

Insight driving innovation and impact

# Birmingham Connect Case Study: King Edward VI Aston School

Using new sports and greater social mixing to increase enjoyment of physical activity

June 2022



## Introduction

King Edward VI Aston School is a multi-ethnic, all-boys grammar school and specialist sports college located in the Aston area of Birmingham. It has around 963 pupils and is part of Birmingham Connect.

Birmingham Connect 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. The programme is delivered by the Youth Sport Trust (YST) and funded by the Commonwealth Sport Foundation (CSF) via Birmingham 2022 and Sport England.

## Background

King Edward IV Aston School was keen to take part in the programme as it is linked to the Commonwealth Games and develops leadership skills in young people. There was also the desire to promote greater social integration, and to increase understanding of people from different backgrounds. The lead practitioner highlighted an interesting contrast for the pupils at King Edward Aston; while they are in a “grammar school bubble”, they also live in one of the most deprived areas in the country.

“Because we’re based in an all-boys grammar school, you’d think the need isn’t that great here. But we are in one of the most deprived areas in the country.”

HELEN TONKS, LEAD PRACTITIONER

The lead practitioner reported that the school has a “big sports programme”, where “95% of students are part of a programme or a sports team”. The lead practitioner’s aim was to recruit a group of young people to be Connectors on the programme who would benefit the most from an opportunity to develop their leadership skills; the eight young people selected were all from year eight and none of them were part of a sports team at school.

## Activities

### Connect-In Events

#### 1. Virtual training

The lead practitioner and the eight Connectors attended a virtual kick off session that was hosted by the YST, supported by YST Athlete Mentors<sup>1</sup> and Team England Ambassadors. The Connectors reported that they particularly enjoyed the stories of the Athlete Mentors, and the interactive parts of the training, including the quiz and engaging with the pupils from the school they were partnered with.

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<sup>1</sup> YST Athlete Mentors are some of Britain’s most successful world class athletes that inspire young people.

## 2. Taster day

The aim of the taster day was for Connectors and staff to explore different types of activities to use in their events, including judo, boxing, badminton, squash and basketball. This was a particular success as the Connectors agreed this event was the best thing about taking part in Birmingham Connect so far. They reported that they took part in sports they had not done before and learnt about job opportunities during the career's event that they were unaware of, such as sport analysts and journalists. They said that this "opened [their] eyes to what else is there". The Connectors particularly enjoyed meeting pupils from other schools face-to-face instead of virtually.

**"We got to socialise with the other partner school. [...] We finally got to meet them in person and tried the activities with the professional athletes which was really fun."**

**CONNECTOR FROM KING EDWARD IV ASTON SCHOOL**

The lead practitioner perceived the event to be "well-organised" and it facilitated the mixing of pupils in a positive way; while the boys felt "shy and reserved during the first activity", they "became more confident as the day went on".

## Connect-With Events

### 1. School led event at King Edward's school site

The Connectors from King Edward Aston and their partnered school Eden Boys' School received training to achieve a Tennis Leaders Qualification and to umpire. They received a certificate from the Lawn Tennis Association at the end of this. The Connectors also spent time planning their own 10-minute tennis session for the event at Birmingham University the following week. The aim of this school led event was to mix the young people up for the activities to encourage greater social mixing between the schools. This goal was achieved as the Connectors from King Edward Aston reported that they particularly enjoyed playing tennis together with the Connectors from Eden Boys' School at the end of the day.

### 2. YST led event at Birmingham University

The Connectors from both King Edward Aston and Eden Boys' School led a tennis coaching session for participants from each school. This had been planned during their first event with their lead practitioner. The Connectors perceived this event as "pretty fun", involving "good socialising". This event also offered a range of different sports and activities and allowed them to develop their leadership skills and to mix with other young people involved in the programme. The venue impressed the Connectors and helped build momentum, according to the lead practitioner.

**"Well-executed idea to have us train other people and teaching schools. It was a good thing."**

**CONNECTOR FROM KING EDWARD IV ASTON SCHOOL**

### 3. School led event at King Edward's school site

The Connectors from both schools helped run a primary Year 5/6 tennis event by making use of their umpiring skills learnt during the first Connect-With event. They tracked the scoring of the matches, explained the rules of the game to the primary pupils and finally awarded “respect badges” at the end of the competition. The lead practitioner was very pleased with their engagement, and the Connectors reported that they enjoyed the event and the engagement from the primary pupils.

## Benefits

### Increased confidence and life skills



Birmingham Connect has helped the Connectors to build their confidence and self-belief, particularly to present and deliver activities in front of others. The Connectors also developed other life skills including leadership, communication, and resilience. Indeed, the Connectors recalled the pupils they were coaching during the Birmingham University event to be “a bit disobedient”

because they were a similar age and thought they could be “messing around”. Instead of being frustrated by this, the Connectors carried on developing their leadership skills and their next event was a very positive experience.

**“I became more confident about leading and talking in front of other people.”**

**CONNECTOR FROM KING EDWARD IV ASTON SCHOOL**

The lead practitioner also highlighted that the biggest success of the programme so far is seeing the Connectors' confidence grow.

**“Amazing to see that journey from shy and reserved to them actually leading. That's a life skill, whatever job you go into, you need to speak and communicate.”**

**HELEN TONKS, LEAD PRACTITIONER**

Additionally, the lead practitioner mentioned that the Connectors will get a lot out of the programme when it is finished too; their status in school has risen as they engaged in something that has “high profile in school” and that “celebrates their achievements”.

### Improved connections between schools and social mixing



King Edward Aston and Eden Boys' School had not worked together before Birmingham Connect. The schools delivered their school events together which worked well and was a positive experience for the pupils. The Connectors reported that they developed social skills as part of the social mixing. “Having to talk to new people” was something they struggled with at the beginning,

however they now feel more confident in engaging with pupils from different schools.

Birmingham Connect Case Study: King Edward VI Aston School

“Just getting off to a good start with people, getting the courage to speak with them openly.”

CONNECTOR FROM KING EDWARD IV ASTON SCHOOL

The Connectors confirmed that they are on good terms with the Connectors from Eden Boys' School, including pupils who are of different ethnicities to them. The process of meeting new people from different backgrounds was described as “fun”. Indeed, it could be observed during the school-led events that the Connectors chose to spend time with the other Connectors from their partner school, regardless of their background. It could be observed that when these events were over, and the Connectors from both schools were waiting for their school busses to arrive, they all stood in mixed groups from both schools talking to each other. King Edward Aston is a grammar school located in a very deprived area of Birmingham; positively, the programme has helped to raise awareness and understanding of the school among other young people in the local area.

“It’s been good to see the boys interacting with students from other schools and dispel myths of grammar schools being really posh. For other schools to interact with our boys and see they are quite normal boys, it’s a good thing. And for our boys to see students from other schools and get out of that grammar school bubble.”

HELEN TONKS, LEAD PRACTITIONER

### Increased enjoyment and engagement in physical activity



The Connectors were selected to take part in the programme partly due to their lack of engagement in school sports teams. The lead practitioner mentioned that they are “very academic” and feel “very pressurised to get A stars”. Therefore, the lead practitioner highlighted that beside the increase in confidence, one of the biggest successes of Birmingham Connect has been the Connectors “having that time to enjoy something without that pressure”. The young people enjoyed the variety of activities so much so that they plan on engaging more with physical activity both inside and outside of school now. It has inspired them as they now participate in sports they never played before, such as squash.

“They got the opportunity to trial different sports. Trying those sports they haven’t done before opened their mind a bit about what the Commonwealth Games are about.”

HELEN TONKS, LEAD PRACTITIONER

## Future

King Edward Aston has successfully completed the Connect-In (assembly, virtual training, taster day) and the Connect-With events (YST led events, school led events). What the Connectors now look forward to is the Connect-All festival event later this month where all participating schools come together.

Beyond Birmingham Connect, the lead practitioner plans on involving the Connectors from both King Edward Aston and Eden Boys' School in a leadership programme next year in order to build on their leadership skills and experience more opportunities to deliver festivals. The aim is that when the Connectors get into year 9, they will be invited to a Future Prospects leadership academy which focuses on social integration with other young people from different backgrounds, gaining recognised NGB qualifications and increasing their knowledge of possible careers and pathways in sport and leadership. This is a yearlong course starting at the end of year 9 and progressing into year 10.

## Top Tips

- ✓ Carefully select the young people to be involved, those who would benefit from the programme the most and where the impact will be highest, not just the "sporty" ones.
- ✓ Ensure that the teachers and young people have plenty of information about Birmingham Connect and what it entails at the start of the programme.
- ✓ Integrate Birmingham Connect activities into other programmes and projects that are already happening within the school, e.g. use Connectors to support other events rather than always coming up with something new.



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