



**CASHBACK
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CASE STUDY

Personal Journeys Through Rugby

Finding Confidence, Belonging and a Different View of Themselves

PERSONAL JOURNEYS THROUGH RUGBY

Finding Confidence, Belonging and a Different View of Themselves

“Before rugby, I didn’t really see myself as confident.”

— Pupil, Wester Hailes High School

For many young people involved in the programme, rugby did not begin as a long-term ambition or a clear pathway into sport. More often, it started quietly — attending a lunchtime session with a friend, trying something unfamiliar after school or simply looking for somewhere to belong within the wider school environment.

Across Phase 6, conversations with pupils consistently highlighted the gradual development of confidence, friendships and self-belief through rugby activity. While the experiences themselves varied across schools and communities, many young people described similar feelings during their first involvement — nervousness, uncertainty and not always believing rugby was something they would naturally fit into.

One pupil at Inverclyde Academy reflected:

“I used to be really quiet and just sit there. Now I’m a lot more open than I used to be.” Pupil, Inverclyde Academy

For several young people, one of the earliest changes was simply becoming more comfortable socially. Friendships formed through rugby increasingly became important support networks both inside and outside school, particularly during periods of transition or uncertainty.

At Leith Academy, one pupil explained:

“Meeting new people has probably made the biggest difference.” Pupil, Leith Academy

Another young person reflected:

“The friendships in rugby last for ages... it made moving into secondary school a lot easier.” Pupil, Castlebrae High School

Across several schools, pupils also described rugby helping them approach wider challenges with greater confidence — not only within sport, but within school life and personal situations more generally.

One pupil at Ross High School explained:

“Whatever problem I’ve had now I’m not scared to go for it.” Pupil, Ross High School

Several young people also reflected on the way rugby gradually changed how they viewed themselves. For some, confidence developed through physical challenge and resilience. For others, it came through feeling trusted within a team environment and recognising that they had something valuable to contribute alongside other people.

At Greenfield Academy, one pupil reflected:

“If I never had rugby, I still would have been scared to tackle things head on.” Pupil, Greenfield Academy

Another explained:

“In rugby everyone has a place and a position. You can transfer that into real life.” Pupil, Greenfield Academy

Importantly, young people consistently spoke less about winning matches and more about becoming willing to try things they may previously have avoided — joining clubs, speaking within groups, meeting new people or stepping into leadership roles.

At Larkhall Academy, one pupil reflected:

“Confidence is definitely going to stay for life.” Pupil, Larkhall Academy

For some participants, rugby also became one of the first environments where they felt genuinely included within a team setting. Staff across schools including St Paul's RC High School, Northfield Academy and Greenfield Academy consistently described pupils becoming more communicative, socially settled and increasingly willing to engage positively over time.

One parent at Northfield Academy reflected simply:

“He was going to school, making friends and most importantly, he was happy.” Parent, Northfield Academy

The importance of encouragement and positive role models also emerged strongly throughout the phase. Coaches, Development Officers and school staff were regularly described not simply as people delivering rugby sessions, but as adults who encouraged young people to attempt things they may otherwise have lacked confidence to try.

For girls involved in the programme, several reflections also highlighted the importance of supportive environments and visible role models. Some young people spoke openly about initially feeling unsure about participating in what they viewed as a male-dominated sport before gradually developing confidence through girls-only sessions and positive team experiences.

One pupil at Auchmuty High School reflected:

“I was nervous at first, but once I started playing properly I just wanted to keep going with it.” Pupil, Auchmuty High School

Importantly, many of the changes described throughout the phase were relatively small in isolation — contributing more confidently in class, feeling comfortable joining new groups, attending more regularly or becoming more willing to support younger pupils. Others described becoming more resilient and increasingly willing to work through difficult moments rather than walking away from them.

Yet across schools and communities, these moments appeared repeatedly within the experiences shared by young people, parents and staff. Not as isolated success stories, but as examples of what can happen when young people experience environments where they feel welcomed, encouraged and supported over time.

Reflection and Learning

Across Phase 6, rugby environments often became places where young people developed confidence, friendships and stronger engagement with school and community life. While participation began differently for every individual, the strongest impact consistently emerged where pupils experienced encouragement, positive peer groups and environments where they felt accepted and included.

For many young people, the long-term value of the programme was not defined solely through rugby performance, but through the gradual development of confidence, resilience and a more positive view of themselves.