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& activity research



Active Kids Paralympic Challenge: School Journeys



June 2016

About SPEAR

The Centre for Sport, Physical Education and Activity Research (SPEAR) is located within Canterbury Christ Church University. SPEAR undertakes a range of theoretically-informed analyses, from critical commentaries and reflections on current policy and practice, to commissioned research, evaluation and consultancy.

SPEAR's research guides and informs public policy to increase physical activity and sport participation. It contributes to the wider evidence-base used by policy-makers, provides a rationale for government and commercial investment, and steers programme improvements to enhance the experience of practitioners and participants.

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Active Kids Paralympic Challenge Journey Garrat Park

School Context

Garrat Park is a special needs school for students aged 11-19, located in the London Borough of Wandsworth. The school provides support for students with moderate learning difficulties, including autism. Students represent a variety of ethnic groups and the proportion of pupil premium students is above the national average.

The school has a small playground, indoor sports hall and astro-turf pitch. To expand provision the school has developed strong links with local sports clubs and leisure centres. Garrat Park offers a range of extra-curricular clubs and teams including football, rugby, cricket and tennis.



Active Kids banner at Garrat Park

Reasons for Engagement

Mike Darcy, a PE teacher at Garrat Park, became aware of Active Kids Paralympic Challenge through Active Kids: *"I was put in charge of collecting vouchers and came across Active Kids Paralympic Challenge on the website, so thought it was worth taking a proper look"* (Mike Darcy, PE teacher).



Active Kids poster in school reception

Through 'Get Set', Garrat Park was also given the chance to attend the 2012 Paralympic Games:

We were lucky enough to take some of the kids to the Paralympic Games in 2012 and saw some of the athletics; they absolutely loved it! Ever since then I have really wanted to give the kids more opportunities to get involved with the Paralympics.

(Mike Darcy, PE teacher)

Mike hoped that Active Kids Paralympic Challenge would be an opportunity to develop student's social skills:

As a SEN school some of our [student's] behaviours can be very challenging. Ability can be quite low, and a lot of them have problems making friends and working together - social skills can be a real problem. So Boccia is great - everyone gets a go and it's a very simple activity.

(Mike Darcy, PE teacher)

The equipment also contributed to Garrat Park's decision to register:

The equipment looked great, and it was something a bit different. It is a great opportunity to breathe new life into the curriculum... it seemed to be too good of an opportunity to pass up!

(Mike Darcy, PE teacher)

Snapshot of Activities

Mike delivers Active Kids Paralympic Challenge within PE lessons for years 7, 8 and 9, working through each of the challenges weekly. On the day of the visit, Active Kids Paralympic Challenge was delivered in a Year 7 PE lesson with a group of mixed ability students; all with a statement of SEN.

The lesson began with a short introduction to Paralympic sport and disability athletics. The students discussed different impairments disabled athletes might have, and how sports could be modified to make them more inclusive: *"If you can't use your legs but you want to play volleyball, if everyone sat down then you would all be at the same height and that would be fair"* (Year 7 participant).

Students were then split into four teams with each team member allocated a number in preparation for a relay. Each student ran to and from a cone at the end of the playground before 'tagging' another team member.

Mike asked students how to adapt the activity for someone with visual impairment: *"Maybe you could have someone direct them?"* (Year 7 participant). Students were then split into pairs, one wearing a blindfold and the other acting as guide. Using a guide rope pairs were instructed to walk slowly to the cone at the end of the playground and back. Most struggled to keep pace and rhythm, resulting in stumbling and misdirection. Mike noticed a lack of communication between the pairs and encouraged guides to talk to and work with their partners: *"It does make sense actually; if you can't see then you need to listen instead"* (Year 7 participant).

Students gradually became more comfortable and progressed to a slow run in relay format. Towards the end of the lesson, Mike added puzzle pieces and asked pairs to collect a piece when they reached the cone, bring it back and complete the puzzle. The element of competition engaged the whole class and all students guided and cheered on their teammates as they collected the puzzle pieces.

The lesson finished with a short recap about disability athletics and the different Paralympic sports that will feature in Rio: *"I want to see goalball... I think it will be really fun to watch!"* (Year 7 participant).

Perceptions of Resources

Mike is impressed with the Active Kids Paralympic Challenge resources: *"They're fantastic - very good for the kids. It is different, lots of fun, and you can do it in any space"* (Mike Darcy, PE teacher). The resources also help Mike deliver more accessible activities:

We differentiate because of the varying abilities, but using Active Kids Paralympic Challenge, everyone is on a level playing field. One student who is in a wheelchair was able to be involved in all the activities. It has been really accessible that way... I have contacted other special needs schools in the area and have stressed that they use the kit.

(Mike Darcy, PE teacher)



Guided walking
(click picture to play video)



Blind relay
(click picture to play video)



Active Kids Paralympic Challenge Puzzle
(click picture to play video)

The challenge cards are seen as integral to delivery:

I like the way it has separate sections; Space, Task, Equipment and People. You can tweak the activities to make it really work for that particular group.

(Mike Darcy, PE teacher)

Impact of Active Kids Paralympic Challenge at Garrat Park

Every student at Garrat Park has SEN, however, many had not previously participated in disability sport and were not aware of opportunities available. Mike believes that Active Kids Paralympic Challenge has raised awareness and aspirations: *“Some of them didn’t even know about the Paralympic games before but now they are so interested, and a few of them even want to be in the Paralympics one day”* (Mike Darcy, PE teacher).

Mike believes that the inclusive nature of the activities encourages students to be more active:

On the football pitch, the boys run rings around the girls, but in a game of Boccia the girls had a chance to beat them. They are much more comfortable doing physical activity because it is such a leveller. The Paralympic challenges are less about how strong or fast you are, but more about teamwork and communication.

(Mike Darcy, PE teacher)

Through Active Kids Paralympic Challenge, Mike is seeing improved concentration and focus in PE and across the wider curriculum:

Boccia is a great one for students to concentrate and focus on what they are doing. They then take that focus with them to the next lesson; some teachers have commented that they are coming in more focused and relaxed.

(Mike Darcy, PE teacher)

Students are reported to have become more aware of different impairments and have developed a greater understanding of the obstacles disabled people face:

At the London Youth Games, if our students are walking around on finals day and come across children who are blind and holding someone’s hand – in the past they might have joked about it, but now they realise why they need support. They understand what being visually impaired is like and how difficult it can be.

(Mike Darcy, PE teacher)

Active Kids Paralympic Challenge has helped foster teamwork and communication; skills that Mike has been targeting as an area for improvement:



Paralympic discussion



Working in teams

A lot of our students struggle in team sports, but during these activities they have really had to work together... doing things like the guided running has really helped them communicate; once they put on the blindfold they realised how much they relied on their partner's communication, so when it was their turn to guide they were great at describing it in a way their partner could understand.

(Mike Darcy, PE teacher)

As a deliverer, Mike was keen to use Active Kids Paralympic Challenge as a chance to enhance his own skills and understanding:

I trained as a mainstream PE teacher, so everything I know about special needs I have learnt on the job, bits and pieces here and there. Any forms of training and other ideas are always welcome and this has been very informative... some of the tips are things I have never really thought about before so it's been beneficial for me.

(Mike Darcy, PE teacher)

The challenge cards also provide other members of staff with a useful aid in delivery:

If I have other members of staff taking a lesson, I can give them the activities to do. The resources are clear and easy to pick up and go, so they feel more comfortable doing it.

Sustaining and Embedding

Garrat Park hope to embed Active Kids Paralympic Challenge within the curriculum and is considering offering the activities before school to encourage student's readiness to learn:

I have spoken to our occupational therapist and she has suggested running these activities for 15 minutes before school to get students focused and relaxed for the day... I think these activities would be perfect.

(Mike Darcy, PE teacher)