

My Personal Best

My Personal Best is a project that focuses on developing key characteristics through physical activity, sport and Physical Education. Within the King Edward VI Aston partnership, we have 8 Alternative Provision schools. In the past, we have focused our provision on mainstream primary and secondary schools. In line with the School Games mission of tackling inequalities and supporting young people that need it the most, we have used this project to connect with young people who we have previously not been able to engage in the School Games.



School Profile



Titan St George's Academy is an alternative provision free school, founded in 2013. The school welcomes young people who are at risk of permanent exclusion or have been disengaged from education. The school has a bespoke curriculum designed to meet the needs of all its students by looking at the 'whole' child rather than one size fits all. Titan St George's Academy has 5 core values; Teach, Inspire, Transform, Achieve and Nurture.

First Steps

It was really important for us to get more of an understanding of the school, how it functions and to meet the young people who attend St George's Academy. With this in mind we spend time at the school in the following areas:

2 x meetings with the headteacher of the school.

3 x observations of PE lessons.

2 group feedback sessions with young people about their school experiences.

1 one 1 discussions with young people about PE experiences in previous schools.

Young people / teacher chose 5 characteristics from My Personal Best for focus on.

We utilised student voice by asking young people from St George's Academy which characteristics were important for them to develop. Discussions took place using one-to-one time and small groups. We talked about why these characteristics were important to them and how they might benefit in the future.

Young people pinpointed 6 main characteristics from Healthy, Social and Thinking Me criteria that they felt they would like to focus on in the summer term of 2024:

Healthy Me



Resilience
Self-Belief

Social Me



Respect
Trust

Social Me



Concentration
Decision Making

My Personal Best

Once we had identified our 6 key characteristics with young people, we began to discuss how we could use physical activity to develop these skills. From these discussions, we broke down their feedback into the following areas:



The school lacks the facilities to offer lots of different activities. These are sometimes seen as demotivating to young people.



Young people expressed a wish to try alternative activities and did not like the traditional PE offer in their previous schools.



Young people expressed a negative opinion of themselves based on their experiences in their previous schools.



Being in a safe place where it was okay to make mistakes was seen as really important to students.



Students expressed a desire to be outside where they felt it was easier to express themselves and their talents.



Students felt that physical activities gave them a chance to release frustration and anger in a positive way.

Project Plan

In conjunction with the school and taking on board the young people's views, we decided to create a 6 week sailing programme for 56 students at the school to take part in. The aim was to integrate their feedback shown above to drive change and development across the 6 skill areas. All sessions took place at the Midlands Sailing Club on Edgbaston Reservoir.



Young people in year 7-11 completed 6 weeks of sailing sessions from March – May 2024. They learned how to build their boats, ready to go in the water, how to steer and water safety. They also learned how to navigate their boat around buoys in the water.

Ratios for the programme were roughly 4 adults per group of 8 students. This allowed them to gain experience faster, due to individualised coaching both in a theoretical setting and out on the water.

Whilst observing the groups, it was clear that the feeling of being outside the classroom environment had a positive impact on behaviour, ability to follow instructions and independence when out in the boat.

A big thanks to Phil Reeves and the staff at Midland Sailing Club for all their expert delivery within the project.



My Personal Best

Case Study 1 – J (Year 9)

This student completed the most sessions. He came to me most days and asked if he could go. His positive behaviour in school allowed this. Most importantly, by working sensibly with the older students he realised that he did not have to be influenced by the poor behaviour of some in his year group – a hard lesson learnt, especially when he had to apologise. In terms of future potential, J was highlighted by Midland Sailing Club. It was agreed to offer a sponsorship as a school and I had several conversations with Dad about this. I have sent the family membership forms and await an outcome.



Case Study 2 – G (Year 9)

The only girl in a large group of boys. Progress in week one consisted of her putting on her wetsuit. The following week she sailed with a teacher after a lot of encouragement! Throughout the following weeks we saw a gradual development with her self-confidence to the point where she was happy to go out with a friend. She has matched the highest achievers in the school in terms of grading which includes participation, behaviour and attitude. This has never been done in the other sporting activities she has taken part in.



Case Study 3 – C (Year 8)

New to the school with many additional needs. Sailing presented the perfect opportunity to talk, encourage and build her confidence. The setting was calm, away from the noise of school. After week one we managed to get her into the dingy with one of the instructors and she did brilliantly. If only we could offer this one to one intervention with more of our students.



Case Study 4 – A (Year 11)

I never envisaged this student being so motivated, organised and determined. He took part in every session and extra. I didn't have to remind him or nag him. He was initially terrified when he first went into the water and panicked, swimming towards the middle of the reservoir rather than shore! Top marks.



My Personal Best

Student Blog – Pupil 1



I have always loved taking part in sport at school. In my last school we did Football, Basketball, Hockey and Badminton. Being with my friends is really important to me as I like to stay active. When I started at Titan St George's it felt like a fresh start as I was getting in trouble at my last school and my behaviour was bad. When I was told that we were going sailing, I had no idea what it was – I thought it was swimming.

We turned up to the first session and I felt scared that I would fall in and not be very good at it. It is difficult to show this to other people in the group so I just pretended it was fine but I didn't feel like that. The instructors at Midland Sailing club were brilliant. It was important to me that two of the instructors were near me age – they seemed to get me and the way I like to learn – there was no judgement and they were supportive even when things went wrong. After a while I felt really confident and was actually showing my peers what to do. This made me feel like a hero. Being able to help others gave me a sense of pride and achievement. I am really proud of the positive example I set to others who found the sailing hard and the staff at the school now look at me differently. Because they were there seeing me succeed, I feel that I belong and have a place in the school.

Sailing allowed me to develop my communication skills and social skills which I can use in other areas of my life. I have realised that even if something scares me and it feels difficult at first, I can achieve things with resilience and trying again if things go wrong. I would gladly go sailing again.



Student Blog – Pupil 2



In my last school I wasn't even allowed to do PE. I had a terrible reputation with the teachers and they would only let me do English, Maths and Science lessons. I didn't get on with the PE teacher and didn't get to be with my friends in PE. I really like to be active and don't like sitting down in a classroom. It's hard for me to sit still for a long time so I would get into trouble.

At Titan St George's I get to take part in PE and sport – we have done football, basketball and tennis this year. I also do boxing. This has been brilliant because I can use all my energy in a good way.

When we first went sailing I didn't like it. There were lots of instructions and listening whilst we set up our boats. As the weeks went on I felt more and more confident even though I kept crashing the boat! In school, I would have been angry and upset, but sailing improved my resilience to things going wrong and I just tried again until I got it right. By the end of the project I felt calmer and learned that I can deal with things going wrong in a better way. I think that teachers saw a better side of me when I was sailing. I showed them the good parts of me and I get on better with the teachers now as they know me more.

If I got the chance again I would definitely want to go sailing. I know that I can succeed at something which is something I have not felt before.



My Personal Best

Head Teacher Statement

“ For many students this has been a once in a lifetime chance to experiencing such an adventurous activity. The gasps when they saw the reservoir for the first time was noticeable.

Many students have had to overcome fears, and for some, personal pride. The experience has developed such traits as perseverance and determination especially when it has been cold or extra windy. The development of listening skills has been key.

This new activity has enabled some students to shine when they may not have been able to do so in the more traditional activities we do at school. I have been surprised at the students who have excelled when I thought that they would have given up. The knock on effect in this has been a big boost in self-confidence for several students.

The course has definitely had an impact on behaviour in school with many students earning the right to take part in extra sessions. For some, an improvement in behaviour in school has been obvious. I have had a conversation with a parents who has said that behaviour has also improved at home.

It has also created an opportunity to build teacher relationships. Any activity that takes place off site helps with this but the fact that students have been out of their comfort zone has created opportunities to praise, encourage and talk. For a few students it has provided an ideal opportunity to talk and really get to know the student. Typically we have students from challenging backgrounds or who demonstrate a whole range of complex needs and crave time from staff.

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Conclusions

Students from Titan St George’s Academy have benefitted hugely from the experience of sailing. Being in a different environment has helped them to flourish both in terms of skill level and in their personal skills. Observationally, behavioural issues during the project have been low. Students really appreciated the opportunity to be outside learning a new skill that wasn’t in the traditional PE curriculum. Students who would give up and display disrespect towards themselves and others in school showed determination, calmness and trust towards each other. They engaged fully in the activity, thanks to the professionalism of the instructors and exhibited resilience and self-belief when things didn’t go according to plan. We hope these are skills that can now transfer into the classroom and beyond to help these students create a successful future.

Next Steps



King Edward Aston will be sponsoring 3 students who showed real potential in the boat as well as a positive attitude towards staff. We will pay for membership of Midland Sailing Club next year so they can continue to develop their skills within the sport.

We are also committed to carrying on our work with Titan St George’s students in 2024-25, as well as their sister school, Titan Aston Academy.