

The Impact of Little Sticks at Ryecroft CE Middle School

How PE Specialist delivery has transformed inclusion, confidence and engagement through golf



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Ryecroft CE Middle School in Uttoxeter has revamped their approach to how the school introduces new and emerging sports to pupils, thanks to the implementation of Little Sticks. Led by PE Specialist Natalie Bannister, the school has embedded the programme across both the curriculum and as an extracurricular club, creating new opportunities for pupils of all ages to access golf in an engaging and inclusive way.

Little Sticks arrived at a time when the school was exploring ways to diversify its provision, and the response from pupils, parents and staff has been overwhelmingly positive. This case study explores that impact of the programme, highlighting how PE specialist-led delivery has made the programme a big success.

Beginning from scratch and building confidence

Despite being an experienced PE specialist, Natalie openly admits golf was not previously part of her expertise. In fact, she describes herself as "*a complete novice... the most I've played is crazy golf!*".

Coming into the programme without prior technical experience, Natalie found the training from Majesticks GC not only accessible, but inspiring, believing that starting from scratch actually helped her relate to pupils: "*I think that was a really good position for me to be in... I can empathise with those children not knowing anything and feeling a bit lacking in confidence*".

The training, resources and online content provided through the programme gave her everything she needed to deliver high-quality lessons immediately: "*I feel I've been equipped enough just from the one-day training. I've got all the equipment, I've got the lesson plans, the videos. I can just pick it up and off I go*". This foundation meant Natalie was able to launch a six-week curriculum block with Year 5 pupils straight after Easter, embedding golf as a structured part of PE for the first time in the school's history.

Growing enthusiasm and demand across the school

Once the programme was introduced, enthusiasm grew far beyond the initial target group. Ryecroft's location next to the JCB headquarters (home of the LIV Golf tournament!) meant many pupils were already aware of golf, even if they hadn't played it before. This created excitement from day one: "*Quite a few of the Year 5s have been to LIV Golf, and parents are really on board because they play golf. It's nice getting positive feedback that they're seeing their children involved too*".

The programme quickly became a talking point around school and at home. Older pupils began asking why they couldn't take part yet, so Natalie expanded delivery: "*My Year 8s are really interested, so we've now brought in the Little Sticks programme to the Year 8s just to trial with them*". Further reinforcing demand, she launched a winter indoor club open to all year groups. Despite space limitations, the uptake was strong from the start: "*I've got a mixture of boys and girls, some Year 5s who've never done it before, and Year 7s and 8s helping the younger ones*". This cross-age mentoring naturally encouraged leadership, and embedded golf as a valued part of the school culture.

Inclusion is at the heart of the programme

One of the big impacts of Little Sticks at Ryecroft has been the level of inclusion it has enabled. Pupils with varied needs, personalities and learning preferences have flourished. Natalie highlights that the sport's individual nature, combined with Little Sticks' accessible resources, has opened the door for pupils who often struggle in more traditional team sports. "*Every child in my class so far has picked up a golf club and made it their own*".

SEND pupils, in particular, have shown remarkable engagement: "*Quite a few SEND children maybe don't feel comfortable doing certain sports, whereas here they're quite happy to pick a club up and just hit a few balls*".

Crucially, the sport allows children to choose how they participate, either individually or within group challenges, meaning they can be successful in their own way. This flexibility is rarely found in more physical contact-based activities and has helped build confidence, reduce anxiety and provide a sense of belonging in the sessions.

Developing leadership and life skills

A major strength of Natalie's delivery is her emphasis on independence and shared responsibility. She has intentionally structured lessons to allow children to take ownership of equipment and setup activities in a rotation format, something that the Little Sticks resources naturally support. *"The biggest one is that independence... they're thinking for themselves. It's nice bringing in that creative side, creating their own putting greens and their own rules".*

For Natalie, this development is central to her wider approach to PE: *"Life skills is a big thing we push... organisation, teamwork, fairness, sportsmanship. The children take ownership and I'm there more to facilitate".*

This method of empowering pupils has had a noticeable effect on younger year groups who have become more self-sufficient, and on older pupils, who naturally step into leadership roles by modelling good technique and supporting their peers.

High quality equipment that allows for creativity

Throughout delivery, Natalie consistently praises the design, accessibility and versatility of the Little Sticks equipment and activity cards:

"Everything in the bag has been used. The activity cards are really good and really helpful".

Children respond especially well to the colourful nature of the equipment, which makes it both visually engaging and easy to understand. This has had clear benefits for SEND learners in particular: *"Everything is so easy to use, and because it's colourful, children respond well to it". - Natalie*

The pupils themselves are full of enthusiasm for the equipment, with pupil feedback highlighting that they *"really like the equipment, it's all fun"* and that they *"really like the targets on the head of the launchers"*.

Beyond the core kit, Natalie has enhanced activities with additional PE items such as hoops and numbered cones, enabling pupils to design their own holes and creative challenges.

Strengthening community connections

Ryecroft's unique location, next to the JCB headquarters, means golf is woven into the wider community. Little Sticks has helped the school tap into this local identity, giving pupils a route into real-world sporting experiences. *"This is a huge community opportunity, and we've promoted it [Little Sticks] as much as we can on social media and in newsletters".*

Parents have shown strong support, something that became clear during meetings and events: *"on parents evening the feedback was phenomenal. I didn't realise how many children played with their parents outside school".*

Attending the Little Sticks Festival at St George's Park further enriched the experience, giving pupils a taste of competition and celebration beyond the school setting: *"allowing the children to see their skills being put to use... it really ties things nicely together".*

Sustaining and growing the programme

Natalie sees Little Sticks becoming a long-term part of Ryecroft's PE setup, with plans to continue delivering it annually for Year 5s, while offering one-off or club-based opportunities to older pupils. She values the structure, clarity and progression built into the programme: *"why change something when it's working really well?"*

Her next goal is to strengthen pathways to local golf clubs and expand opportunities for pupils who want to continue the sport outside school: *"It'd be lovely to have clubs come in and offer help... it's that next step and pathway".*

Natalie also recognises the potential for equipment development that supports taller or older pupils, helping bridge the gap between introductory kit and full-sized clubs.

Summary

The Little Sticks programme, delivered through the expertise and enthusiasm of PE specialist Natalie, has had a huge impact at Ryecroft CE Middle School. It has inspired pupils across all year groups, strengthened life skills, empowered SEND pupils, and given staff the confidence to explore golf further as part of a broad and inclusive curriculum offer.

"It's been a brilliant programme to roll out... you see children gaining successes in different ways". - Natalie