

Meersbrook Bank School

A chance comment from my daughter one day started me thinking. "Mum, why don't Meersbrook Bank have a gymnastics club?" My reply was simple, "There is no-one to run it." She was in Year 8 at Newfield at the time and said she would come down to help ME run the club. She would show the moves and I would be the responsible adult.

The club was open to Years 3 through to 6 on a first come first served basis. I had approximately 11 initially sign up. There wasn't a cost to parents as I felt that this could be a barrier to children signing up. I had a range of children who accessed the club, some quite sporty and some who had confidence issues. It was never meant to be a competitive club, it was one to welcome all abilities. After a few months I remembered the Key Steps competition which my daughter had entered many times with Carfield School, so I enquired about it and in January 2016 I took the first Meersbrook Bank Gymnastic Squad to their first competition (5 children). They came 13th out of 27 squads.

The club continued to grow and I began a Year1/2 club during a lunchtime, this attracted about 25 children; considering Meersbrook Bank is a one form per year group, it equated to 42% of Key Stage 1.

By November 2016, the club had absolutely taken off, and I had to run another evening session. A Tuesday and a Friday evening. I'm not quite sure on how many children attended between the 2 days, but at least 35. In the early part of 2017 I took 4 squads to the Key Steps competition (20 children). 1 squad came 18th out of 21 squads, 1 came 12th out of 21 squads, 1 came 11th out of 18 squads and the last came 10th out of the 18 squads.

In 2017, my daughter and I sat down over the summer and wrote a series of moves to complete to receive badges, much like the BGA badges you earn at gymnastics clubs. I then designed a badge and got them printed in different colours to differentiate the progression, I designed a certificate too. This seems to have done the trick to engage the children, especially between competitions.

I then got really lucky when Clare Tierney-Kitchener joined Meersbrook Bank. Passionate about sport in general, she helped so much making the club much easier to run and actually seeing the potential in our children. She then took over the admin side and entered our squads into the Key Steps competition arranging transport to and from the venue. She arranged for me to attend a coaching course, and supported me through it all. She has been and still is amazing.

The school started to take a £10 joining fee (annually), for the Key Stage 2 clubs, as parents were so grateful they wanted the school to charge for the club. This for me was something I felt uncomfortable with, but just asking for an annual charge sat better with my conscience. With approximately 45 children attending it became a nice little pot to buy bits of equipment. Along with collections taken from displays put on at the schools summer barbeque, and some of the Sports funding given to schools, I was able to buy new fit for purpose gym mats, a new vaulting box and springboard and some sportswear.

It did however become an obsession with some children, as they practised on the grass the school has within the playground. The children would spin and jump, flip and cartwheel, which had to be stopped because of the steep nature of the yard, but it was in these instances I saw the potential in some children, so I approached them to join the club. Many were on the pupil premium list, but again this was a good reason to invite them to the club, even for a couple of weeks to see if they liked it.

The biggest accomplishment for me was a year 5 girl who had been coming for a couple of years. Quite a graceful young girl who was extremely shy, who wouldn't take part in any school show, or be put on the spot for anything. I asked her to come to the competition in 2019, not to be part of a squad, but just so she could see what it was all about. She came and actually performed! I asked the judges to mark her so she could see just how good she was. She then easily took part in the competition the following year.

By January 2020, I had 72 children altogether attending the 3 sessions which at the time was about 40% of all school age children on roll.

Some teachers had commented on children who had attended the gym club on how "switched on" they were during lessons since joining gymnastics, almost like a light being fired up.

Some children's parents had enrolled them into gym clubs as they had seen their efforts in little displays I had done in school. Some had represented their clubs in local and national competitions, although I can't take the credit for their performance, I feel they definitely had a good start especially confidence wise.

Now I run the club in class bubbles due to the Covid rules. This is much quieter, but you can get round everyone to see what they need to work on.