

# Case Study

## BiG Support at Westfield



The BiG Challenge is a big opportunity at Westfield. There is a dedicated support network in place and students are given as little or as much help and advice as they need. This model has helped Westfield to secure places in the BiG Challenge finals every year since the competition began.



Westfield has secured places in the BiG Challenge finals every year, including Key Stage 3 team 'Picture This', shown above with their personalised mouse mats and calendars.

All students are challenged to come up with a business idea and write a very basic business plan. They are then invited to attend an interview which can either be an opportunity to flesh out a basic idea or an intense Dragon's Den style interview, depending on the students' age and experience. Some ideas are not practical, lawful or within the bounds set by Westfield so these teams are given plenty of advice and asked to refine their business plans. Teams that present a feasible business idea are helped to register for the BiG Challenge.

Every team that enters the BiG Challenge is invited to present to Westfield Head Teacher, Susan Simmons. Susan asks teams about their profit margins, suppliers, unique selling point, target market and marketing strategy. Once they have talked through their ideas and intentions with her, Susan gives them permission to trade at the school. Enterprise Coordinator, Jennie Wood, explains why Susan's input makes a difference:

"We have found this meeting with the Head Teacher is a huge endorsement of their idea and makes a big difference to the teams' confidence. They take it very seriously, often bringing samples and drawings, and preparing speeches and profit charts. Some teams are bounced at this point but very rarely!"

Once registered and approved by the Head Teacher, a bank account is set up for each team in the school Enterprise Safe. When accessing their start-up funds, teams must explain exactly how much they want and what they will do with it. This helps teams to organise their budgeting early on and it encourages students to be in full agreement with their teammates before they start spending. All teams receive a basic help session on accounting and recording their earnings. Staff members can also take a refresher session on accounting so they are in a good position to support students throughout the competition.



# Case Study

## BiG Support at Westfield



Teams are invited to attend regular, informal drop-in sessions with their mentor or interviews on a more formal, fixed date basis. Whichever way they utilise this support, students are encouraged to write up notes during each session to track their progress. Jennie keeps a copy of each team's notes until the report writing stage begins; this provides a useful reminder of the team's journey throughout the competition.

Students are offered extra sessions after school and during lunchtimes to get specific help on their marketing, finances and report writing. These are often presented by experts from the Entrepreneur Exchange. Teams are also offered a one-to-one link with local entrepreneurs which is a real motivating factor for students, as Jennie observes:

"Linking with external agencies and entrepreneurs is by far one of the most successful ways of encouraging and supporting the teams. When planning the sessions with the Entrepreneur Exchange we are responsive to what the teams tell us they want to engage in.

"The credence they get from it is remarkable. Even if the visitors are saying the same thing as their teachers, they are considered to be 'real people' whose opinion is far more important to the students!"

Shortlisted teams can access as much help as they want or need. This may be advice on organising their ideas, technical help in putting together presentations, or a space to practice in and a member of staff to watch them and to give feedback.

Westfield's approach to the BiG Challenge is focused on giving students the freedom to make their own way through the competition whilst providing a flexible level of support. Jennie comments,

"What is right for one team is not right for the others so we provide them with the scaffolding and they choose which bits to use and what to build with it! The important part of the experience for young entrepreneurs is working out for themselves what they do and don't need and what they can and can't do.

"After all, how can you make your own decisions and work through the consequences if there is no real risk or reward there for you to experience? Advice is great, as long as you are allowed to take it or ignore it, after you have considered it."

"We have found the most successful teams are those who have utilised the entrepreneur links as much as possible and who now have far higher aspirations than just trading at Westfield. It has also led to some excellent longer term relationships between local traders and Westfield which both are now benefiting from."



Westfield teams are encouraged to trade at events in and out of school as it keeps up momentum throughout the competition. 'Star Signz' (above) had a stall at last year's Valentines Fair at the Town Hall in Sheffield.



Project Part-Financed  
by the European Union  
European Regional  
Development Fund