



EVERYONE'S A WINNER

DEAN WATSON EXPLAINS HOW RAISING THE PROFILE OF PE IS IMPROVING ATTAINMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT AT RASTRICK HIGH SCHOOL...

It's known that PE can be a vital tool in increasing the motivation and engagement of students across the curriculum, so the challenge of raising its profile within the whole school is an important one to grasp.

In its unusual position as a solely practical subject at Key Stage Three, PE provides students with opportunities to develop vital life and social skills to succeed not only in PE, but also in other lessons and in life in general. Key characteristics such as resilience, teamwork, determination, independence, and the willingness to attempt, rather than avoid, can be transferred from subject to subject. Through elements of competition, and drawing students out of their comfort zones, it can promote confidence and improve self-esteem as well as creating a pride and identity for students in a way that other subjects cannot.

Active power

My strong belief is that by engaging students in PE and school sport, it gives them an opportunity to express themselves and challenge their limitations, helping them realise that obstacles, both literal and metaphorical, can be overcome. Harnessing these qualities in other curriculum areas can prove vital in empowering the students to work hard and try new things. Moreover, school sport provides a plethora of cross-curricular opportunities whereby students can subtly experience elements of other subjects and develop in these areas, without thinking they are in an English or mathematics lesson, for example.

With this in mind, we decided to sign up to Sky Sports Living for Sport at Rastrick High School, delivered in partnership with the Youth Sport Trust, as it had clear aims of using sport to raise attainment, improve behaviour and attendance and enhance social skills, which is

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something we were keen to do. In a school setting, it was my opinion that leaving PE and sport in isolation was clearly limiting its potential. We wanted to use this as a vehicle to have greater impact across the school.

Additionally, the opportunity to work with professional athletes who are willing to come into school and share their stories is imperative in the success of the projects. This allows the students to realise that champions are ordinary people like themselves, and that even these champions had to overcome barriers and do things they did not particularly want to, or enjoy, in school or in life.

Progress for all

It took little persuasion for our head teacher to sanction the initiative, selling the vision that we would not be focussing on improving sporting ability, but on improving progress and attainment in other prominent curriculum areas. The project gained the support of the English department and other staff who recognised we were using the reputation of the PE department to support other areas of the school. This is important because collaboration is key to the success of a project.

It is a good tip to choose a sport that students know nothing about and have never tried before – we selected Aussie Rules – because there are no preconceived ideas about it, meaning it can be entered into with open minds. It also creates a level playing field for all students.

Choosing the students and understanding

your goals is also an important consideration. We focused on Y9 to enhance progress in English before students began their GCSEs. A list was created of all boys in the year who had not made expected progress in English, before cross referencing this with students who enjoy and engage in PE. The list was long, so we prioritised students who had a second 'issue.' For some this was behaviour issues, for others it was attendance or social skills. All, however, had the common theme of engaging with and enjoying PE and school sport.

Rigorous measures were put in place at every assessment period to monitor the behaviour, attendance and progress of this cohort of students across the curriculum and not just in PE and English, even though these were the main focuses. When students were not making progress in an area, strategies were put into place to work on these deficiencies. As a result, progress in all areas was phenomenal, with examples such as one student moving from a final warning for a permanent exclusion to not receiving a single behaviour point in the final term of the project. Another, who had previously only regressed in English since starting at secondary school, made four sublevels of progress in only two terms.

Ever onwards

The success of the project has created a buzz around the school amongst students and staff alike, with the momentum being maintained by changing the cohort and using the previous cohort to act as mentors and leaders. We will be moving forward with this in the next academic year linking one project with English, maths and science to widen the impact it has across the core subjects. It is safe to say that recognition in school of the value of PE, and its positive impact on other areas of the curriculum, is growing exponentially.