

Sycamore sowing seeds of success at school

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Posted On: April 02, 2015



Action from one of Carlton le Willows Academy table tennis sessions

Coaches from Nottingham Sycamore Table Tennis Academy are boosting the search for the champions of the future.

Having been impressed by the skill and enthusiasm of students at lunchtime and after-school table tennis sessions at Carlton Le Willows Academy in Gedling, Nottingham, Sycamore has designated the school a satellite club.

It means professional coach Harvey Stevens goes into school to work with Year 7 students during the weekly after-school club – with the ultimate aim of some of those players starting to play in regional and then national matches.

Jason Ramage, vice-chair of Sycamore – one of Table Tennis England's Talent Development Centres – said: "Carlton le Willows has such a massive take-up with table tennis, it's just amazing.

"Normally school clubs have about 10 students attending – Carlton le Willows routinely has between 20 and 30. Our coach was blown away by the enthusiasm there. It seemed the perfect place to become a satellite club."

Table tennis began taking Carlton le Willows by storm after new outdoor tables were introduced for students to play on at lunchtime and breaks. Demand was so high that a lunchtime club with eight table tennis tables was set up in the hall, with a weekly after-school club added soon after.

The initial idea to introduce outdoor tables came from the Academy's student-led school council and head teacher Craig Weaver says he has been delighted with the results: "The idea for table tennis came from the students and they have taken up the opportunity with such enthusiasm and spirit, it has been amazing to see.

"The impact on school life has been extremely positive and of course it backs up the Carlton le Willows ethos, which aims to give all students the chance to achieve the very best for themselves.

"Thanks to the school-sports club partnership with Sycamore Table Tennis Academy, we now have the benefit of professional coaching so who knows, we may be nurturing an Olympic table tennis champion of the future right here at Carlton le Willows."



The enthusiasm of pupils at Carlton le Willows helped it to become a satellite club

As a designated satellite club for Sycamore Academy, Carlton le Willows, which has around 1,350 students aged 11 to 18, will benefit from a number of weeks' funding from Table Tennis England for the coaching. Students will also have the chance to take part in Sycamore's own clubs, with the potential for selection for regional and national matches.

Ramage added: "Nottingham is a hot spot for table tennis, which is why Sycamore was designated a Talent Development Centre. We aim to provide the best players in the region with a pathway towards the ultimate goal of playing table tennis for England."

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