



The importance of sport in developing the whole child

Headteacher of Quinton House School, Catherine Cozens, explains why sport has an important role to play in developing the whole child.

The London 2012 Olympics raised important questions about the role of sport in education. Soon after Team GB's success, Ofsted published a report that sought to determine how schools could deliver better quality, competitive sports. It concluded by stating that the best schools recognised "*the wider benefits of participation in competitive sport in building a strong ethos and helping children to develop into well-rounded and successful individuals.*"

Fast-forward four years, and the emphasis on the role of sport in building character and skill is being drowned out by calls to take up sport to combat childhood obesity and to promote good health and wellbeing. No doubt these are important reasons – studies show that regular exercise helps mental cognition and memory - but we shouldn't relegate sport as simply a means to an end. Rather, we should encourage children to take up sport for its own sake – to help them to develop new skills and interests beyond the curriculum.

Sport gives children a sense of self-worth. There's no denying that pupils who excel in exams and gain straight As experience a prodigious and well-deserved sense of achievement. But for some, it is the euphoria they feel when they score a goal, win a game or top the school sports league tables that motivates them to achieve. Sport is naturally competitive, and to succeed, pupils have to believe in their own success. In the words of four-time Olympic gold-medallist, Serena Williams, "you have to believe in yourself when no one else does". The same applies to pupils who partake in sport – it encourages them to muster an inner strength and self-belief they perhaps never knew they had.

Children don't have to win, however, to succeed in sports. It's not all colourful ribbons, shiny medals and dazzling trophies. Failure is inevitable. It was only after failing to win the men's 5000 metres in the Beijing 2008 Olympics, that Mo Farrah went on to defy the sceptics and secure gold in both London 2012 and Rio 2016, respectively. Rome wasn't built in a day and the same can be said for sporting success. By failing, children learn an invaluable life lesson – that of how to persevere. As adults, we know that life is full of unexpected setbacks and hindrances; the path to success is rarely straightforward. Sport equips pupils with the skills - determination, perseverance and self-belief – to overcome such failure.

But what stands out above the success and failures, is how sport can transform pupils. With over twenty-five years of teaching experience, I've seen how participating in sports can encourage even the most timid and reserved students to blossom and come out of their shells. For children who lack confidence, representing the school and proudly donning the school sports kit imbues them with a sense of pride that's invaluable to building their self-worth. Pupils who were once school refusers with low



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self-esteem undergo astounding transformations simply through their participation in sport. They become confident, independent leaders, who are even willing to take on the responsibility of helping their peers when similar struggles set in.

At Quinton House School, we recognise the importance sport plays in developing the character of each and every child. This is why, once a year, we come together as a school to celebrate our pupils' sporting achievements. Our annual sports presentation evening focuses on outstanding performances in school sport, including pupils who are progressing into elite pathways. Our England basketball player and our gold medal-winning, international swimmer are testimony of this. But we also celebrate our young leaders and volunteers in sport, who lead, coach and support pupils. Last year, our sports presentation evening saw rugby legend, Philip Dowsen present awards to pupils and give an inspiring talk about his journey to success, but more importantly, the failures he overcame along the way.

It's easy for schools to develop tunnel vision and focus purely on the academic curriculum. But the evidence suggests that there's much pupils can gain from sport, that can even reinforce their learning in the classroom; and to deprive them of this would be to deprive the world of its great sportswomen and men of the future.

Quinton House School is an independent non-selective school for girls and boys aged 2 to 18, offering a Nursery, Junior School, Senior School and Sixth Form set in 31 acres of picturesque grounds at Upton in Northampton. Established in 1946, the continued success of pupils is a result of high aspirations, hard work, traditional values and a tailored programme of individualised learning.