



## Engaging a new generation

**R**ECENTLY I was invited by Dave Carter, of the National Smallbore Rifle Association (NSRA), to join him in a spot of air rifle target shooting at The Priory Pembroke Academy near Lincoln. This project is a six-week initiative that is currently running in six schools throughout the county and sponsored by Sports England. All the air rifles used for the training are supplied by Edgar Brothers and Air Arms with ancillaries supplied by Forest Lodge Guns.

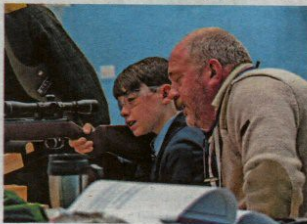
The course focuses on those children who, for whatever reason, do not engage in other forms of physical education. It has been specifically designed by the NSRA as a structured youth proficiency scheme which is based on nine individual modules that cover topics from safety through to dominant eye.

To be awarded their badges and certificates the students must complete and pass a written proficiency test at the end of the course, which is no bad thing in my book. Such is the growing popularity of the course, Dave recently had 60 children sign up to a 16-place course.

### Converting the sports hall

From start to finish it's a team effort and the first act is to convert one end of the school's sports hall into a functioning indoor range. This includes the range, firing points and secondary teaching area. The day's team of coaches assisting the children were Pete Mullen, Ian Heald and Carl Stuffs. The role of the staff is not only to give marksmanship coaching but also to develop the individual's personal discipline the sport requires.

The paper targets the group use are those normally used for pistol targets. These have been purposefully chosen by the project to give the children not only a larger target to aim at but also to help them feel as though they are succeeding in a sport.



The targets are then kept by the children so they can take them home to show to their parents or guardians. Understandably, all the children are proud of their achievements. It gives them a well-earned sense of progression which is a vitally important component of the course.

This day, 13 students aged 11 to 16 took part in the activity. From the onset the atmosphere was calm with Dave and his team creating a focused environment. While one group fired the other groups carried out a concurrent theory session. I couldn't help but notice the children were continuously leaning forward, hanging on to every word of their coaches, the engagement was total.

Today also marked a key milestone in the group's progress as it was the first time they had the opportunity to fire the rifles in the standing position. Between firing details I was able to ask a couple of the children taking part what they thought of the new firing position. One pupil noted: "I had to bring [the rifle] into my shoulder as it kept dropping," with another adding "it's hard work."

Midway through the session we were joined by the school's headteacher Simon Evans and a member of the

senior management team, Steve Willshaw, who is also a National Baccalaureate Trustee. Both Simon and Steve were extremely interested in the activities the children were engaged in and acknowledged it was beneficial in their learning and development. Such is their interest The Priory Federation, of which the Pembroke is part, is seeking to roll the programme out across all its schools.

The federation is also keen to integrate the project with its own qualification; The Priory Baccalaureate. This in itself is seen by them as a key part in achieving successful pupil engagement, educational enrichment and would form a key part of a child's project work as they progress in education. The two educators also took the opportunity to try out the rifles for themselves, with Simon Evans firing a rifle for the first time resulting in a solid grouping, clearly a natural.

### Noticeable and positive difference



Simon also felt the project had resulted in a "noticeable and positive difference academically" in those children who took part. Indeed, children who have taken part in previous projects, along with family members, have gone on to engage with local rifle clubs, including Skegness, and Lincoln and District. That in itself is another good measure of how successful the programme is and shows the benefits are far more than educational, they are also social, which is what fieldsports are ultimately all about.



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