Until Manchester Communication Academy opened in September 2010, locals had to travel over a mile to go to school or use sport facilities.

So when a new local school was planned in Harpurhey, Manchester, the neighbourhood regeneration team saw an opportunity to fill a gap in local provision.

Now they have access to a specially-designed dual-use sports centre with outside playing fields that can be used by all sections of the community.

This is due in part to the support of the academy’s lead sponsor, BT, and co-sponsors Manchester city council and The Manchester College. Together they backed head teacher Lynne Heath’s vision and values about a school and community working together.

The council invests £40,000 a year in a trust fund to provide opportunities such as residential visits. The Manchester Model did not require the normal cash sponsorship of £2m from any of the main sponsors, and provided the Trust Fund as a replacement, whilst BT provides expert staff to work with the academy identifying ways of achieving a customer-focused culture.

Key project information

All of the new sports facilities at the academy can be accessed by the community through separate staffed entrances and car parks. The site’s design and supervision arrangements work well, despite being in an area of high deprivation with little free space surrounding the school.

The outdoor playing pitches are a five minute walk from the main buildings but remain in view, and it is possible to site dedicated outdoor changing facilities beside the pitches.

The facilities include:

- Six new grass sports playing pitches
- One floodlit 3G pitch (A five-minute walk off site)
- Three outdoor games areas
- Four court sports hall
- New build community college on site for adult provision

Free Community Use

The management team encourages free casual use of the facilities on weekdays between 4pm and 6pm, to provide diversionary positive activities during known peak antisocial behaviour times.

Students as sport leaders are present during these times to offer some structure to the play that takes place.

Community clubs and partnerships

Local clubs and leagues are given priority block bookings from 6pm until 10pm weekdays, and 9am until 5pm at weekends.

Clubs are encouraged to partner with the Academy and provide a development pathway for students and the wider community.

This commitment to local groups and initiatives in their first year is already generating over 300 weekly users of the facilities in the first year.
Making it work

Complimenting BT’s focus on social responsibility, the Academy appointed a Vice Principal – Patsy Hodson - with a community engagement role, a year before the academy opened. Having a dedicated senior role has guaranteed that the local community remains integral to all strategic business planning.

Within the first year of joining the team approximately £250k of external funding was secured to support the community regeneration programme, supporting intergenerational and social enterprise projects.

Patsy heads up a dedicated community team, supported by Martin Roberts as community programme manager whose salary is met within the core school staffing budget. Defining his role as programme manager instead of business manager ensures that sports development is included in all planning, and the academy is not solely focused on income generation to the detriment of community sport use.

Not being tied in to a private finance initiative contract has given Martin the flexibility to negotiate block bookings and fees with community providers and clubs, often agreeing a discounted fee in return for a club running after school sessions for the school.

For example, the newly established Manchester Multicultural Badminton Club offers a clear route for students to progress from grass roots to excellence. It takes young people from an after school club, to open community play and finally to structured competition.

The academy has also benefitted from coaching offered by other local organisations such as Manchester City in the Community, Manchester City Council Sports Development, FC United and other local clubs.

The academy’s sinking fund ensures the facilities are maintained to a good standard. Additional income is generated by booking out the conference centre facilities to corporate users and local groups. This helps to keep booking fees at an affordable level for local people. A tiered system of charges ranges from a heavily subsidized community rate of £30.00 per hour for a full 3G pitch session up to a corporate business rate, in line with other commercial facilities in the area at £80.00 per hour.

The advantages

Academies have the freedom to develop their own terms and conditions for staff. At Manchester Communication Academy, all staff including support staff has to make a two hour commitment to delivering enrichment sessions every week, so saving the academy staff costs.

Every student is expected to take part in two sessions each week and encouraged to continue their activities through the exit routes provided by local sports clubs at the facility.

Students are also trained as sports leaders and coaches to deliver community activities, contributing to the success of the site as a true community facility.

Opening up access to facilities to deliver a large vibrant community programme has generated adequate income to support the employment of one staff member to look after the supervising of the off-site outdoor facilities and a community officer who drives forward the outreach work and generates new partnerships.

The main challenges

Local clubs are vital to the long-term sustainability of a community programme, but satisfying all of their requirements can be challenging.

Networking with local user groups is important to develop good relationships and a two-way understanding that helps to work through any issues. Martin’s appointment as a community programme manager who
already had extensive local knowledge and existing relationships with local sports clubs and providers proved to be a huge bonus in overcoming this challenge.

**Top tips**
- Build up relationships and trust to generate champions in the community
- Form a steering group of local user groups so that issues can be raised and resolved collectively.
- Invest time engaging with the local community to ensure programmes always serve local need and expectations
- Assign staff early on with roles so they can start developing programmes and forming partnerships.

**Further information**

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