

6. Creating a community through co-curricular activities

Wilmslow High School- a mixed sex 11-18 comprehensive school in Wilmslow, Cheshire, England. Wilmslow is a large school with approximately 2000 students on roll. (North West / SLIDACI: 10 / PLIDACI: 6)

What?

Through participating in sport and physical activity in co-curricular activities, it is recognised that pupil engagement in schools can increase by developing a sense of belonging within the school community and representing their school. This is critical as since the pandemic there has been a 35% increase in the number of children and young people feeling lonely even with access to social media, (Mental Health Foundation, 2021). Therefore, these clubs have the opportunity to create social connections and develop lifelong skills for children and young people in addition to being physically active.

So what?

Wilmslow High School proves the importance of bringing students together through co-curricular activities through recognising and rewarding students for their commitment to attending and their values demonstrated whilst participating. Valuing the importance of teamwork, staff are minimizing isolation by building a community within each co-curricular club on offer within their timetable through rewarding regular attendees with fixtures and providing trophies and awards for demonstrating sportsmanship values.

With an end of season celebration evening available for attendees, clubs are committed to both individual and team development in a safe environment after school. To support the attendance of students, the school's timetable is structured to allow for Physical Education lessons to be scheduled for the end of the day with taster sessions integrated to encourage students to 'give it a go'. Through placing the sessions after school, the school is endorsing the safety of young people encouraging young people to participate in a safe supervised provision and in positive activity after school. This concept is critical as [national research](#) has shown pupils are fearing for safety after school and also the rise in stabbings of under 16s in the 4-6pm window.

Wilmslow High School staff understand the importance of creating a sense of belonging for pupils, going the extra mile by leading the school teams in Saturday morning fixtures to provide the opportunity for children and young people to represent their team and compete. Alongside creating a positive competition experience for the pupils, this investment of time has positively impacted the relationship between staff and pupils particularly with pupils on the verge of exclusion: channelling their behaviour towards a positive outlet.

Now what?

To broaden the sense of belonging for all children across secondary schools, schools can consider:

1. Exploring the link between curriculum and co-curricular provision- i.e., consider implementing taster sessions within Physical Education lessons to promote the opportunities available in co-curricular activities.
2. Work with senior leaders to consider where timetabling of PE at the end of the day could aid opportunities for young people to stay after school.
3. A focus of creating a community within co-curricular activities to ensure students want to attend, and also implement a school wide reward scheme to recognise individual achievements that are not solely performance based.



[Mental Health Foundation \(2021\) 'What is the current state of loneliness in children and young people?'. \[Accessed 10/08/23\]](#)