**Sheffield Ice SEND event.**

Big smiles, penguins and of course Santa hats were the order of the day as almost 350 primary and secondary school children attended the SEND Ice skating event at Ice Sheffield on 5th December 2023.

The event, which was organised by Links School Sports Partnership in collaboration with Sheffield City Trust, British Ice Skating and Panathlon, was an inclusive event where children with SEND were able to ‘get their skates on’ and try ice skating in a safe and supportive environment.

Andrew Hibberd, EDI and Community Leader for British Ice Skating, said: "It's incredible to get these children to come together for this type of event, especially so close to Christmas when ice skating is massively popular. It’s a great opportunity for them to try skating."

The event was also to promote Ice Sheffield’s new ‘Learn to Skate’ programme through British Ice Skating. The programme has a dispensation model for people with disabilities which gives them an inclusive pathway on to introductory courses. Participants can use different routes for progression through the instructor pathway, and get involved in the sport regardless of their disability.

Keith Hudson, Development Officer for British Ice Skating, believes that the sport can be fully inclusive. "I believe that ice skating is for everybody, no matter what your situation. It's for all disabilities, and all ages, whether you’re 45 or 95 it doesn’t matter.

"This event is about showing children what ice skating is, getting them to hopefully fall in love with it and then providing them with access to a course here which allows them to progress within the sport."

The course is about modifying the activity to suit the participant, moving through eight levels. At each level, any barrier to participating in a specific exercise can be moved by adapting the activity.

Participants at the event were given leaflets giving free online access to an app which accompanies the programme and provides video instruction and further information.

According to Tom Daniels, teacher at Seven Hills School, however, it’s not just about learning to skate, the day was about "getting the children out into the community and preparing them for a life beyond school, and giving them opportunities to try things that they haven’t done before to see if they want to continue with it in the future,”

Tom also believes events like this teach life skills, such as planning a journey, timetables for transport and timescales, which helps to increase children's confidence.

Eighteen-year-old James from Seven Hills admitted that he was "proper nervous" but loved it and "would do it again tomorrow." Although it was his first time on the ice, he managed the session without any falls, although he did admit he came close. "I just thought, whoaaaa, just breathe and try it again!"

Twenty pupils with special educational need and disabilities (SEND) came from Nether Green Junior School. Their teacher Charlotte Musgrave said: "Just seeing them come out of their shell, from standing at the side of the ice not really knowing what they were doing to going around the ice without any help, and seeing rosy cheeks and smiley faces, it’s been absolutely brilliant. The children have been so excited anticipating the day so I’m so glad it lived up to expectations."

Equally impressed with the event was Sarah Smith from Horizon Community College who brought 12 pupils. She said: "Some of our children have never even seen the ice before. They started off with the penguins but by the end almost all of them had progressed to skating without them. They’re literally learning new skills every day, making new friends, and growing in confidence."

One of her pupils, 11 year old Lucas, said: "It was my first time ice skating. It’s a bit tricky but you get used to it. It’s been nice to spend time with my friends and go somewhere nice."

Owen, 10, thought that the event was "very good and I would definitely advise people to come here." He was one of a group of six wheelchair users from Paces school who had great fun being pushed around the ice at some speed by their teachers, illustrating the event's inclusivity.

As Ryan Ruddiforth, Programme Manager at Ice Sheffield stated: "They don’t have to be amazing skaters, it’s about having fun. The aim is for them to enjoy it, experiencing a new activity in a safe space where everyone is a beginner. We just hope that they go home to their families and say that they’ve had a great time."