

REACH FOR THE STARS!

Olympic medallists help schools put dreams back on the curriculum...

Swindon Academy is a school in flux with many daunting challenges ahead of it. But its Principal Jan Shadick has brought a new determination to the Academy which has sent its first two pupils to University and has recently moved to a brand new, single-site building.



Jan dreams of success for her students and so, when the opportunity came up, she happily embraced the chance to bring dreams back onto the curriculum with the 21st Century Legacy team and invited us into her school.

These days it's not unusual to watch teachers glaze over when the conversation turns to the curriculum but at Swindon Academy teachers' eyes light-up when the Legacy programme is mentioned.

That's because they have witnessed the profound, life enhancing changes that have been wrought in entire year groups of their pupils through the simple maxim 'Be the best you can Be.'

That maxim was introduced into their lives by Olympic role models who took the time to come to the school and inspire the young pupils with their own life's path.

Jan Shadick had first discussed the 21st Century Legacy with her staff before she determined to take the plunge and introduce the ground-breaking programme into Swindon Academy.

It was track stars Darren Campbell and Katharine Merry who fired the starting pistol on the programme and brought the message to Jan's students in the crucial years 7, 8 and 9.

And who better than Darren to talk to a group which is so influenced by a devotion to 'street credibility' and peer pressure?

Said the school's head of physical education, Emma Drinkwater, "Darren's experiences on the streets of Manchester resonated with our pupils and they sat transfixed as he told them how the death of his best friend and gang mate in a shooting in Moss Side changed his life. He told them how afterwards he desperately wanted to live so he left the gangs and started to train at an athletic club. The rest is sporting history but Darren had changed his life's course with a dream and our children immediately saw they too could make life changing decisions."

"Darren's input was crucial and then we followed it up with a teaching programme based on the 21st Century Legacy book 'Be the Best You Can Be.'" We factored the programme into our curriculum and we talked about dreams and aspirations, self belief and empowerment.

"Pupils are encouraged to create life maps charting their potential path through life and to understand how they can coach each other to success and celebrate that success. All this we do in a relaxed, fun atmosphere."



"As we went along we found that there were some aspects that were difficult to translate and too tough for 12 year olds to grasp. Again, there wasn't enough time in the school term to pack in the whole programme. We raised these issues with our contacts at 21st Century Legacy and they took them on board and made changes in line with our suggestions. It was good to know that we were being listened to which isn't always the case for teachers these days."

"Meanwhile the students learnt that it's okay to have dreams that aren't simply based on getting hold of the latest mobile phone or keeping up with street fashion; they learnt that it's okay to want to go to university rather than run with a gang."

"The effect on those years 7, 8 and 9 has been dramatic. It's filled a vacuum, where previously there was little self belief or ambition, and really improved their confidence levels. We have seen children who previously wouldn't have had the confidence to stand up and speak to a class get up on their feet and talk openly about their dreams for the future."

“They’re no longer embarrassed to discuss their hopes and the possibilities in their lives. They no longer fall back on street culture stereotypes. It’s been quite a miraculous transformation. More than that it’s given us the vision that one day soon we’ll be creating role models from within our own student group and that would be fantastic. It’s ticked a lot of boxes!”

“Truthfully it’s been a fantastic injection of positivity into a school with an intake that is largely uninspired by their backgrounds and for me it’s summed up by one example.”



“One of our girl students did have an aspiration. She was quite clear that she was going to go on to college and become a hairdresser. Great, she already had a goal. But that changed as the programme went on from a simple ambition to a dream when she told us, now I want to be the best hairdresser in the world!”

Assistant Principal, Personal Development and Well-being, Nick Warren, an international rugby coach, has embraced the programme too and has his own take on the way it plays with the students.

“We’re dealing with a lot of children who positively don’t want to stand out from the crowd. That, after all, is the essence of street culture where the group has to be more powerful than the individual in order to exist. Standing out from others is not a good idea out there.”

“Our catchment provides us with many challenges and a few students don’t have a particularly strong family motivation to improve their lives, and that’s not a good starting point for a teacher to work from. However this programme has loosened the grip of the street culture.”

“They’ve moved on from dreaming about the latest pair of trainers to imagining bright futures and they’re not ashamed to say so. I think it’s been very enlightening for them because they’re no longer afraid to say they want to be individuals and they are prepared to break free from the group.”

“Our pupils have become more confident but in the right kind of way, they’re not brash, they’re not rude, they’re not arrogant. They’ve somehow acquired a quiet determination from the Legacy programme which has also come with a new ability to evaluate and measure themselves and to be less judgemental of others in their peer group. They support each other.”

“There’s also been a quite profound change in the student/teacher relationship because during our sessions we find ourselves talking about our dreams, personal and professional, as teachers and our aspirations for the future.”

“There’s a frank sharing of these ambitions and a good rule has evolved which says ‘what’s said in the room, stays in the room.’ That has brought about an atmosphere of trust and a loosening of inhibitions for all of us.”

“That catalyst for all this has been the visit by the Olympians who have, quite literally, shown the heights which can be attained. The continuing chemistry of the programme has been in the ‘Be the Best you can Be’ workbook which we followed.”

“We’ve also contributed a few ideas of our own. For instance when Darren came back to see the students at the end of the programme I had medals made for them to mark the completion of the course and Darren presented them to each student. That was a great moment for them and we’ll do that again to give them the sense of drama and success their lives can achieve.”

“We’ve also made a dream wall where visitors to the school and others have written down their particular dreams and aspirations for the pupils to read them. We’ve started collecting celebrities for the wall and we’ve already got the children’s author Anthony Horowitz up there!”

“I’m a sports fanatic and no-one has to convince me of the power of sport to change lives but I truly believe that this programme will leave just as important a legacy as the Games themselves.”

Twelve year old, Year 8 pupil, Tyler wants to be an actor and says the 21st Century Legacy programme has helped him believe that anything is possible.

“I’ve learnt that aiming high is the way to achieve the best that you can and be the best that you can be. I can’t think of anyone in my Year who would disagree with that and we’ve all realised that our dreams don’t have to be less because we live on an estate in Swindon.”



“It’s also helped us respect each other more and realise that street rules don’t help you get on in life. Believing in yourself helps you get on.”

Jamaine Hemmings, a fellow year 8 student agrees and has set his sights very high, expecting to become Britain’s first Black Prime Minister.

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