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School improvement through sports leadership: Charters School

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Brief description

This examples shows how Charters School is developing students' leadership skills and providing opportunities for the use of these skills to improve achievement and personal development.

Overview – the school's message

'Developing leadership skills and providing opportunities for the use of these skills have been central to the impact of our sports specialism on the school's improved performance. At present we have 336 students who are leaders in not just sport, but many different areas, including the core subjects. The sense of responsibility, pride and resourcefulness engendered by our leadership programme resulted in exceptionally high scores for our students for these areas in the 2010 Kirkland Rowell survey.'



Martyn Parker and Richard Pilgrim, Co-Headteachers

The good practice in detail

Charters school was judged to be outstanding at the previous [inspection](#) in November 2009. The opportunities for student leadership were singled out for particular praise: 'An exceptional range of leadership opportunities provides superb preparation for students' future economic well-being. Many students take on responsibility, for example as sports leaders, subject leaders, eco-leaders, house representatives, or school council members.'

The impact of becoming a sports college and particularly of the student leadership programmes is seen across the whole school. One senior leader said: 'Charters' success over the last 50 years has been built on the warm and respectful working relationships between all members of the school community.' Nevertheless, since the school became a specialist sports college in 2002, there has been a dramatic improvement in the outcomes achieved by students and the opportunities and experiences available to them. This has been underlined by outstanding Ofsted inspection reports in 2006 and 2009, steady improvements in attainment and achievement, and a halving of permanent exclusions in the last five years in comparison to the previous five years. Increasing student leadership, using PE and school sport as a model of good practice was identified as a target by the school but, in itself is nothing out of the ordinary. What makes this practice exceptional is the number of students involved in both sports leadership and increasingly in other subjects across the school.

The journey

Opportunities for student leadership are a long-established part of the work in PE, through the Community Sports Leaders' Award and national governing body qualifications. Since becoming a specialist sports college, PE has led the way on a number of initiatives to increase the opportunities, responsibilities and range of leadership experiences across the school. Initially student leadership was increased through physical education and school sport (PESS) with the introduction of the Junior Sports Leaders Award and a sixth form National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) course in Teaching, Coaching and Instructing. Opportunities for students significantly increased with the introduction of a Year 9 leadership week in 2006 and the Young Apprenticeship in Sports Leadership and Management in 2007.

Year 9 leadership week

The leadership week was initiated by the PE department in 2006 for all Year 9 students following the completion of their SATs. All students completed the initial training for the national Junior Sports Leaders Award to improve their leadership, organisation and communication skills. The first year involved 25 lessons in one week to complete the training.

In 2008 English and mathematics became part of the leadership week to increase the opportunities for students to take responsibilities across the school other than in PESS, to improve students' independent learning and to link with the National Citizenship Awards that have the same aims of leadership and confidence. English and mathematics were the first to become involved because they were already using older students as Literacy and Numeracy Prefects. Both subjects introduced the idea of subject leadership through team-building and communication [exercises](#) for one hour each during the leadership week. Following the week's training, students could choose which subject they wanted to use to take their leadership forward.



Young leadership exercises

The extension of the work in this way proved a success because the principles of sports leadership were adapted for other subjects and consequently different students became engaged in taking leadership roles across the school. In 2009, science became involved and in 2010, modern foreign languages joined in. You can see examples of their lesson plans

[here](#). Currently student leaders, including those with physical disabilities, are active in PE, dance, English, mathematics, science and modern foreign languages. The impact of student leadership is significant, particularly for students in Years 10 and 11. Student evaluations at the end of the [leadership week](#) indicate a shift in their attitudes and a willingness to admit that 'I'm good at....' and/or 'I want to be a leader'.

Examples of student leadership activities following the leadership week



Joint working continues after the leadership week. For example, PE and the core subjects of English and mathematics deliver practical lessons together. The Head of PE is programmed to support one lesson per week in both subjects using physical skills to reinforce their learning.

In PESS, students use their skills to lead and support a broad range of activities. They run primary school festivals, tournaments and competitions in sport and dance, to enthuse and engage primary pupils. Some have led a visit to the school's outdoor recreation centre in Wales for students from a local special school. Leaders in Years 10 and 11 organise and officiate at the house sports competitions for Year 7 and extend extra-curricular opportunities by running additional sports clubs such as X-biking, outdoor education, volleyball and tennis. Students are also engaged in evaluating provision that has led to changes in the opportunities for their peers. For example PE Sports Leaders evaluated the impact of introducing new sports such as American Football and Aussie rules football on participation and learning. As a result of the evaluation, these activities are now available for students.

'School report'

In English, leaders initiate and judge a creative writing competition for the school, run a 'spelling bee' for Year 7 and mentor younger students working with them to improve specific aspects of their work. For example, a Year 11 leader worked with a Year 8 student to help to improve spelling. In the spring of 2010, leaders in Years 10 and 12 were involved in an action research project. They were trained, mentored and worked alongside English staff to evaluate learning in English lessons. One student leader said, 'This is about evaluating lessons to improve things from a pupil's perspective'. And it resulted in recommendations and [actions](#) for the English Faculty that have been implemented this year.

In mathematics, Year 10 leaders deliver a session for the parents and carers of new Year 7 students that show the components of 'a typical maths lesson' and 'what Year 7 will be learning' and lead the sessions for Year 9 during the leadership week.

Other student leadership activities

Student leaders support two key activities in the school. The first is at the time of transition between primary and secondary school. Students plan, lead and manage subject sessions for Year 5 pupils on both primary school sites and when the primary pupils visit Charters. They become effective role models and initial contact points for younger pupils when they join the secondary school. Some students deliver sessions to younger children during the summer holidays so that the children's parents and carers have opportunities to attend parenting

classes. The second is during the five Curriculum Enrichment Days each year when they plan, lead and manage sessions for their peers and younger students in their chosen subject.

Students also take more responsibility and undertake more roles across the school. A few very successful examples include PE leaders interviewing and feeding back their views on prospective new teachers. And in core subjects, students are beginning to plan and lead parts of lessons such as introductory starter activities or leading small group work. One student planned and led a group learning how to use a broader range of sentences in their English composition work.

Young leaders are also grabbing the initiative for themselves in other subjects. For example in Music, a group of students offered to plan and run an orchestra rehearsal when a member of staff became unavailable at a day's notice, to ensure there was no disruption to their practise. They also led workshops for strings and woodwind.

Young Apprenticeship in Sport Programme

The Young Apprenticeship in Sports Leadership and [Management](#) was introduced in 2007 for elite sports leaders. Students undergo a rigorous selection process to secure a place, including an application that outlines not only their future aspirations but what they are prepared to contribute in their own school. Currently the school has 61 students participating in the programme in Key Stage 4. They have additional lessons each week where they have opportunities to gain national governing body coaching and officiating qualifications that contribute very effectively to their future prospects in the workplace and/or to volunteering in sport.



The school ensures that the apprentices undertake a rigorous programme of learning and there are high expectations of their own independent research and preparation for sessions. The apprentices are given high levels of responsibility which they undertake conscientiously. The focus students bring to lessons is exemplary; they work productively to observe, evaluate and feedback with honesty and accuracy on each other's work in a supportive and constructive manner. When observing one session on introducing the X-bike and fitness work to their peers, the apprentices were clear and confident in their instructions and were able to use motivational language well to ensure that a rapid pace of work was maintained at all times. They were being well prepared for the world of work and indeed would not have been out of place in a sports centre or a club. Currently they lead X-bike sessions in school and run extra-curricular clubs that are bringing about positive changes for some students who have been identified as displaying challenging behaviour. Many lead sessions in other local schools or clubs and all undertake work experience placements in local leisure centres.

The young apprentices also perform a key role in a major initiative linked to the British Council and the Youth Sport Trust programme called 'International Inspiration'. This aims to 'reach young people all around the world and connect them to the inspirational power of the 2012 Olympic Games so they are inspired to choose sport'. The school has developed extensive links with the Holy Family Combined School, a rural school in South Africa. PE staff and young apprentices from Charters have been working with young leaders at Holy Family to develop PE, English and literacy for primary age pupils.

Students appreciate the opportunities available to them through the Young Apprenticeship programme. Comments such as: 'It has given me more confidence in working and communicating with others... and it has helped me to recognise the importance of adapting to different situations and having a contingency plan', are commonplace. Others say that the course has given them insight into different ways of learning and how to gain and give respect. They see themselves as ambassadors who are expected to 'model' behaviour while at school.

What will the school do next?

The staff are keen to extend opportunities for students further and some of their aspirations are summarised below.

- Introduce Level 2 Sports Leadership for Year 11 and the Level 3 Higher Sports Leaders Award (HSLA) for Year 12. Subsequently HSLA students will deliver sports leadership for primary school pupils.
- Introduce a Sports Education programme for all Year 8 students.
- Create leaders in the remaining curriculum areas.
- Continue to develop the leadership role in partner schools, both locally and abroad.
- Broaden the leadership role into the wider community, working with parents, carers and community groups on fitness programmes.
- Look at examples of good practice in other schools.
- Increase the number of discrete programmes of leadership in the curriculum to support independent learning.
- Use leaders more in lessons outside PE.

The school's background



Charters School is a community comprehensive school in Sunningdale, Berkshire. Students are drawn from a range of backgrounds and their attainment on entry is just above the national average. There are about 1,600 students, of which some 400 are in the sixth form. The school has specialist status in sport and science and has been recognised as a high performing specialist school. The vision and ethos are articulated in the mission statement: 'Unity, Respect, Excellence'.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice; or already doing something similar that could help other providers; or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Get in touch [here](#).

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