

Insight driving innovation and impact

BE Football Case Study: St Christopher's School

Building girls' confidence and self-belief through football.

May 2022

Believing in every child's future

Introduction

St Christopher's School, in Wrexham, is one of the biggest Additional Learning Needs (ALN) schools in Wales. It is a mixed gender school and currently has around 300 pupils, aged 6 – 19 years old.

In 2020, St Christopher's School joined the BE Football programme. BE Football is delivered by the Youth Sport Trust (YST) and funded by the Football Association for Wales (FAW) Trust. It aims to bring football to schools through a life skills approach for female pupils. BE Football explores how teachers can engage girls in curriculum physical education (PE) through football, identifies and develops life skills and supports girls to be empowered to lead football-related activity for others.

Background

St Christopher's School had previously worked with the YST and the FAW Trust but is always keen to be involved in new projects that give the staff new ideas and their pupils extra experience.

Prior to BE Football, the school already offered football for an eight-week period on the curriculum each year and the school regularly entered a mixed team to compete in the football tournament in Wrexham. Across all sports, girls often played in the same teams as the boys. However, it was a small proportion of the girls at the school that played football. The school also had a small number of young leaders that supported sports delivery across the school, however this group was typically made up of more boys than girls. Covid-19 significantly impacted the school's leadership programme as it prevented much of the work they used to do with local junior schools from happening.

Activities

Training

Six BE Football Influencers took part in a virtual training course¹, which inspired the girls and gave them the skills and knowledge to become young leaders. The BE Football lead practitioner highlighted the challenges in keeping young people engaged for virtual curriculum delivery during Covid-19 but emphasized that the BE Football training was very well delivered and successfully engaged all the girls.

“The training was really interactive. They got the kids going and they were totally focused for the whole 2 hours.”

(GLYN JONES, ASSISTANT HEAD AT ST CHRISTOPHER'S SCHOOL)

¹ Covid-19 meant that the training was delivered virtually, instead of face to face.
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Launch event

To launch BE Football, the school hosted a World Cup fun day. This was the first event that school had hosted after Covid-19. They encouraged as many girls as possible, from all phases across the school, to take part in the event. The BE Football Influencers ran the event, with the support of some of the boys who were also sports leaders at the school. The lead practitioner at the school emphasised that the girls were in charge of leading the event and the boys played a supporting role (e.g. setting up the cones and the pitches). The young people were categorized into four groups based on their physical mobility and football ability and then each team chose one young person from each group to join their team. Some young people were limited to what they could do in the game, e.g. they might be only be able to score once they had done four passes.

“The good thing about the event was that this was led by the girls.”

(GLYN JONES, ASSISTANT HEAD AT ST CHRISTOPHER’S SCHOOL)

Football sessions

The BE Football Influencers have also delivered football sessions for girls during lunch-time and supported some of the curriculum football delivery, which has engaged 34 girls, all of whom had never regularly played football before.

As part of National School Sport Week in June, the school normally has a mixed football tournament but this year, the BE Football Influencers are leading a tournament just for girls. The lead practitioner stated that without BE Football, this would not have happened.

Benefits

Confidence and self-belief as leaders



BE Football has given young people a new opportunity to take on leadership roles at their school, and in turn, has given them a belief in themselves. At the start, one BE Football Influencer did not actively participate and would rely on others to do much of the work. BE Football has gradually developed her confidence and she now puts forward her own ideas, actively leads, and has already signed up for next year.

“They [the influencers] go, hang on a minute, the boys aren’t in charge, I can do this. We were in charge, which means people believe in us.”

(GLYN JONES, ASSISTANT HEAD AT ST CHRISTOPHER’S SCHOOL)

“It allowed some of the less confident girls the opportunity to flourish.”

(GLYN JONES, ASSISTANT HEAD AT ST CHRISTOPHER’S SCHOOL)

New football opportunities



The BE Football programme has given girls new opportunities to take part in football activities. The lead practitioner highlighted that as the girls have additional needs, many may find it difficult to find suitable football opportunities in the community, which further highlights the importance of this provision.

At the start, some of the girls were very shy and did not want to participate in the activities. The BE Football Influencers made the activities fun and tailored to the girls taking part (e.g. if they wanted to start by throwing the ball instead of kicking the ball they encouraged this). Without any pressure to take part, the girls gradually gained the confidence and began participating in the activities.

“The girls participating are just having fun. If they have fun, then they will come back again.”

(GLYN JONES, ASSISTANT HEAD AT ST CHRISTOPHER’S SCHOOL)

The lead practitioner for BE Football also emphasized the value of having young people delivering the activities; he highlighted that the young people often react better to one of their peers encouraging them to participate as opposed to one of the teachers; some will feel more comfortable with their peers, they can empathize with them, and support one another.

Future

St Christopher’s School is seeing new pupils with more learning difficulties coming through so from September 2022, they will have a dedicated person reviewing and developing their leadership offer for young people to ensure it is fit for purpose in the future. BE Football will help to shape this offer.

Top Tips

- ✓ Share content on social media to raise awareness of the project and the positive activities that are being undertaken with the young people themselves, plus other schools, partners, and families.
- ✓ Ensure that you have senior management buy-in to support the delivery of the project, e.g. they can help to ensure that young people have sufficient time during the school day to commit to the project. In addition, support from the PE leads will enable changes to be embedded in the curriculum.
- ✓ Make the sessions fun and do not put pressure on young people to participate.



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