

## OPENING SCHOOL FACILITIES

# CASE STUDY

## Aspire, Chesham Project



### Introduction

The Opening School Facilities (OSF) Programme aims to create sustainable positive changes to the physical activity levels of target community populations; particularly those who experience health and social inequalities which could be alleviated through sustained participation in physical activity. It does this by facilitating the opening of schools for the provision of additional PE and extra-curricular sport and physical activity.

Funded by the Department of Education, the OSF initiative is part of Sport England's 'Uniting the Movement' strategy. It contributes to Sport England's goals to tackle inequalities in physical activity by listening and responding to new audiences, supporting innovation and new ways of working, particularly working collaboratively with communities to co-evaluate new initiatives.

This case study reports the Aspire, Chesham Project, in South East England

The report is the result of a collaborative review and evaluation involving teachers and participants.

Our aim is to celebrate success and to identify learning from the project which can be embedded in future projects.



## Aspire, Chesham

Aspire is an Alternative Provision (AP) school in Chesham, catering for:

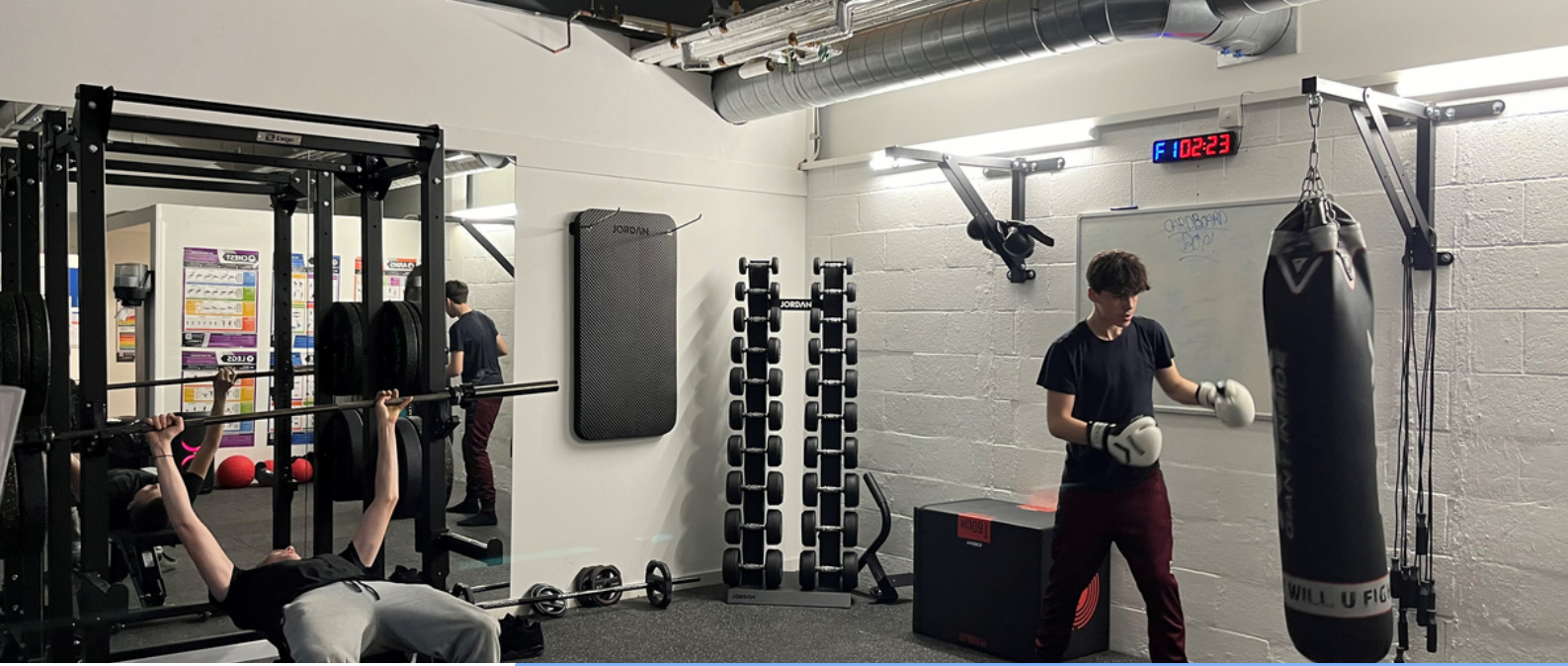
- Children who have been permanently excluded from their mainstream school
- Children who have been identified by their mainstream schools as at risk of exclusion, and who have been accepted by Aspire Schools for a placement
- Children with poor school attendance
- Children whose needs cannot be met at mainstream and where Aspire is seen as a suitable alternative
- Students either receive Special Educational Needs support or have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHC Plan)

They attend for a short period of time to identify strategies that will help them manage their emotions and be successful at school.

The aim at Aspire is to help students rediscover a love of learning, to help them learn and use strategies to regulate their emotions and manage their behaviour, and to help them identify and work towards a positive destination for their next steps in education and life.

The young people get to school by taxi, from across Buckinghamshire so are unable to use the facilities outside school hours. They attend the gym during PE lessons, free periods and breaks.





## What the project set out to achieve

Aspire planned to purchase a box gym and gym equipment to provide students and staff an opportunity to be able to improve health and wellbeing. It would be used by students throughout the day as part of intervention and engagement to help improve health and wellbeing.

The teacher said that “these young people never have any opportunities’ and were unable to afford to attend a local gym. He considered that having a gym in school would enable students to release energy and self regulate their anger.

The priority was to meet the needs of the students: by creating the gym and gaining good engagement from the young people.

“It’s fun to work out with friends and it calms me down when stressed”



these young people never have any opportunities



“ Equipment is Good. The Sessions are fun and improve my mental health”



## What the project achieved

The planned Box Gym was declined by the School Leadership Team as there was insufficient space, but instead, an unused classroom was converted. The Head of PE felt that this proved better than the planned box gym as it was located within the school building and consequently easier to integrate the use of the gym within the school timetable.

The 8 (as of October 23) students have been supported to use the equipment safely on their own and develop their own training plans. They've gained confidence using the equipment unsupervised. The students requested and designed a 'competition board' to help them stay motivated and record their goals. Staff use the board too, building staff/student rapport.

"It's fun, it's free and we get to use a quality gym"

One of the students has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and he comes to the gym to focus and release anger. Another student is a member of a boxing club and used the gym to train for an upcoming fight. Community gyms can be unaffordable for young people and one young person expressed that he was unable to join a local gym but pleased he had the opportunity to workout in the Aspire gym.

The gym has been successful with demonstrable benefit and with so many students using it. Seeing the success has led to another gym being created at the Aylesbury site and there are plans for a gym at the Wycombe site in the future.





## Reflection and application of learning

Aspire changed their approach when it wasn't possible to create a Box Gym in the school grounds, but the solution of using an unused classroom has proved far more successful as it's easier to integrate into the school timetable

As students do not live locally and use taxis to get to school, it's not possible to use the gym after school. They use it in breaks and sessions are programmed within the school day.

The students have been supported to take ownership of their time in the gym: choosing the music, creating a competition board. Clear guidance on using the equipment has given them confidence and there's clear behaviour expectations: setting the students up for success.

When they were asked what were the most important things to consider when designing a session for young people, their answers included



The learning from the experience has led to a gym being created at the Aylesbury site, with one proposed at Wycombe.

Outdoor opportunities are being planned for students who do not wish to engage with indoor fitness.

“Is it fun? Is it free? Can my friends join me?”

“Cheap/free. Good equipment. Can go there with my friends”

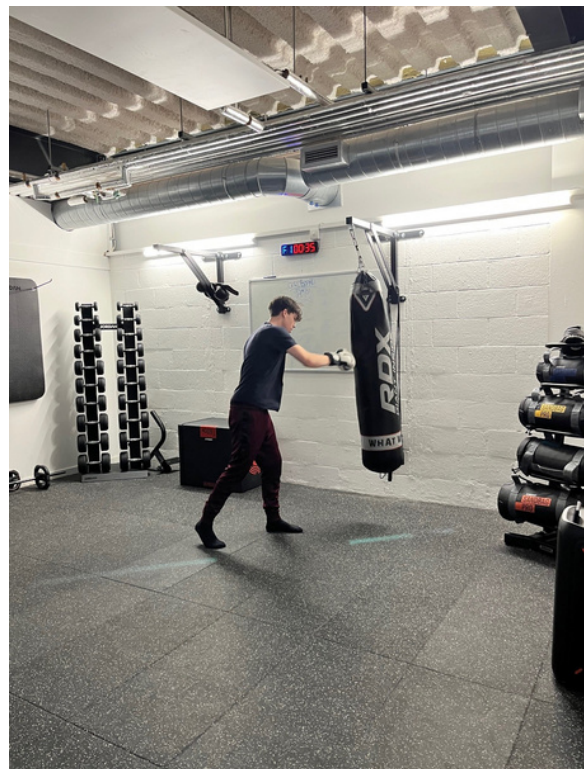
“ Exciting, fun. Can see progression. Learn new skills”

“Location, price, time”



## What next?

Year two funding will allow an Outdoor Learning Project to be developed. Aspire will purchase mountain bikes and will enable students who aren't interested in the gym to be engaged. It will form part of DofE - The Duke of Edinburgh's Award



Students identified many different ways it improved their health and wellbeing

“I've got more confident using gym equipment and it's made me stronger”

“I choose to go more with my family and take the dog for a walk”

“I've got more confident using gym equipment and it's made me stronger”

For more information, contact [rhsmith@leapwithus.org.uk](mailto:rhsmith@leapwithus.org.uk)