

Girls and sport – increasing participation through to the Upper Sixth

Vignettes from five high-participation schools explain the most striking finding in HMC's 2015 survey of pupil involvement in sports and competitive fixtures.



Douglas Robb
(Gresham's)

Sport is an integral part of education at Gresham's and Gresham's girls' love of sport is fostered in many ways from Year 3 to Year 13.

The girls enjoy a full fixture programme that gives each one the opportunity to take part in traditional team sports including hockey and netball. They all experience regular games sessions and are encouraged and coached regardless of their sporting ability. To ensure that each girl has the opportunity to take part in something they enjoy, we offer an alternative sporting programme which includes activities such as Zumba, Pilates, street dance, body-pump, fencing and horse riding.

The school firmly believes that by taking part in and enjoying any physical activity beyond the classroom, girls develop better self-esteem and experience higher mental alertness in the classroom. Gresham's girls learn valuable lessons from healthy competition and participation in sport including respect, rules and the importance of teamwork.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, many of our girls, both former and current, have competed at local, national and international levels in sport, and act



Image courtesy of Gresham's

"Offering flexibility in terms of sporting opportunities is key for successful participation."

Top Tips

- Offering flexibility in terms of sporting opportunities is key for successful participation.
- There will always be demand and a place for traditional girls' games in an HMC school; however, it is important to recognise that by introducing alternative activities, girls are given greater opportunities for positive experiences that suit their needs.



Louise Hall, Director of Sport, Fitness and Wellbeing, Benenden School

The holistic programme of Sport, Fitness and Wellbeing at Benenden provides an outstanding range of physical activities and associated opportunities. This helps us to meet our overall school aim of giving each pupil a complete education in which she relishes all that school life has to offer so that she leaves us as a confident, positive young woman truly prepared for her future.

We strongly believe in helping each and every pupil to find at least one form of physical activity (hopefully many more) that they enjoy and are good at, and we appreciate the importance of promoting long-term habits with respect to maintaining an active and healthy lifestyle. We want pupils to be happy, inspired and proud of their achievements whilst also taking responsibility for themselves.



Ruth Mercer
(Godolphin & Latymer)

Sport is central to success at Godolphin and Latymer – encouraging each girl to build valuable, lifelong skills as well as enjoy their time at school. We don't pay lip service to this; we actively promote sport, with girls being encouraged to learn for life, not just for exams, and to develop a wide range of interests and talents. Participation in sport and other extracurricular activities is prized as much as academic success.

Our girls need to be able to approach the future with qualities and skills that will enable them to be happy and successful, resilient in the face of adversity and willing to persevere when necessary, appreciative of their worth as individuals but also very much aware of the importance of being able to work effectively with others.

How, specifically, does this relate to sport? We believe that sport and fitness bring important and lasting health and wellbeing benefits for

Top Tips

- Be creative and innovative with your curricular/co-curricular programme, ensuring variety without excessive compulsion.
- The development of our Student Sport & Exercise Committee and Parents' Sports Forum has been extremely influential in enabling effective two-way communication between the department, pupil body and parents.



Image courtesy of Benenden School

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Our aim is that everyone participates regularly in activity and can access competition if they wish, but also that our top teams are consistently successful in competition.

We do recognise, however, that team sport is not for everyone and that modern fitness disciplines or less mainstream sports might prove more attractive to some girls. This is reflected in our compulsory Year 7-13 PE curriculum. Although more rigid in the younger years to develop skill and expose girls to different experiences, it is flexible in terms of an options-based offering as the girls progress.

We offer 14 different sports* with coaching, clubs, and recreational and competitive opportunities. Our annual calendar sees more than 1,000 sports fixtures, with teams from A-F level involved.

Our Inter-House programme is wide-reaching, targeting all year groups in many of these sports, as well as introducing other activities, and we also offer a plethora of pool-based and exercise and fitness classes. Furthermore, extensive opportunities are provided for girls to benefit from guest speakers, workshops and theoretical lectures that support practical performance.

every single girl, not just the elite sportswomen. In team sport, the girls learn valuable social lessons and to work collaboratively. They make split-second decisions, and they learn about what makes a good loser and a good winner. They make friends.

In team and in individual sports, they learn how to work towards a goal, to master basic and fundamental skills first in order to progress; they later learn to take setbacks in their stride and to be resilient.

Given this powerful rationale, it is imperative that we provide opportunities for each and every girl to enjoy sport. All girls throughout the school take part in timetabled lessons and many in extracurricular activities. In each year group, we run multiple squads, and all girls who wish to play, for example, netball or hockey competitively can do so. There are six netball teams in Year 7 that compete with other schools while other girls in our development/club squads play matches internally. Over 100 Year 7 girls participate in extracurricular hockey and a similar number in netball. In Year 10, we run six U15 netball teams and two U15 hockey squads while the PE department adopts a highly inclusive approach so that all girls feel that participation, as well as competition, is beneficial. House matches and activities provide other competitive and participatory opportunities.

Top Tips

- Simple things such as allowing girls to travel to and from school in PE kit and to wear their kit in other lessons helps encourage participation and reduce self-consciousness about appearance during and after sport – they don't even think about it.
- Sporting blogs, tweets and our sports portal encourage parental involvement and allow participation and success to be celebrated.

We recognise that all girls, but especially those in older year groups, enjoy variety in sport. Popular choices include rock climbing (via a climbing wall), trampolining, dance clubs, strength and conditioning, basketball, volleyball, dance fit, Zumba, badminton, gymnastics, indoor hockey, fencing, kick boxing and martial arts clubs. We can also offer rowing from Year 9 upwards, which is very well-supported. Most activities are led by the fully qualified staff, but a number are led by the girls themselves.