



## Opening Schools Facilities funding improved attendance and behaviour in Cornish schools

Attendance is an ever-growing priority for secondary schools across Cornwall. If children and young people do not feel like they belong at school and don't see themselves as being successful at something, they are less likely to attend. This is not the only reason for non-attendance but, having listened to many voices recently through our work with schools, children and young people, this is clearly a significant factor.

Whilst the **Opening Schools Facilities (OSF)** funding from the Department for Education was introduced to support schools in opening their facilities to increase levels of physical activity amongst pupils after school hours, it has achieved so much more. It's evident through our regular engagement with Heads of PE and school leaders that this funding is raising the profile and priority of PE departments due to the positive impact their after-school provision is having upon pupil attendance and behaviour.

Impact has been seen across the following schools:

- **Bodmin Community College** invested their funding into mixed martial arts and cycling projects, providing students with the opportunity to be more active in less traditional sports. The teachers tracked several students with one Year 10 male with special educational needs (SEN) **improving his overall attendance by 10%** with teachers reporting an improvement in his focus during lessons and a reduction in the number of negative points during the same period. A Year 8 male (SEN and Provision Plan) who is a HUB student removed from the main site due to several factors, has been attending the cycling sessions and during this time, teachers have been able to have constructive conversations about choices and actions. Consequently, after 5 weeks of cycling, he is now working towards **returning to the mainstream College** full time.
- Matt Pound, Head of PE at **St Ives Community School** reported that, due to the success of their football project, four 'hard to reach' girls in Year 9 with an average attendance below 85%, started to never miss a Friday (the same day as football club). St Ives itself is a highly affluent area yet it also has high levels of deprivation and a lack of facilities for young people within the community. With no other pitch in the town, pupils were breaking into the school to use the field simply so they could kick a ball around. The school therefore used their OSF funding to create a community football hub and was able to report an **improvement in whole school attendance of over 4%** during the same time period as the project they delivered.
- **Saltash Community School** realised that attendance improved if the after-school provision offer was right. Previously, after-school clubs were primarily geared towards those students who were interested in representing the school in competitions, focusing on traditional sports, and consequently only a small number of students took advantage of these opportunities.

Head of PE Robert Hawkins Robert has worked tirelessly to improve this, using the OSF funding to create a climbing wall, explaining: *“The aspects of climbing that are intrinsic to the activity are also those that we would promote for a long, healthy life – be these physical or mental. Furthermore, the very fact that this activity is removed from the ‘standard’ aspects of competitive sport makes it appealing to many of our young people and allows us an avenue to promote healthy living, teamwork, focus and creativity without any of this seeming like a lesson”*. As a result, they now have an increasing number of ‘non-typical’ students attending their after-school activity club with a **direct positive effect on overall attendance** - one student specifically stating that she only comes to school on Thursdays ‘because climbing club is on’.



- **Poltair School** which has the second highest number of FSM children in the county, has created a BLK Box gym for students to use before and after school, complimenting existing provisions such as breakfast club. This gym initiative has proven to be a **transformative solution to addressing attendance** issues with rates rising from below to above 90%. Scott McNally, Head of Year 9 has observed what a positive impact the project has had, noting the change in not only attendance rates but students’ social skills and physical and mental wellbeing.

Having awarded OSF funding in 19 schools across Cornwall, prioritised according to deprivation and pupils registered for benefits related free school meals, Active Cornwall have observed the direct correlation between their opening school facilities provision with improved attendance, behaviour and general wellbeing. CEO Paul Critchley commented *‘We are thrilled at the impact this programme continues to have across schools in Cornwall. A demonstration of how investment and partnership bring not only inspiration and activity but wider whole school outcomes to school communities.’*

#### Key Learnings:

- PE Department profiles raised within the school and senior leaders because OSF funded projects address whole school priorities.
- The appeal of the before/after school offer positively impacts overall school attendance.
- Increased participation in physical activity through OSF projects improves overall behaviour both at school and in the community.
- OSF funding has enabled PE departments to change their behaviour and practises to try new things to engage a new audience.

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