

Posted

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Context, Intent and Target Group

Background Information

Blackpool is an area with high levels of social and economic disadvantage, which is reflected in the health and physical activity levels of its young people. Local data from the *Active Lives Children and Young People Survey* has consistently shown that many children in Blackpool do not meet the recommended daily levels of physical activity, with younger pupils—particularly those in Years 3 and 4—falling below national averages. In addition, schools have reported a noticeable gap in confidence, coordination and fundamental movement skills among lower-ability pupils in these year groups.

Throughout the 2024/25 academic year, we have continued to strengthen our partnership with Blackpool Sixth Form College and their dedicated group of sports leaders. After gaining experience by supporting a range of events during this year, the leaders took full ownership in Summer Term 2 by planning and delivering their very own handball festival for eight local primary schools.

We identified their Sports Leaders group as an ideal cohort to plan and deliver a meaningful, peer-led intervention. The result was a handball festival designed to be inclusive, fun and supportive—giving Year 3 and 4 pupils from eight local primary schools a positive, confidence-building experience in sport, while providing Sixth Form leaders with a real-world opportunity to lead, organise and reflect on their impact.

Get in touch

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What was the aim of work?

The aim of the festival was designed not only to challenge and empower Blackpool Sixth Form sports leaders but to unleash their potential as confident,

inspiring role models. By leading every aspect of the event—from planning to delivery—these young leaders experienced first-hand the power of leadership, teamwork and resilience. This transformative experience helped them grow in self-belief, communication and problem-solving skills, equipping them with lifelong abilities and a strong sense of purpose. At the same time, the festival created a vibrant, inclusive space where Year 3 and 4 pupils, particularly those with lower confidence and ability, could discover the joy of physical activity, develop new skills and feel supported and motivated. The impact extended beyond the event itself, fostering lasting connections between generations and inspiring a culture of active, confident learners within the community.





Which outcome(s) did it focus on?

- 2. To ensure all competition has a clear intent and creates positive experiences based on the motivation, competence and confidence of the young people that need our support the most
- 4. To support the personal development of targeted young people through youth engagement and leadership
- 5. To advocate and engage key stakeholders on the value of School Games to support local provision and improve the experience for young people and their families

Which expectation(s) did it meet?

- Using the national tool to complete and deliver a development plan covering the current academic year, updated once each term.
- Using the development plan to show how community connections will be made for young people to continue their participation.
- Using the events calendar to upload a termly offer of events and activities with a clear intent, updated once each term.
- Using local insight and youth engagement to identify young people and schools that would most benefit from a targeted School Games offer.

- Developing a case study to show where you have made the most impact against local priorities, and through effective storytelling share your learning locally and nationally.
- Collaborating with key partners to inform the local and county offer to tackle inequalities and ensuring inclusive and safe practice.
- Prioritising resources to implement meaningful youth engagement so young people have a voice and choice of opportunity.
- Identify schools that are not engaged and developing strategies to improve this.
- Co-ordinate and signpost schools and young people to a programme of relevant training of leadership, coaching, volunteering and officiating experiences.
- Co-design and deliver a broad and balanced School Games offer that is informed by insight and youth engagement and embeds positive experiences. It is expected that an SGO will facilitate a minimum of 12 targeted inter competitions/events/festivals with clear intent.

Community links

- Active Partnerships
- Community sports clubs
- Leisure providers
- Youth board within Local Authority

Intent

The purpose of this initiative was to empower Blackpool Sixth Form sports leaders by providing them with a meaningful opportunity to develop and demonstrate leadership skills through the planning and delivery of a handball festival. The project focused on outcomes related to personal development, including confidence building, communication, teamwork and organisational skills for the young leaders. Additionally, it aimed to positively impact the physical activity levels, social skills, and self-esteem of Year 3 and 4 primary school pupils, particularly those identified as lower ability or less confident in sport. By targeting these younger pupils, the work sought to create an inclusive environment where all children could engage in enjoyable, skill-building physical activity, while fostering a culture of peer mentorship.



Target group

- Primary Schools
- Specific Year Group
- 3
- 4
- 12
- 13
- Targeted Groups of Young People

Aligns to Schools Games Intents of:

- Engage new/target groups of young people (tackling inequalities)
- Develop leadership, character, life skills

Implementation

The festival took place in Summer Term 2 of the 2024/25 academic year as part of Blackpool Youth Games Week. The leaders were divided into small groups responsible for different aspects such as event logistics, coaching sessions and equipment management. In Summer 1, the Sixth Form sports leaders delivered the festival on a smaller scale to one local primary school as a pilot. This initial run helped them gain confidence, test activities and refine the schedule and coaching plans. Building on this experience, the leaders then took full ownership of planning and delivering the larger festival for multiple local primary schools.

The leaders designed a comprehensive festival schedule that included warm-up activities, skill development stations and concluded with friendly match play. They created inclusive and adaptable coaching plans to cater to varying skill levels, focusing on different aspects of handball to ensure every participant could engage meaningfully. Two leaders were chosen to take charge of opening the event and closing it with a medal ceremony, emphasizing the School Games values rather than simply celebrating winners. Throughout the festival, the leaders actively engaged the pupils by offering encouragement, clear instructions and role modelling positive teamwork and sportsmanship. They also adapted activities in real-time to maintain inclusivity and fun, ensuring all pupils were able to participate fully. This approach demonstrated the importance of empowering young leaders to take ownership of event planning, collaborating closely with local primary schools to target younger pupils, particularly those needing confidence and skill support. The peer-led structure fostered participant engagement and confidence-building, while the recognition and celebration of achievements reinforced positive outcomes.

Throughout this academic year, the Sixth Form sports leaders worked closely on School Games in Blackpool, supporting at a variety of events to build their experience and confidence. This hands-on involvement allowed them to observe leadership and event management in action, develop key skills and gradually take on more responsibility. By the time they planned and delivered the handball festival themselves, they were well-prepared and confident in their roles, having benefited from ongoing guidance and practical opportunities to grow as leaders.



Impact

The event created a lasting positive impact on both the Year 3 and 4 pupils and the Sixth Form sports leaders. For the younger pupils, the festival boosted their confidence, physical skills and enthusiasm for sport. Teachers reported that many children, especially those who were initially less confident or lower ability, engaged more fully and enjoyed the activities, with several showing noticeable improvements in coordination and teamwork.

For the Sixth Form sports leaders, the event was a key moment in their personal development. Having successfully planned and delivered the festival, they gained substantial confidence in their leadership and communication skills. This boost was clearly demonstrated throughout the subsequent Blackpool Youth Games Week, where these leaders stepped forward with greater assurance to take on more prominent and proactive roles at various events. Teachers also praised the Sixth Form leaders, commenting on how well-prepared and approachable they were, also noting how suitable the activities were for the pupils' varying abilities. Many mentioned that the leaders were brilliant with the children, creating a supportive and encouraging environment that helped pupils feel comfortable and motivated. Several leaders have since volunteered to support sports activities and leadership roles within local primary schools, seeking to build on their experience and contribute further to the community.

The increased willingness of the leaders to volunteer and take initiative also helps strengthen ties between Blackpool Sixth Form College and local schools, promoting a culture of active participation and peer mentorship that extends beyond a single event.





Challenges

One of the challenges we faced during the project was ensuring the Sixth Form sports leaders felt fully prepared and confident to take on the responsibility of planning and delivering the festival independently. Initially, some leaders were hesitant about the scale of the event and their ability to manage different aspects such as logistics, coaching and participant engagement. To overcome this, we implemented a smaller-scale pilot event with one primary school before the full festival. This provided a space for leaders to practice, reflect and refine their plans with ongoing support and feedback, which greatly boosted their confidence and capability.

Another challenge was designing activities that were inclusive and engaging for pupils with a wide range of physical abilities and confidence levels. The leaders addressed this by creating adaptable coaching plans and remaining flexible throughout the event to adjust activities as needed in real-time. This taught us the importance of building adaptability into event planning and training young leaders to think on their feet.

From these challenges, we learned that gradual responsibility-building, strong support networks and flexibility are essential to success. The pilot event was particularly valuable and we would definitely incorporate this approach in future initiatives. If we were to do this work again, we might also allocate more time for

initial leader training and include peer mentoring within the leader group to further strengthen confidence and teamwork.

Overall, these learnings have not only enhanced the success of this project but have informed our broader approach to developing young leaders and delivering inclusive, impactful sports events within the community.

Sustainability

To ensure the long-term sustainability of this work, key measures have been put in place. By embedding leadership opportunities within Blackpool Sixth Form College's existing Sports Leaders programme, we have created a structured pathway for future cohorts to engage in similar initiatives. The successful delivery of the handball festival and the positive outcomes for both the leaders and younger pupils have established a strong model that can be replicated annually or adapted to other sports and activities.

Looking ahead, the project framework is designed to be flexible and scalable, enabling adaptation for different sports, age groups and community contexts. This adaptability ensures that future groups of young people can continue to benefit from peer-led, inclusive physical activity initiatives, further embedding a culture of active, confident learners across Blackpool.



Top tips

Top tips

- **Start Small with a Pilot:** Before launching a large-scale event, run a smaller pilot with one school or group. This builds confidence, highlights potential issues and allows for adjustments before scaling up.
- **Empower Young Leaders:** Give young people real ownership of planning and delivering activities. Provide guidance and support, but let them make key decisions to develop their leadership skills and confidence.

- **Plan for Inclusivity:** Design activities that cater to a range of abilities and confidence levels. Use adaptable coaching plans and encourage leaders to be flexible during delivery to ensure all participants feel included and motivated.
- **Build Strong Partnerships:** Collaborate closely with schools and community organisations. Clear communication and shared goals are vital for smooth coordination and long-term success.
- **Celebrate Every Achievement:** Recognise effort, teamwork and personal progress rather than just winning!

Related sport/s

- Handball
- Leadership Training