SCHOOL GAMES IMPACT AWARDS

School Innovation and Impact: Embracing Technology through VR

Berwick Academy
Objectives: to use technology to enable hard-to-reach and disengaged young people to be more active.

The school opted not to persuade pupils to stop playing video games, but instead to use the power of gaming to establish tangible links to physical fitness and PE lessons as well as to transition Year 8 pupils from three feeder middle schools. The school aimed to address the decline in after-school clubs by linking them with video games, via a Sporting Virtual Reality Club and Experience days. The benefits of this technology have been life-changing: increasing activity levels for the hard to reach disengaged young people who would not participate in physical activity and regularly not attend PE, as well as building more positive relationships with staff.

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Who were the target audience and how were they identified?

The target audience were 20 existing pupils in years 9-11 plus 40 feeder school pupils from year 8 who fit these criteria: resistent to sport; on a Pupil Premium list; led a sedentary lifestyle; and enjoyed video games - often to excess. All 40 had previous engagement issues in PE and/or specific learning needs. Rather than stopping young people from playing video games, the school wanted to establish links to physical fitness and PE.

The aim was to increase the components of fitness such as reaction time, coordination and power, and not to focus on aerobic fitness or competition which was the feedback from pupil voice.

What did they do?

Following pupil consultation, and with the help of Open Schools Funding (OSF), the school purchased Virtual Reality (VR) headsets to link the virtual and real worlds. Staff were trained in their usage and designed formats whereby a mixture of VR and real-world activity is delivered in both structured sessions and unstructured free play.

The school has been utilising the virtual/real combination in an after-school club, during PE lessons, and at a Year 8 transition Experience Day.

What was the impact and how did it relate to the School Games key outcomes?

The VR headset programme has provided over 640 hours of additional sporting enrichment time. Because of the target group, this time has not been taken away from other sporting activities but instead was generated from pupils who would not have taken part in sport at all.

One pupil joined the school as a selective mute with learning needs. He once hid in a bag to avoid a PE lesson but after joining the VR group, now actively engages in regular PE, contributes to class discussions and is developing key skillsets.

How did they make it sustainable?

The school aims to continue with the VR after-school clubs to at least the end of the academic year, and to establish a date for an annual Experience Day for year 8s from feeder schools. Active Northumberland SGO has offered support in running the Experience Days, and students are empowered to take leadership roles on these days.

Information on the impact has been presented to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), which has galvanised support within the wider school curriculum.

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