



Portland College

Portland College, based near Mansfield, is a specialist college for young people aged 16-24 with SEND needs and a Centre of Excellence for Autism.

They currently have 200 learners and around 155 faculty to support and the site embeds health and wellbeing with a strong emphasis on physical activity into the college life in innovative and fun ways.

We know from data and insight that young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are less likely to be active and if we want to address this inequality, we have to provide more support to empower these young people to move more in a way that works for them.

Portland College in Nottinghamshire has long understood the power of physical activity and invests in wellbeing right across their work. Leading this work is Dave Winter, Curriculum Manager who is also the chair of Special Olympics Nottinghamshire and therefore understands the power of physical activity and sport to support our wellbeing.

The college recently hosted a This Girl Can Day for their learners of all genders to highlight how fun, accessible and enjoyable moving more can be.

The day included a workshop from Britain's Strongest Woman, Annabelle Chapman, cricket, badminton, football and boccia sessions.

They also held workshops on body confidence and Autism in girls, really creating a holistic approach to supporting women and girls to move more.



The campus boasts a 1 km full wheelchair accessible woodland trail which weaves around the spectacular Harlow Woods. Deep within the trail is an accessible climbing wall and zip line so that all learners, no matter what their impairment can experience and immerse themselves in the green space surrounding the college.





Their emphasis on wellbeing focuses on the whole team so staff are encouraged to take movement breaks, alongside learners.

Dotted around the site, there are challenges and videos around three main themes - physical activity, self-regulation and mindfulness, recognising that even short bursts of movement and reflection are massively beneficial to our mental and physical wellbeing.



David Winter, Curriculum Manager at Portland College said this about the This Girl Can Day event

“What a great day, it was evident at college that we needed to promote physical activity and exercise to our female cohort, the learners responded really well and all got stuck in, I liked that the day wasn't just sport focused and allowed us to offer workshops around current issues that females face on a daily basis. I must also say that our 'This Girl Can' ambassadors did a wonderful job and these guys are the real role models. I really hope that the day has inspired many of our learners and that they all know that 'This Girl Can'” “Finally I would like to pass on my sincere thanks to everyone who took part in the day and of course all the providers that gave their time up to support the day”

Stevie Speakman, Sports Tutor, as well as organising the This Girl Can Day, leads weekly wellbeing walks before classes start for teachers and faculty around the woods and learners are also guided daily by support learning assistants.

Since introducing more movement and activity into the college day, incidents of behavioural issues have declined and absence levels have also reduced.

The college is lucky in its location in the heart of the woods but some of what they've learned around wellbeing is that creating a culture of wellbeing and belonging is key and that if you can develop and embed that, it can happen anywhere.

Some of the teachers shared their thoughts on how they have created their wellbeing culture:



Empowering learners and giving them options is really important. Some young people with SEND needs aren't given enough responsibility and choice which Portland College has recognised and addressed.



Relationships are key at the college. Learning Support Assistants and teachers take time to build up trust with the learners and are much more likely to want to try something new if suggested by their trusted carer.



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