

Case Study

Woodlands School

Disability Gymnastics sessions at
Leatherhead & Dorking Gymnastics Club



Who are we?

Woodlands School is a school in Surrey in the South East Region that specialises in providing support and education for young people who have severe learning difficulties.

What were our aims?

Our Assistant Head Teacher identified 2 groups of students who were interested in getting active. One of the groups was aged 10-13, and the other group 16-19. All of the students have severe learning difficulties, but some have a range of further impairments including physical disability affecting mobility, and hearing impairment. We wanted to find a sporting opportunity that they could enjoy and succeed at.

What did we do?

Mole Valley District Council received Sport England Inclusive Sport Funding in 2014 to set up local weekly sporting opportunities for disabled people. The council supported Woodlands School to link with Leatherhead and Dorking Gymnastics Club, who are involved in British Gymnastics' I'M IN Programme, and from September 2015 the club were able to offer our older group of Key Stage 5 students a trial term of their own Disability Gymnastics classes. Throughout the term, students made significant progress in their confidence and they learnt a number of new skills on the Floor and on a range of gymnastics apparatus. The Gymnastics Club's coaches adapted all of the gymnastics exercises depending on the needs of each of the students, and tailored sessions to their ability level and pace, making sure that everyone is included and involved!

All of the students loved their gymnastics sessions so much that the club started an additional session for Key Stage 2 students in January 2016, and they continue to offer both sessions on a weekly basis now. School staff accompany the students at the gymnastics club and always return with comments about the significant progress that the students continue to make. Thanks to the club's skilled coaches, well-planned sessions and specialist gymnastics equipment, everyone is able to succeed and learn something new.





What did we achieve?

We now have 16 disabled students regularly taking part in gymnastics. One of the students in particular has difficulty with new situations and environments, but was able to tell his parents that he wanted to join one of Leatherhead and Dorking's evening Disability Gymnastics sessions. He has now found his passion and participates in this class with enthusiasm every week, proudly demonstrating skills he has learnt to peers at school.

Leatherhead and Dorking GC have also gained a great amount of experience coaching our disabled students and have seen a number of benefits as a result of connecting with Woodlands School. Alberto Cacace, Head Coach, said:

It was our priority from the start, that everyone would be involved and have the opportunity to take part in our gymnastics sessions. Our focus has been on "Diff-Ability" rather than "Disability"! We have never looked back and since the first session, the continuous improvement made by all the students in terms of confidence, agility, coordination and individual achievement has been amazing, making these sessions so much fun and rewarding for everyone involved.

Following the success of the programme, we have been able to expand these classes and implemented a new "Diff-Ability" class that runs alongside our main stream classes on a weekly basis, for everyone to train and have fun alongside each other!

What next?

Providing that the school can continue to fund it, we are keen to continue to build on the school-club link that we have developed and ensure these fantastic sessions are available to students in the long-term. We hope that even more of our students go on to join community gymnastics sessions within the club, and that they are given opportunities to compete and perform.

What would I tell other schools?

Woodland's students have gained such a lot through gymnastics, and we would encourage other schools to link to their local Disability Gymnastics Clubs to experience this for themselves. Building confidence, improved health and stamina, developing agility and balance are just some of the benefits which our students can now use in everyday life.