjoyed the opportunity to try different sports and to meet the athletes, plus being able to see the Commonwealth medals. They also enjoyed being able to choose which sports they could lead. They spoke positively about the events; they emphasized their inclusivity and the emphasis on social mixing was different to other things they had done before. The lead practitioner has shared photos of the event on the TV screens around the school to raise awareness of the programme among other pupils and staff.

“The students really loved the different sports.”

(KAREN MORROLL, HEAD OF DEPARTMENT AT KING EDWARD VI SHELDON HEATH ACADEMY)

“Meeting athletes with disabilities was very inspiring to show you that you can achieve anything you want to.”

(CONNECTOR AT KING EDWARD VI SHELDON HEATH ACADEMY)

School led events

During the summer term, King Edward VI Sheldon Heath Academy will work with a local school, Archbishop Ilsley Catholic School, to deliver two events. The Connectors from the two schools will work together to deliver team games for year seven pupils. Like the YST run events, they plan to mix the young people up for the activities to encourage greater social mixing. The first event will be held at King Edward VI Sheldon Heath Academy and the second event will be held at Archbishop Ilsley Catholic School.

“I think it's been brilliant from start to finish.”

(KAREN MORROLL, HEAD OF DEPARTMENT AT KING EDWARD VI SHELDON HEATH ACADEMY)

“The most important thing for us is to be really inclusive so that no one is left out and everyone has something to do and no one is stood on the side line.”

(CONNECTOR AT KING EDWARD VI SHELDON HEATH ACADEMY)

Benefits

Improved connections and social mixing



The Connectors all agreed that Birmingham Connect had given them the opportunity to meet people from different backgrounds. The lead practitioner highlighted that the YST events encouraged young people from different schools to mix, for example each Connector from their school was given a different coloured wrist band, which assigned them to a group of other Connectors from different schools. The young people were nervous at the start but by the end of the event they had met new friends and have maintained a connection with one another via social media. The lead practitioner highlighted that her Connectors noticed differences between themselves and some of the other young people but it was not a barrier to them mixing. She emphasised that the Connectors at her school chose to spend time with other young people at the event that they liked, regardless of their gender or ethnicity, or the school they came from.

“We got there early and then Archbishop Ilsley’s students came and they just mingled straight away.”

(KAREN MORROLL, HEAD OF DEPARTMENT AT KING EDWARD VI SHELDON HEATH ACADEMY)

New connections have also been formed between the group of Connectors from King Edward VI Sheldon Heath Academy; for example, they now have a WhatsApp group to maintain communication with each other.

“The role that Archbishop Ilsley students took was beautiful. They were dominant players, but before they were passing the ball, they were giving it to the younger players; they did that off their own back.”

(KAREN MORROLL, HEAD OF DEPARTMENT AT KING EDWARD VI SHELDON HEATH ACADEMY)

“We see the same faces at school so was nice to get out there and make new friends and broaden our social circles.”

(CONNECTOR AT KING EDWARD VI SHELDON HEATH ACADEMY)

“Makes you realise that everyone is unique and different but shows that you can be friends with anyone.”

(CONNECTOR AT KING EDWARD VI SHELDON HEATH ACADEMY)

Increased confidence and life skills



Birmingham Connect has helped the Connectors to build their confidence and self-belief. The lead practitioner highlighted that through the programme, they have all matured, and learnt how to deliver and present themselves. As an example, she highlighted that the Connectors took part in Judo at one of the events and as part of this, they had to introduce themselves to each other and compete against each other, which encouraged positive behaviours. In addition, one Connector who was very quiet and timid put himself forward to lead one of the sessions at the Birmingham Connect events; he struggled to be heard over the noise but learned that day that it's all about his presence. Another Connector was very sociable but lacked confidence to lead but over the course of the programme, he became the main organiser of the group of Connectors.

New opportunities



The visits to Birmingham University for the Birmingham Connect events inspired the young people. Many had not been on a school trip for a long time so this provided a new and exciting opportunity for them. The young people also came away with a greater understanding of the Commonwealth Games and what it is like to be part of a global event.

The school events will also give young people an opportunity to take part in different activities; much of the sport at school focuses on single-sex, traditional team sports such as football, rugby and netball, but the activities delivered through Birmingham Connect offered an opportunity for mixed sessions, and the nature of the activities created a more level playing field for all participants. One participant, in particular, loved taking part in a new sport so is hoping to join a local club.

“They were absolutely on cloud nine – they were loving it because they got to experience different things.”

(KAREN MORROLL, HEAD OF DEPARTMENT AT KING EDWARD VI SHELDON HEATH ACADEMY)

Improved relationships between schools



Through the programme, King Edward VI Sheldon Heath Academy was partnered with Archbishop Ilsley Catholic School. Prior to Birmingham Connect, the schools had not worked together before. The schools intend to deliver their Birmingham Connect school events together and positively, they plan to maintain a relationship beyond the programme; teachers in both schools have connected and plan to run regular sports clubs together and at least one event like the one they have delivered through Birmingham Connect each year.




“They’ve learnt that there is more than what’s on their doorstep.”

(KAREN MORROLL, HEAD OF DEPARTMENT AT KING EDWARD VI SHELDON HEATH ACADEMY)

Future

King Edward VI Sheldon Heath Academy has now started to introduce lanyards for students who do not participate in PE so that they can adopt another role, such as coach. They also plan to establish new sports opportunities with their partner school, Archbishop IIsley Catholic School. In addition, the young people have reported maintaining connections with new friends that they have met through Birmingham Connect.

Top Tips

-  Carefully select the young people to be involved; those that are willing to work hard and to learn.
-  Be organized; this ensures the young people can get the most out of the programme and that trips out of school can be effectively planned in advance.
-  Use the funding available through the programme to relieve some of the pressure of delivering a programme on top of normal school responsibilities, for example by paying for teaching cover for time spent out of school for programme activities or to support travel to the events.



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