



# THE READER

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Ministering with the young



# Project Touchline

## – playing on God's team

Two Readers, Chris Andrew and John Cowen, are pioneering a new ministry programme, providing sports, faith and values teaching in primary schools.

There is currently a huge opportunity to reinforce the teaching of the faith to young people by combining it with sport. The Project Touchline initiative has attracted interest from churches, schools and parents in the three dioceses of Salisbury, Bristol and Gloucester. This article aims to share the benefits of sports ministry and to reach out to those who are interested in developing it.

Many schools want to demonstrate their Christian distinctiveness. The teaching of Christian values throughout the curriculum is promoted by SIAMS<sup>1</sup>. Each primary school has a value that is taught each term. Project Touchline teaches the Christian value alongside sport, so the children learn how to put the value into practice on the sports field. They learn about Jesus through Bible stories and prayer and they find a practical application in the sport. Sometimes they change their behaviour in response to enacting the value during the games.

### Faith, sports and values in education

Sport has been practised since antiquity. It brings good health enabling children and adults to confront the challenges of life including faith. The connection between faith, sports and values was brought together through Dr Thomas Arnold, headmaster of Rugby School and a man of resilient character and deep faith. In 1828, Arnold described his educational aims as being the cure of souls first, moral development second, and intellectual development third. These priorities were reinforced by playing football. According to legend, William Webb Ellis, a pupil of Rugby School, was the first player to run with the ball, thereby starting the game of rugby. (Webb Ellis would go on to become a priest in the Church of England.)

Baron de Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympic Games, visited Rugby School in 1886, as he considered Dr

Arnold to be 'the father of organised sport'. Coubertin went on to define the modern Olympics by 'Citius, Altius, Fortius' ('Faster, Higher, Stronger'), but at the same time he used Arnold's model of 'gentlemanly conduct'. This combination underpins the rulebooks of all sporting governing bodies to this very day.



### Project Touchline: the beginnings

The story starts back in 2015 when Chris Andrew, a professional rugby coach and Reader in training, was invited by the vicar of West of Severn benefice in the Diocese of Gloucester to deliver some special rugby sessions in his local church school. The aims were to embrace the spirit of the Rugby World Cup and teach the core skills of the game – and at the same time to develop life skills such as teamwork, sportsmanship and respect.<sup>2</sup> Following on from this the PCC paid for Chris to deliver a one day rugby holiday camp linking Bible drama, teaching and sport. As a result of this work, he was asked to represent the diocese at a national sports conference at Lambeth Palace in February 2016. The day, which included an address by Archbishop Justin Welby, also enabled networking and sharing good practice of sports ministry across the dioceses. Everyone was encouraged to go out and find new ways of being church, new ways of witness and worship.

Chris returned to Gloucester and together with John Cowen, a fellow Reader in training, discovered a calling to build up new ways of developing professional sports ministry through teaching and living out Christian values in primary schools across the west. John is a retired structural engineer and was

able to support Chris through prayer, strategy and networking. John and Chris found immediately that schools were very interested in this form of teaching/coaching during PE and collective worship. In the first year, Project Touchline worked in ten church schools coaching a wide variety of sports.

The work has been formally assessed by Rachel Howie the current Diocesan Director of Education and CEO Diocese of Gloucester Academies Trust in the Diocese of Gloucester. She writes 'There are a number of sports that schools can access and links can be made to a range of Christian values. This concept has been well thought through and has potential to have a positive impact on the teaching of Christian values within the PE curriculum.'

### How does it work?

Project Touchline provides professional sports coaching in primary schools every week during term time. The coaching is combined with teaching the Christian faith and values within the national framework for SMSC (spiritual, moral, social and cultural development) and within the SIAMS guidelines.<sup>1</sup> The ethos of the school and the level of Christian teaching is always agreed with the headteacher at the beginning.

Where possible the work in the school is linked to the local parish through the vicar or Reader, and the PCC.

### 1. Headteachers and schools

Many headteachers appreciate the benefit of professional sports coaching, but they can also see the benefit to the children and to the school of combining faith and values with sport. The faith and values enhance the ethos of the school and they contribute to improved behaviour. Integrating faith, sports and values is most effective when the coach leads collective worship prior to the PE lesson, giving greater opportunity for the children to link the Bible story with the Christian value and the sport, and it gives more time for questions about faith and

values. Many of the teachers appreciate assistance in presenting the Christian values with a Bible story and prayer as part of a lesson. Project Touchline is working in a number of schools at present, and three have been selected as examples of this work.

#### **Oakhill Church of England Primary School (Diocese of Gloucester)**

Project Touchline was invited by the headteacher to provide sports coaching in six sports: hockey, rugby, football, cricket, gymnastics and athletics over a full academic year. The school has two sites and in conjunction with the RE lead teacher, a new collective worship programme was developed that linked both sites and the PE delivery so children were able to develop the values and faith teaching into PE after collective worship. The school had a SIAMS inspection in February 2018, and the turnaround in collective worship was 'very much down to our support and our ideas of how to link Worship between the bases'. The report reads: 'Although standards of attainment and progress were poor two years ago, steps have now been taken to address this issue. As a result of the action taken, the effectiveness of the school's Christian character has been increased and standards have now improved. The impact of the school's Christian values on children's personal development and well-being is good. Project Touchline, led by a lay minister at Dumbleton, is embedding Christian values in sport, and values such as compassion are recognised by children to be important in their lives. The outstanding relationships, promoted by the values of friendship and respect, reflect the quality of the school's distinctive Christian character.'

#### **Southrop Church of England Primary School (Diocese of Gloucester)**

The Headteacher invited Project Touchline to provide sports coaching in the same six sports as Oakhill for the academic years 16/17 and 17/18. The school had a SIAMS inspection in January 2018, and the turnaround in 'teaching Christian values as an element of PE enabled us to show children that the school/values being

rooted in scripture are more than just words or ideas. They are the very basis of the life God wants us to live. If we could embrace these values in all primary subjects we would have a true values based curriculum and so a REAL church school' (headteacher, Allan Brown). The SIAMS report reads 'The spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development of pupils is well catered for across the curriculum. For example, the impressive work of Project Touchline provides pupils with experiences to see Christian values lived out in sport.'

#### **Lydiard Millicent C of E Primary School (Diocese of Bristol)**

The headteacher invited Project Touchline to provide sports coaching in two sports: rugby in term two and cricket in term six. The school values of compassion and respect were used to mirror the work being done in sport. In rugby, the coach prayed with the children before the class and at the end of the class. Examples of compassion from the Bible were discussed and were linked to Christians in rugby such as Jason Robinson and Billy Vunipola, both England Rugby players. The rugby included training games such as 'scarecrow tag' where several players have to touch other players with the ball in a square. When the players are touched they become like scarecrows, legs and arms out wide. Their friends who have not been caught then need to go under their legs to free them. By bringing compassion into the game, the children can live out this value, to help their friends and to learn through the game what it means to help people who are stuck and in need.

#### **2. Ministers and churches**

Sport in schools can teach the children faith and values, but they will need much more support as they grow and develop. Longer term support can be provided through the local church, through after-school clubs and through holiday camps. Making that link will depend on individual situations and is often linked to the work in the school. Two examples are given where the link has come from the local church.

In the Diocese of Gloucester, Project Touchline has been working with the Bisley benefice. The PCC are supporting

two special sports days to foster deeper links with the schools. Professional coaching will be provided with faith and values for two local primary schools during curriculum time.

In the Diocese of Salisbury, an exciting four-day multi-sports event at Shaw C of E Primary School was delivered with Rev Shona Hoad, the PCC and the Shaw benefice team. With a regular attendance of fifty children, professional sports coaching was provided in gymnastics, rugby, football, hockey, cricket, dodgeball, netball and athletics. Four Christian values were linked to scripture through each of the sports. The children lived out the values through prayer and faith:

- Perseverance – 'Let us run with perseverance the race that lies before us. Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end' [Hebrews 12:1-2]
- Courage – 'Perfect love casts out all fear' [1 John 4:18]
- Friendship – 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you' [Matthew 7:12]
- Respect – 'Encourage one another and build each other up' [1 Thessalonians 5:1]

#### **What might Project Touchline do for you?**

There are many initiatives to develop faith with sport with clubs and holiday camps but few are teaching all pupils in schools within curriculum time. The key to future growth will be to identify people who are enthusiastic and who have or can develop the right skills. We would like to set up a network of people. If you are a teacher, coach, or a committed Christian who might train to be a coach, or believe you have skills, time or experience then please contact us through <https://www.facebook.com/touchlineproject> or <https://twitter.com/growcharacter>



Chris Andrew (on the left) and John Cowen are Readers in the Diocese of Gloucester.

#### **References**

- <sup>1</sup> SIAMS: See <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/church-schools-and-academies/siams-school-inspections>
- <sup>2</sup> An interview with BBC Radio Gloucestershire can be heard as an archive broadcast here <https://soundcloud.com/lions5555>
- <sup>3</sup> Thanks for the recommendation are due to the then Bishop of Tewkesbury, the Rt Revd Martyn Snow.