

## **Berwick Academy – Girls Active**

### **School context**

Nestling at the heart of the community in England's border town with Scotland, we at Berwick Academy, England's northern-most high school, have demonstrated a tenacious approach to school improvement over recent years. Very much at the centre of this forward momentum has been a clear focus on raising student aspirations, embedding resilience and embracing new challenges.

Our PE department has undergone a renaissance, and students have benefitted from our focus on creating a flexible approach to engaging students with their learning. One of our priorities was the engagement levels of girls and their perceived enjoyment of taking part in physical activity on a regular basis.

### **Activities**

The Girls Active programme came at an opportune time for us as staffing, curriculum and community facility changes created an opportunity to expand our provision. Although quite a daunting prospect from a staff perspective, the 30 Year 10 girls jumped at the opportunity to discover more about their interests and needs, as well as develop a project that would ultimately help them to rediscover their love of sport and physical activity.

The initial phase of the Girls Active programme engaged the girls in activities to support them to develop a deeper understanding of their wishes and dreams in relation to PE lessons. This process was supported by one of the Youth Sport Trust's national trainers and an athlete mentor. Not only did the girls create a solid platform from which to embark on their journey, but they also learned more about one another and working collaboratively for the benefit of the team. Our four GLAMs were inspirational driving the programme and ensured that all pupils had a voice that was listened to.

Through the discovery process, the girls homed in on their collective desire to support younger pupils to be physically active as well as develop their own sports leadership skills. This, together with the launch of a new £25m sports complex opening in the town led to the girls proposing to lead indoor bowls activities to our local first schools.

With concept in place, and the girls eager to begin their journey, we were overwhelmed with the support of local and national partners, including Active Northumberland and Bowls Scotland. Both partners supported the girls to access and achieve a Level 1 Indoor Bowls qualification, which sought to enhance their knowledge and skills when delivering sessions.



As the project continued it became evident that, despite their eagerness to engage in the indoor bowls coaching sessions, the girls felt under-prepared in the leadership aspect of their role. However, a second session with Amanda, the athlete mentor, supported them with key areas of successful leadership organisation and delivery.

## **Benefits**

Midway through our second year of Girls Active, we can now see that the gains are far wider than we had previously anticipated. The original 30 Year 10 girls (who are now in Year 11) have grown as individuals and as a team, successfully coaching more than 170 children from 6 local primary schools in a range of indoor bowls activities. Their confidence, engagement levels and positive attitudes to sport and physical activity have increased and, as a result, we have noted a dramatic improvement in attendance in lessons.

However, the impact has been far greater than this, with girls in other year groups now approaching the PE department to ask if they will get the chance to be involved in the Girls Active programme. As a result of this, and with the additional funds made available to us by the programme, we have now embedded this project in our curriculum where it will form an integral part of our teaching and learning.

The project has also cemented relationships with the local community, both the first schools and the new leisure centre. As regular participants at the centre themselves, the PE staff have seen increasing numbers of students using the gym after school.

Above all, the girls now recognise that their voice is valued and that we have their needs and interests at our heart. Where once they were reluctantly 'compliant' in PE, now they are taking an active interest in its delivery and enthuse about what they want to do.