

Evaluation of the Schools' Bowling Events held for West Lancashire Primary Schools 2021/22

Executive Summary

The events were organised by the West Lancashire Sports Partnership and the Bowls Development Alliance.

Over the course of two taster events, two competition events and a Finals Afternoon a total of 306 pupils attended (most attending on more than one occasion). 21 primary schools took part bringing pupils from Year 5.

An indoor format of a game involving rubber bowls (that are no longer produced) was devised utilising a badminton court, and this proved to be very successful. It was found that the current rubber bowls that were on the market tended to run too fast on smooth hard surfaces to allow for a 'proper' game of bowls. Bowls Buddies have now produced polyurethane to rectify this issue and are available for School Sports Partnerships to purchase.

The events were massively successful, as shown by the feedback from schools and the Sports Partnership, and demonstrated that the sport of bowls is ideally placed to engage children who are not provided for by the mainstream sports, such as football.

The format is one that could be rolled out further, particularly now the equipment has been improved and Bowls Buddies bowls have been produced.

1. Introduction

Following an approach by the BDA Club and Community Development Officer (Ian Gill) to the West Lancashire Sports Partnership (WLSP), two initial taster events were organised for primary schools at Burscough Sports Centre. The first event was held for Skelmersdale area primary schools and the second for Ormskirk/Burscough area primaries.

Each school was invited to bring 8 pupils from Years 5/6, particularly those that were perhaps sporting but who were not particularly engaged by mainstream sports.

The idea behind the events was to try and assess how popular such an event would be with children and if they were engaged by the sport. It was also the intention to test whether there was a format for the sport that could be played indoors in a sports centre environment, and whether the current junior bowling equipment was suitable for such an event.

Following this two tournaments were organised prior to Easter for the same groupings of schools to further test an indoor format for the sport suitable for children. This was extremely successful and culminated in a Finals Event held at Ormskirk School, involving the top two schools from each area.

The events have demonstrated the success of the initiative in engaging young people who do not normally engage in mainstream sports and the enjoyment that bowls brought to the pupils who attended. It has also allowed for a successful trial of an indoor format of the sport for children, which can then lead to children taking up the sport at a club level.

2. Background

Bowls is generally seen as a sport for the over 55s by Sport England and there has not been much emphasis on younger participants within the sport in recent years. There is perceived to be a decline in participation rates by juniors/younger adults. However, bowls is genuinely a sport for all that can appeal to children who like competition but are not perhaps as engaged by more mainstream physical sports such as football and rugby.

The UK Sport 'Uniting the Movement Strategy' contains 5 'Big Issues' and by developing and investing in a junior pathway into the sport this directly hits four of these Big Issues as follows:

Recover and Reinvent – The sport needs reinventing for the younger generation and by developing new pathways into the sport and a new junior product, this will enable the sport to recover in the post-Covid environment.

Connecting Communities – Given bowls is a sport for all it can reach across the generational divide and connect young and old, thus breaking down age barriers. In which other sport can a 14 year old compete on an equal basis with an 80 year old?

Positive Experiences for Children and Young People – This initiative directly meets this issue by engaging children who are not otherwise engaged by other sports and giving them a positive experience (as shown by the feedback on the events held).

Connecting with Health and Wellbeing – Bowls provides gentle exercise but also has been demonstrated to be good for mental well being due to its strong social element. Through engaging the young in such an activity it will have positive benefits for their physical and mental wellbeing if they are not currently engaging in sporting activity.

In order to test out how successful bowls could be in engaging with young people the BDA worked with the West Lancashire Sport Partnership. This involved:-

1. Initial taster sessions for primary schools in the Ormskirk and Skelmersdale areas of the Borough;
2. Follow up tournaments for primary schools in each of these areas; and
3. A Finals Event which brought together the top two schools from each area.

The details about these events and how they were run is set out below.

3. Initial School Taster Sessions

Format of the Events

The idea behind each event was to, firstly, engage pupils in a variety of fun bowling activities and, in the second part of the session, provide a competitive game between schools and test whether this could form the basis of a future tournament. The West Lancashire Sports Partnership invited primary schools in the West Lancashire area to take part and organised the booking of Burscough Sports Centre. The BDA provided a Club Development Officer and equipment to plan and run the sessions on the day. There were other people present to assist from the WLSP

The first event on 22nd October 2021 involved 7 Skelmersdale area primary schools who brought 52 pupils from Year 5. Each school had around 8/9 minutes on each first stage activity. The first stage activities included:

Carpet Bowls: Having a go with proper miniature carpet bowls on a 30ft mat, trying to get the bowls on a target mat.

Bowls Cricket: Pupils split into two teams, one batting and scoring runs by landing bowls into a target wedge, the other team bowling – taking wickets by landing bowls in three hoops.

Through the Gap: Two teams trying to accurately get bowls through a pair of cones which were gradually brought closer together.

Striking – a row of skittles that had to be knocked down

Target Wedges – trying to get the highest score in two target wedges

Target Mats – trying to get the highest score by landing bowls on a target mat.

Normal Bowls Game – utilising a badminton court and the junior bowls.

The second event, held on 5th November 2021, involved 14 Ormskirk area primary schools (112 pupils) and, as more schools turned up than expected, additional games (as set out below) were added utilising the squash courts as follows and the second stage of holding a normal bowls game had to be dropped:

'Spider' - two teams with a jack in the middle – furthest away bowl gets removed until one winner is found

Further target mats and wedges games – utilising the bowls equipment

All the Stage 1 games utilised the junior bowls and a variety of other target mats and cones etc.



Feedback on the Events

All schools were asked to complete a Feedback Form and 13 of the schools taking part did so. The feedback from the schools was extremely positive. In terms of the feedback on the Stage 1 games, virtually all the games played were rated as 'Fantastic' or 'Good'.

- *"The children would like to do it again competitively."*
- *"Enjoyed all the games - particularly those where more play at once eg 'Striking' - 4 at once, much faster moving."*
- *"Kids really enjoyed the activities and loved getting competitive with each other."*
- *"All of the activities were fun and well organised. The children loved being involved."*

In relation to the mini bowling competition played at Stage 2 of the Skelmersdale Event, 4 schools said it was 'Brilliant' and 3 said it was 'Good', with no schools rating it as average or poor. Comments included:

- *"The children enjoyed it and showed improvement in their skill."*
- *"An excellent way to round off the event. The kids loved playing against the other schools."*
- *"It was great to see the children participating in events against children from other schools. All of the children enjoyed participating."*

Finally schools were asked to rate the overall event and provide any overall comments. 10 of the thirteen schools (77%) said that it was 'Brilliant' and 4 (23%) said that it was 'Good'. The teachers were asked for any overall comments and some of these are reproduced below:-

- *“The pupils enjoyed learning a new sport and found it interesting.”*
- *“Excellent event! Staff were friendly and helpful. They explained all activities for the children and made the morning fun.”*
- *“The enthusiastic staff who were running the event made it enjoyable as the children were always busy and getting stuck in.”*
- *“A brilliant event, thank you very much.”*

Overall Conclusions from First Taster Events

Overall these first stage events were considered to be a great success, with some great feedback from the schools involved. The format for the ‘proper’ game of bowls, to be played on a badminton court was shown to be successful. This gave the West Lancashire Sports Partnership the confidence to plan further tournaments involving the schools.

The format for an indoor version of the sport that could be played on a badminton court was demonstrated to be successful. It was found that the ‘older’ versions of the junior bowls performed better than the newer versions on the smooth sports hall surface, in terms of playing a proper bowls game, and it was decided that the older versions should be used for any future tournament.

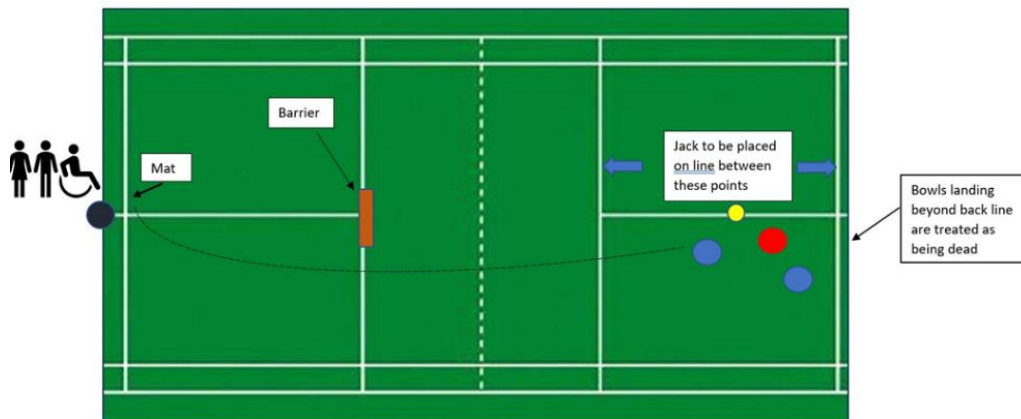
5. Tournaments

The West Lancashire Sports Partnership invited schools to a tournament so that schools could properly compete with each other, culminating in a final, the winners of which would go through to the Lancashire School Games representing the District.

Similarly to the initial taster sessions these were split into two, one for Ormskirk area Schools and one for Skelmersdale area schools, and both were held at Burscough Sports Centre. Helpers from the local bowling club attended to assist the pupils and ensure that they knew what they were doing.

The rules and format were set down and are reproduced in the Appendix.

Schools Bowling Competition



The first competition was held on 21 March 2022 for Ormskirk area schools and this was attended by 8 schools (around 75 pupils in total). Because of the number of pupils, 8 from each school competed against 8 from another on each court over 8 ends. Whilst the format worked fine, due to there being 8 from each side on a court, pupils got less turns bowling and this did lead to some becoming distracted. Each school played two matches in a mini round robin and the top three schools then went on to play in a further mini round robin to find the top two schools (the second placed teams and the third placed teams played in further mini round robins also).

In the second competition for Skelmersdale area schools (28 March, 2022) there were only 4 schools attending (35 pupils) and this made it easier to run with 4 from each school on a court (split by boys and girls). This meant that pupils were more engaged and it was also easier to run for the helpers. They all played each other in a round robin format with the top two schools progressing.



A 'Finals Afternoon' was arranged for Wednesday 20th April which brought together the top 2 schools from each area. This was played at Ormskirk School on the four badminton courts there. It was again played in a round robin format and the tournament was won by Halsall CofE Primary, who will now go through to the Lancashire School Games.

The feedback from the teachers on the day was extremely positive, with them commenting that the tournament had really engaged those children who were not involved in mainstream sports and given them an activity that they could enjoy and compete at. Teachers were asked if they could provide some comments in writing and some of these are reproduced below:

- *“A big thank you from myself and the children at St Thomas the Martyr CE Primary School following their participation in the bowling events. Our Head Boy said, “I really enjoyed the bowling, can we do it in PE? It was great to see some of our children enjoy an activity that didn't make them feel anxious and I am keen for more such activities. Thank you to your team for their guidance and patience during the two sessions we were fortunate to be involved in. One of our children, who has hearing difficulties, blossomed as she learnt more and loved the opportunity to try something new. Thank you.” Mr Roscoe, Headteacher, St Thomas the Martyr C of E Primary School*

The West Lancashire Sports Partnership were extremely pleased with the outcomes and provided the following comment after the Final Event:

- *“As far as the Sports Partnership are concerned we have been delighted with the opportunity these events have provided, introducing a new activity to children who have not previously engaged with the more traditional sports activities. It is refreshing to provide a new opportunity with accessible exit routes through the community bowls clubs. Thanks for all your hard work, and indeed your bowling club members for making the events such a success. I hope we can look to continue next year”. Mrs C Hart, School Sport Manager, WLSP*

All the children who attended have been invited to attend the junior bowling sessions at a local bowling club. It is still to be evaluated how many come along and start bowling regularly, but two of the pupils have already started learning to play bowls properly on an outdoor green.

6. Key Learnings

There are several things that were learnt from the Schools Indoor Bowling Sessions that are set out below.

- Before the initial sessions it is clear that pupils had no idea what bowls is and this was their first real exposure to the sport.
- Bowls really engaged young people and the sessions were found to be enjoyable. Those games that encouraged some competition were especially liked.
- The competition gave an opportunity for those that are not engaged by mainstream sports, such as football, to compete and succeed. This gave these pupils a sense of pride and achievement.

- The schools that participated were really pleased with the sessions that were run and generally thought that they were either excellent or good in engaging their pupils.
- The initial taster sessions gave pupils a good basic grasp of using the bowls, as well as showing how versatile and enjoyable bowls is, prior to the competition. The format for the competitive games, utilising junior bowls and a badminton court as a mini 'green', worked well and was easily understood by the pupils. However, it worked best where there were 4 person teams competing against each other on each court (2 from each team at each end). Otherwise pupils got less turns at bowling and became distracted.
- The current version of the rubber bowls are not suitable for these competitive games, as they roll too fast on a smooth hard surface. The older versions worked well but are no longer manufactured. (Bowls Buddies have now produced improved versions for indoor and outdoor use)
- Enough volunteers are needed to assist at each court. When first learning two volunteers on each court is ideal (one at each end).
- There needs to be a pathway to a local bowling club holding junior sessions for pupils who are engaged by such an event so that they can then take up the sport. The best time for holding such indoor events is between Christmas and Easter to then enable pupils to seamlessly take up the game at a local club.

7. Conclusions

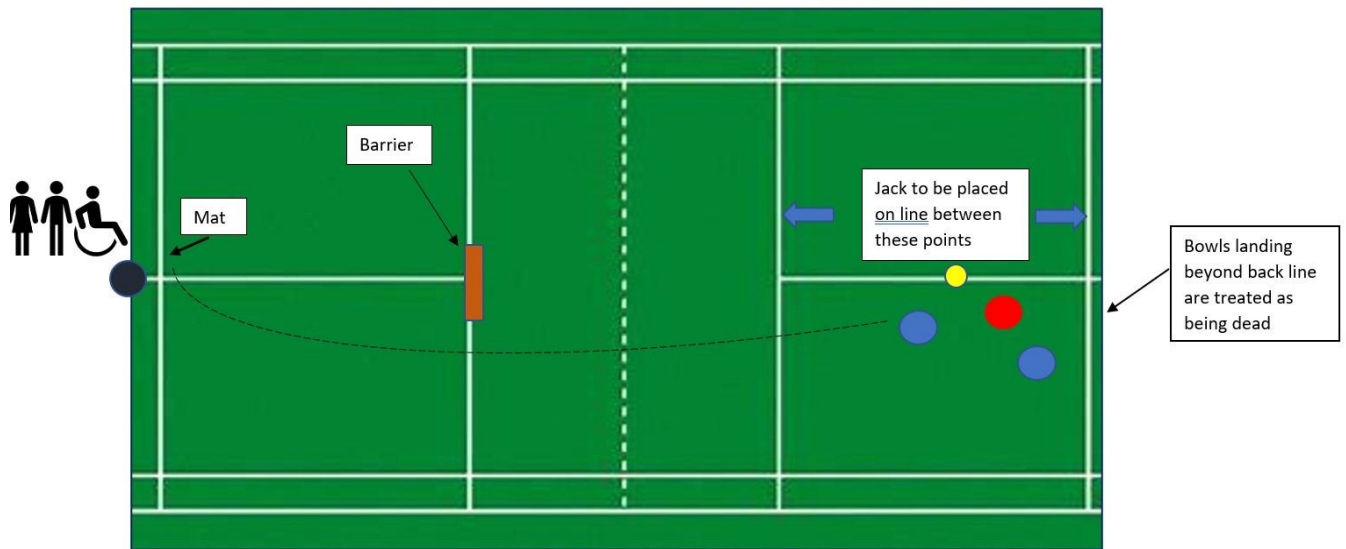
Overall the trial was extremely successful. It engaged children who were not engaged with mainstream sports and provides a model that could be rolled out in other locations. Both the schools and the Sports Partnership provided overwhelmingly positive feedback. Now that improved polyurethane bowls have now been manufactured by Bowls Buddies LLP there is a product on the market that can fulfil the requirements of holding similar sessions across the country.

The new Bowls Buddies Bowls, along with target mats and wedges etc can now be purchased via the Bowls Buddies website – <https://bowlsbuddies.com>.

APPENDIX

Schools' Bowling Competition Rules

Schools Bowling Competition



Teams will be of 8 children from each school – 4 boys and 4 girls. There will be one additional 'substitute'. There will be a girls team playing on one court and a boys team on another. Scores will be aggregated after 8 ends

Play

- Each initial match will consist of 8 ends (4 in each direction)
- Each school team will place one pair of girls, or boys, at each end. (G1 at one end and G2, at the other)
- G1 will bowl first against G1 from the other school. Each girl will bowl as in normal pairs bowling – Player 1 from Team 1 will bowl followed by Player 1 from Team 2, then Player 1 (T1) again, then Player 1 (T2), then the Players 2 go alternately
- Once the end is completed and scored the G2 pairs will go back in the other direction. The barrier will be moved accordingly after each end. This will then repeat until all 8 ends have been played. Each pair will therefore play 4 ends each.
- Players should stay at their end – if they wish to know which bowl is closest they should ask their substitute or team members at the other end, who can go and have a look, or one of the officials.
- The team winning the end will get to place the jack between the lines as shown above. The jack will be placed by the lead bowler or with direction from the lead bowler.
- Scoring is as per normal bowls scoring ie the number of bowls you have closer than your opponent's nearest bowl will score – a maximum of 4 points on each end.

- Any bowl touching the barrier or going beyond the back line of the court (or out of the court utilising the inner tram lines at the sides) will be dead and removed from play.
- The mat must be placed as shown in the diagram and the person bowling must keep one foot on the mat until the bowl has left their hand.
- The substitutes will be responsible for moving and placing the barrier at the completion of an end (in the position shown on the plan above).
- If the substitutes cannot agree on the score (who is closest) then they should ask for the measures and they can measure the distance between bowls with some assistance from officials.
- After 8 ends the score will be passed to the Competition organizer and teams should wait for instructions as to who they play next