

Harris Academy School - Wallball

Increasing youth
engagement beyond
mainstream sports by
developing
playground games



The Club

Harris Academy in South Norwood run a Wallball session after school once a week for young people aged between 11 and 16-year-olds.

The club is made up of around 15 girls and boys across five year groups and sets out to deliver fun, yet competitive, sessions for young people who may typically struggle with mainstream sports such as rugby, football, or netball.

The facilitator, Amanda, who is a PE teacher at the school, set up the club and also coaches the sessions.

The Aim of the Club

As a member of the PE department at Harris Academy, Amanda wanted to bring a new sport to the school that young people aged 11-16 could relate to and which could eventually be added to the school curriculum.

A lot of children at the school played 'pat ball' during break times and lunchtimes and this is very similar to Wallball itself. As a result, Wallball was the obvious solution to provide a competitive, yet recreational, club that young people could relate to whilst also developing their skills, both at the sessions and in their own time.

With minimal equipment needed to play Wallball, Amanda also encourages the students to play outside of school as a way to keep fit and de-stress from any pressures at school they may have.

The club was also set up to provide an environment that is competitive and skills-based, as well as fun and engaging. The students are also able to get involved in other roles within the sport such as leaders or referees. This means it has the potential to reach those that were interested in sport already, but also targets those that may struggle with the competitive element of other sports at school.

Recruiting participants

The club is set up for students of all ages at the school which means that Amanda is able to approach and recruit students through various methods during school hours.

For example, placing posters around the school; having displays in the PE department; speaking in assemblies and tutor groups; and informing students about the club following taster Wallball sessions they did in PE lessons.

As well as this, Amanda also personally engages with young people at the school who she thinks would be well-suited to the club.

For example, she encourages those that may typically be disengaged with sport, in particular team sports, using Wallball as something that can take them away from their studies and de-stress from exams.

Ongoing Engagement

The students that come along to the sessions are generally enthusiastic and want to have fun. Sessions are tailored to suit them to ensure they maintain the motivation to participate and come back to the sessions.

One thing that works well about having a club run by a member of staff at the school is that Amanda has already developed a good rapport with the students through PE lessons and so can develop sessions based around the students' needs and preferences.

In addition, having regular contact with students throughout the week means that she is able to remind them about the session or check-in with students if they didn't attend the session.

By completing the online Youth Personalities training that London Sport created, based on Sport England's 'Under the Skin' research, Amanda understands the six youth personalities and is able to apply this knowledge when developing sessions.

She believes that Wallball sessions are suitable for a variety of different personality types. Through applying the Youth Personality Toolkit, Amanda has identified that the club is made up of a combination of Ambitious Self-Starters, Everyday Youth and Sports Enthusiasts. She has been able to cater the sessions to ensure that there are fun and engaging elements, but also skills-based and competitive aspects as well.

Furthermore, the students have goals to work towards which contributes to maintaining engagement. In particular, Amanda set up competitions and tournaments against other schools in the area which gives students who may not normally get into sports teams at the school the chance to represent their school.

They also receive medals and t-shirts for taking part which can help keep the students engaged.



The Challenges

Despite efforts to keep the students involved, there have been some unavoidable barriers which meant the students couldn't commit to the sessions every week. Exam periods are a challenge, with students having to focus on studying rather than attending the sessions. Amanda makes every effort to keep the students doing GCSEs engaged by promoting Wallball as a way to de-stress from studying.

However, with the school's focus on attainment, the students have to attend 'study support' and 'intervention sessions' instead. The exam period also means that the sports hall, that is usually used for Wallball sessions, is out of action. As there are no other suitable areas for the club to play Wallball, some sessions were unfortunately cancelled. The young people are, however, encouraged to play in their own time to practice.

A further challenge has been getting some of the students to and from the sessions. The school itself is set on two sites, which means those from the other site have to take a minibus to and from the sessions.

Some parents have been concerned that their child would miss transport home if they stayed for the full session. Amanda overcame this by allowing students to leave early if they needed to get home; she did not want them feeling obligated to attend the full session if this affected their travel home.



What makes the club successful?

- **It's relatable** - the students can identify with and take ownership of the sport as it is something they were already doing in break times with friends and so they were able to get to grips with the skills and rules quickly.
- **It's fun, engaging and open** - Amanda wanted to ensure that the sessions didn't resemble PE lessons where some students tend to disengage. To make this possible, she places more focus on the students meeting new people, having fun, and learning from others. If students wanted to sit out and observe, they were welcome to. They were not forced to do anything they didn't want to.
- **Flexibility** - by allowing students to arrive or leave the sessions when best suits them, students do not feel pressured to attend all of the sessions if they need to get transport home, for example.
- **The age group** - despite the age difference between some students (up to five years), the younger students are able to observe and learn from the older students which they would not normally be able to do in PE lessons during school hours. The older students also take on leadership roles, and this has proven invaluable as it means that these students can support and mentor the younger students to improve.
- **Goal-directed** - having Wallball competitions and tournaments to work towards means that the young people can work towards improving their skills and technique to be prepared for competitions. It also gives students who may not normally make school teams the opportunity to represent their school.

Got an idea for a Satellite club? Get in touch:

Email the team at:
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