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TACKLING INSIGHTS

Making rugby+ the positive difference that changes lives for good.



One programme, a growing impact

Since its launch, Tackling Insights has brought together rugby, STEM and enrichment to create opportunities for young people in communities experiencing the greatest need. This report looks at the impact of the 2025/26 programme, while reflecting on how the programme has evolved over its four-year partnership with Sage.

Inside this report

The 2025/26 programme

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What young people told us about sport, STEM, confidence and wellbeing.

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Your support makes the difference.

Newcastle Rugby Foundation's partnership with Sage has been one of real substance and impact. Across 2026, the Tackling Insights programme delivered 90 sessions of rugby, STEM and enrichment learning across 13 schools and 30 classes, reaching 694 young people from Bishop Auckland, Gateshead, Ashington and Blyth.

Together, we've brought sport and science into the same classroom for children who rarely get enthused by either. Almost 70% of participants attend schools in the 20% most deprived areas (IMD 1-2) in the country, and 49% of the young people we reached were girls, in a country where only 16% of girls believe engineering is for them.

Over 50% of all participants told us they now feel good at maths and science, find STEM more exciting, and feel prouder of themselves than they did before we arrived. It's been a genuine, values-aligned partnership that Newcastle Rugby Foundation is proud to continue building on.

Thank you for making this possible.

The goal. The outcome.

Tackling Insights was designed as a structured sport and education intervention for young people living in areas of high deprivation. Each class received three strands of delivery: a STEM classroom session, a rugby session and an additional enrichment session, either an after school club or leadership and character development.

Planned	Delivered
30 classes	30 classes (100%)
Approximately 750 pupils	694 pupils (93%)
15 schools	13 schools confirmed and delivered
3 strands per class	90 sessions in total
Establish After school clubs	65 children attending after school clubs



Where we delivered

We went where the need was greatest.

Tackling Insights was built to reach children in IMD 1 to 2 areas, the most deprived 20% of the country. The delivery data shows the programme landed exactly where it was designed to.

IMD decile	Participants	Share
IMD 1	277	40%
IMD 2	170	24%
IMD 3	114	16%
IMD 4	133	19%

64%

of participants attend schools in IMD 1 to 2, the 20% most deprived areas nationally

40%

are in IMD 1 alone, the most deprived decile in England

100%

of schools sit within IMD 1 to 4, the bottom 40% nationally

39.5%

average free school meal eligibility across the 13 schools



THE NATIONAL FREE SCHOOL MEAL RATE IS 26.5%. THE NORTH EAST, AT 32.3%, IS THE HIGHEST OF ANY ENGLISH REGION. NORTHUMBERLAND'S OWN RATE IS 22.2%. MOST OF OUR DELIVERY TOOK PLACE IN NORTHUMBERLAND, A COUNTY WHOSE HEADLINE FIGURES HIDE REAL POCKETS OF DEPRIVATION. TACKLING INSIGHTS FOUND THOSE POCKETS. EIGHT OF OUR 13 SCHOOLS HAVE FREE SCHOOL MEAL ELIGIBILITY ABOVE 40%, RISING TO 65% AT WOODHOUSE AND 58% AT CHOPPINGTON PRIMARY.

Inclusion

Because Tackling Insights is delivered to whole classes rather than to selected pupils, participation reflects the real make-up of these schools. Children who would usually be excluded from sport enrichment, or who would not choose it for themselves, took part alongside everyone else.

The majority of disabled participants were in from IMD 1

This matters against the national picture. Sport England data shows Black and Asian children, and children from the least affluent families, remain significantly less likely to be active than average. Delivering in class time reaches the children that opt-in provision systematically misses.



19% of participants had a disability

10% were from Black, Asian, mixed or other ethnic backgrounds

Girls and STEM

49% of participants were girls

26% of the UK STEM workforce is female

16.9% of the engineering and technology workforce is female, up from around 10% in 2010

16% of girls think engineering is suitable for them, against 44% of boys

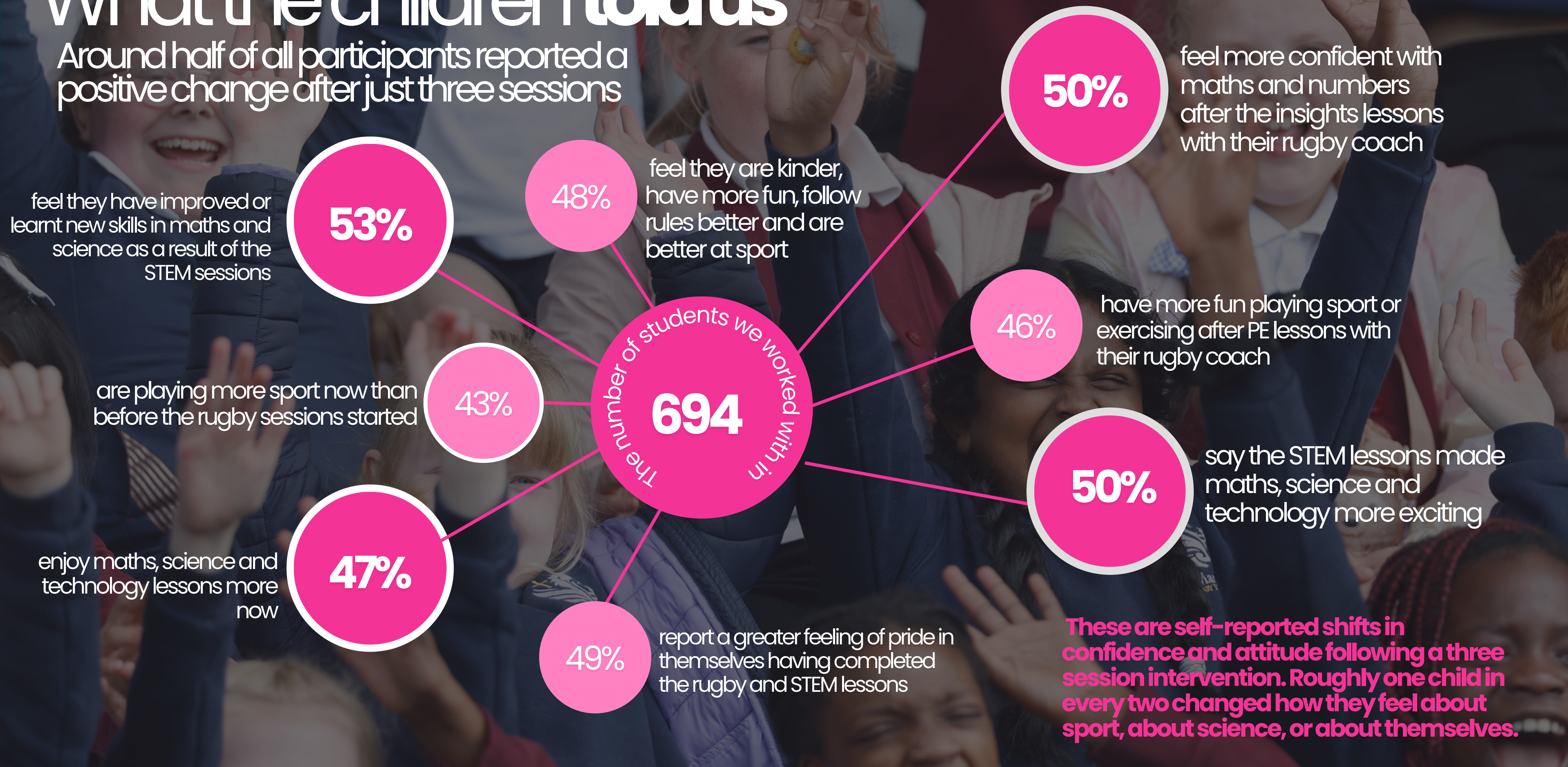
341 of the young people we reached were girls, almost exactly half of all participants where demographic data was captured. That did not happen by accident. Tackling Insights is delivered in class time to whole classes, not as an opt-in club, which removes the single biggest barrier to girls taking part in either sport or STEM enrichment.

Attitudes towards STEM harden early, well before subject choices are made. By primary age, girls are already less likely to see science and technology as something for them. The same is true of sport: fewer than half of children in England meet the Chief Medical Officers' activity guidelines, and girls are consistently behind boys, 46% against 52%.

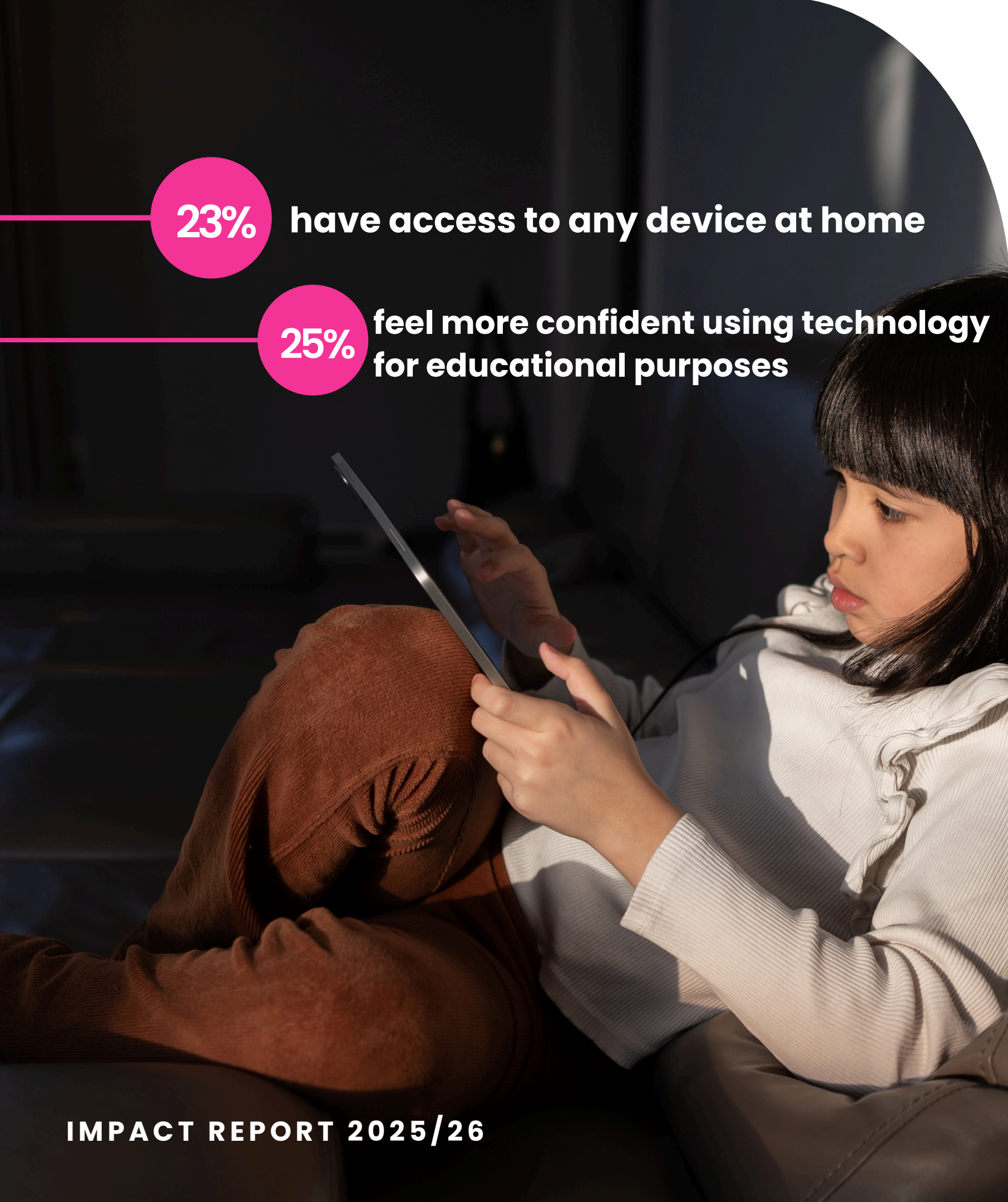
Tackling Insights put 341 girls from some of England's most deprived communities into a rugby session and a STEM lesson in the same term.

What the children told us

Around half of all participants reported a positive change after just three sessions



These are self-reported shifts in confidence and attitude following a three session intervention. Roughly one child in every two changed how they feel about sport, about science, or about themselves.



23% have access to any device at home

25% feel more confident using technology for educational purposes

the digital divide.

The most striking finding of the 2026 programme was not about rugby or about attainment. When we asked participants whether they had access to any technology to use, a phone, a tablet or a computer, fewer than one in four said yes.

Children responded well to the STEM content. Half told us it made science and technology more exciting and that they now feel capable at maths. But more than three quarters of them cannot practise any of it once they leave the classroom.

This is a structural barrier, not an attitudinal one. It tells us that in these communities the appetite for STEM is there and the access is not. Investing in the next generation of talent in the North East, this is the gap worth closing, and it points clearly at what phase two of Tackling Insights should address.

Legacy.

Every school on the programme was linked to a community rugby club, so children finish Tackling Insights with a named local club rather than the memory of a one-off session. Five clubs took part: Bishop Auckland, Gateshead, Ashington, Blyth and Rockcliff.

Area	Schools	Club links
Bishop Auckland	Prince Bishops, Woodhouse	Bishop Auckland
Gateshead	Caedmon Community, St Wilfrid	Gateshead
Ashington and Blyth	Grace Darling, Meadowdale, St Bedes, Choppington Primary,	Ashington, Blyth
North Tyneside	Holywell First	Rockcliff

Our Foundation Day in May saw us invite a selection of Tackling Insights participants to Kingston Park, ahead of Newcastle Red Bulls’ final home game of the season. They met players and enjoyed insight sessions on strength and conditioning and performance analysis. **For most of these children, it was a first visit to a professional stadium.**



Some standout moments.

from Amy, delivery coach

Before the programme, Whitley Memorial in Bedlington had very little experience of STEM lessons. As the delivery progressed it was great to see the children engaging with the topics, challenging themselves and working well as part of a team. This culminated in the attendance of festival hosted at the local high school, where the students were very supportive of each other, putting into practice what they had learned in their rugby sessions.

Year 6 child – Previously admitted to struggling with Maths and Science, thinking they were not very good at it, however after the sessions not only did she comment saying she felt more confident but that she felt she had in fact learned a new skill. Since the programme began, she admitted her attitude to sport and exercise has changed and that she would like more opportunity to engage in sport.

Year 6 child 2 – "the coolest part of the programme was being able to play sports with my friends and classmates"

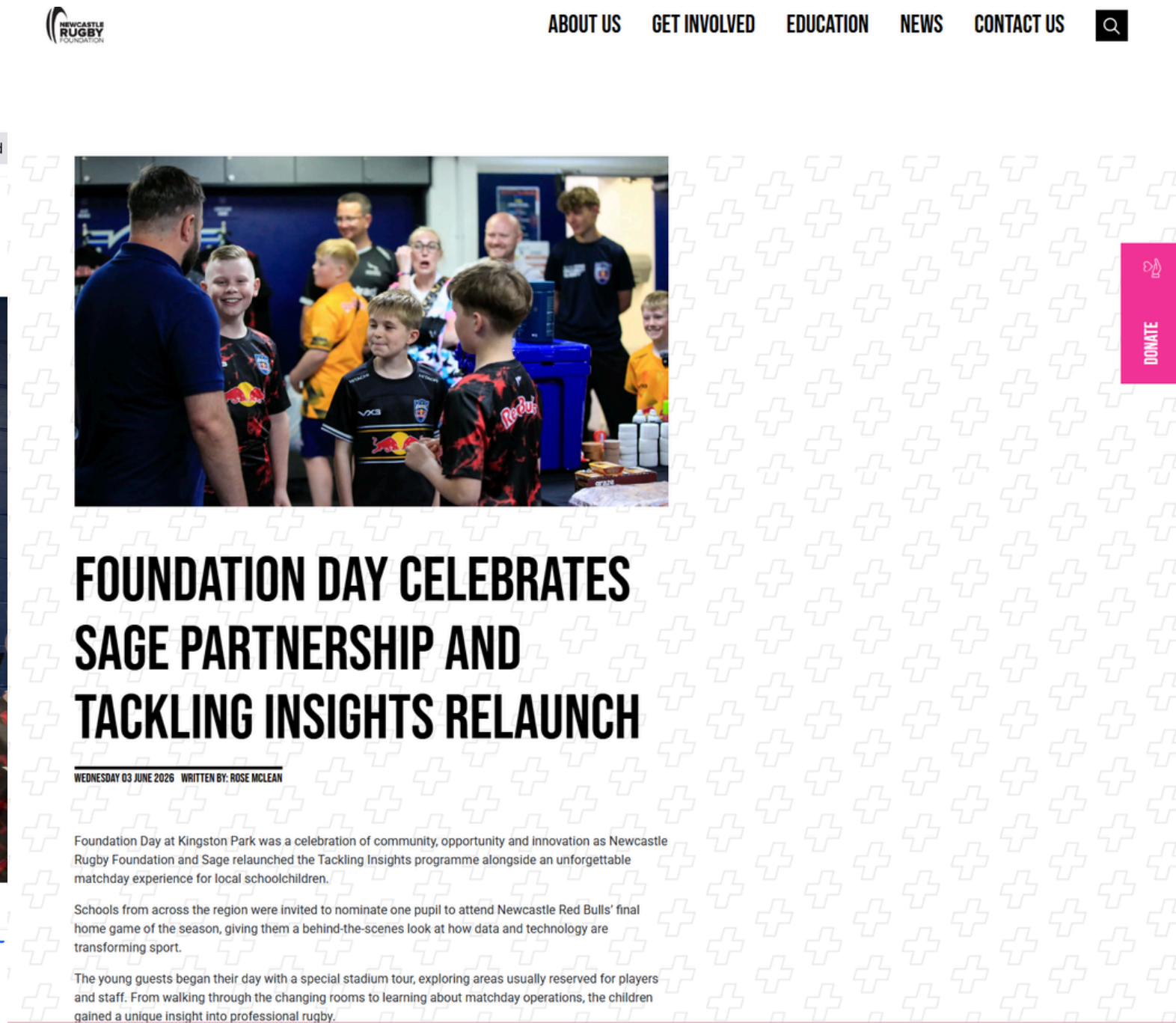
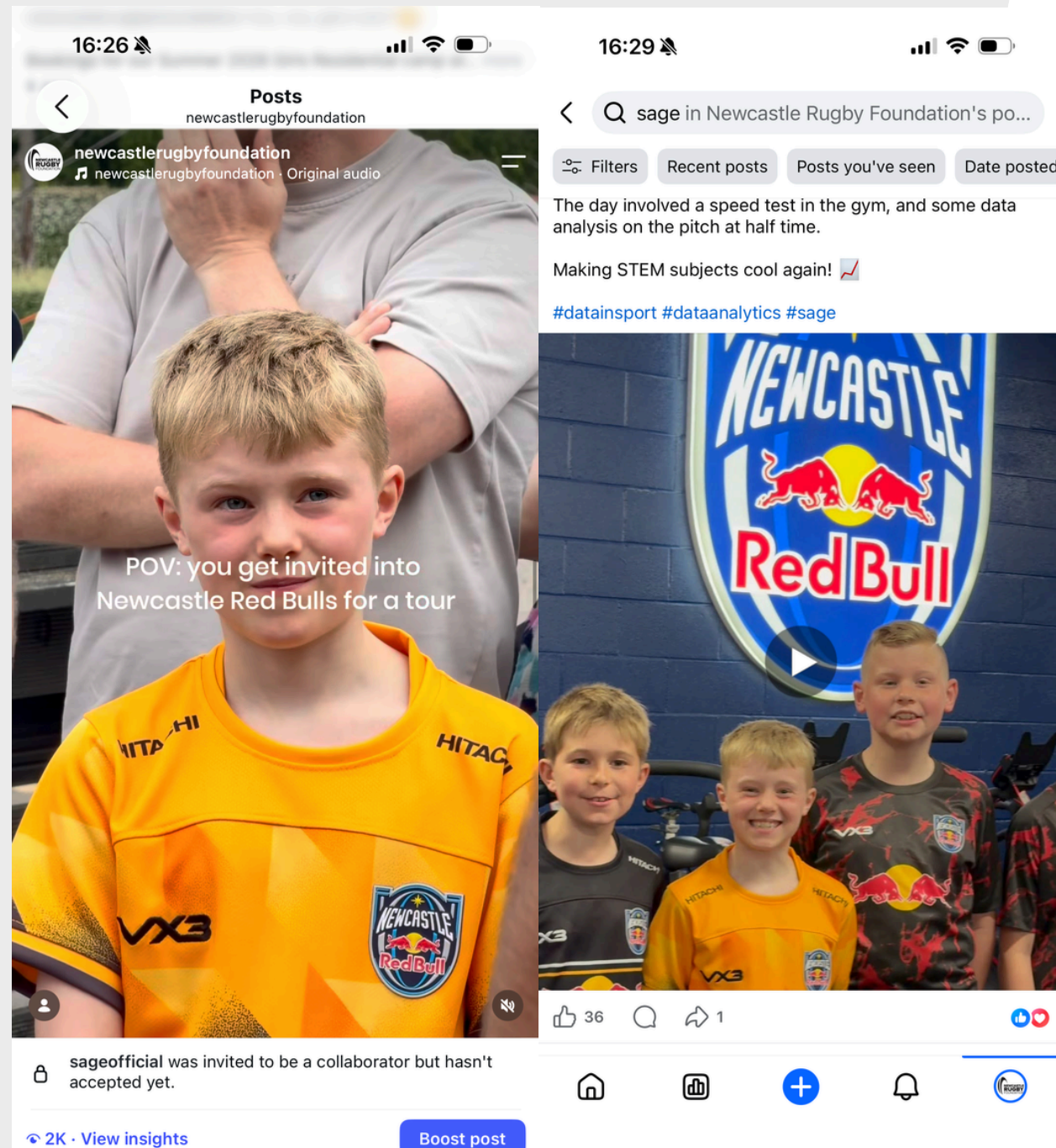
Year 6 child 3 – "I loved the session where we gathered our own data, I can run really fast!"

Year 5 child 1 – "I loved the catapult building; it was a totally cool way of learning about angles!"



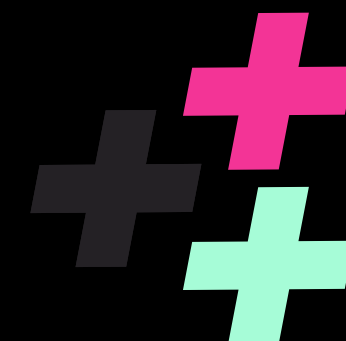
“The most positive outcome for my students was the good resilience encouraged by the tasks. I liked how the children were challenged to stretch themselves, while grounding the STEM concepts in good, real-world examples.

Teacher, Whitley Memorial in Bedlington

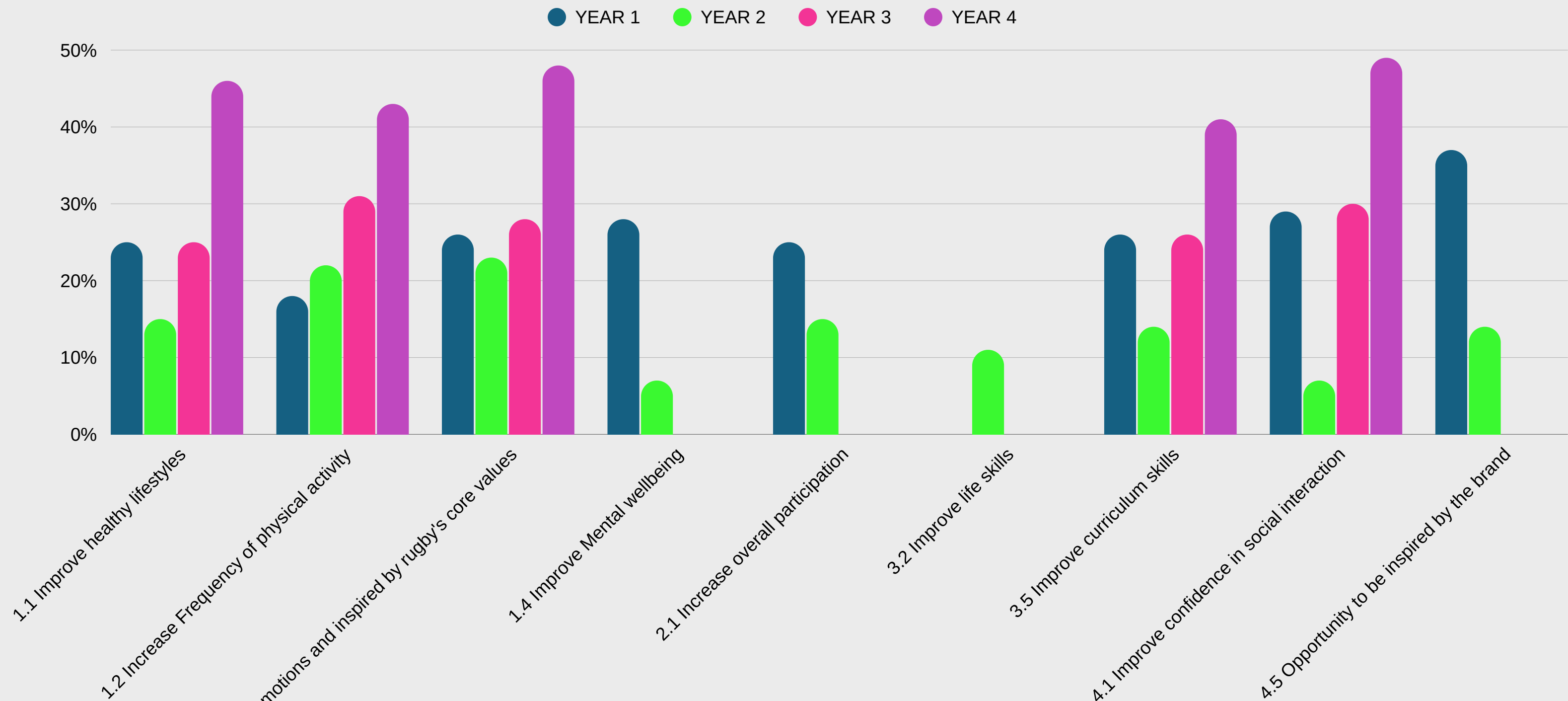


the programme's

EVOLUTION



the evolution.



The graph above illustrates the impacts measured across the four-year period. During Years 3 and 4, it was agreed that several impacts, including 1.4 Improving Mental Wellbeing, 2.1 Increasing Overall Participation, and 4.5 Inspired by the Brand, were already being evidenced through other activities and initiatives. For example, children's participation in physical activity was already being supported and monitored through weekly tag rugby sessions. As a result, greater focus was placed on 3.5 Improving Curriculum Skills, as this was considered a priority area for further investigation. This allowed for a more detailed examination of which aspects of STEM had the greatest influence on children's learning, development, and behaviour.

In Years 1 and 2, data was collected and analysed at a whole-class level. However, with support from Sage volunteers, data collection in Years 3 and 4 was carried out at an individual pupil level. This approach enabled more detailed comparisons and provided a more accurate representation of the programme's impact on each child.

What does it teach us?

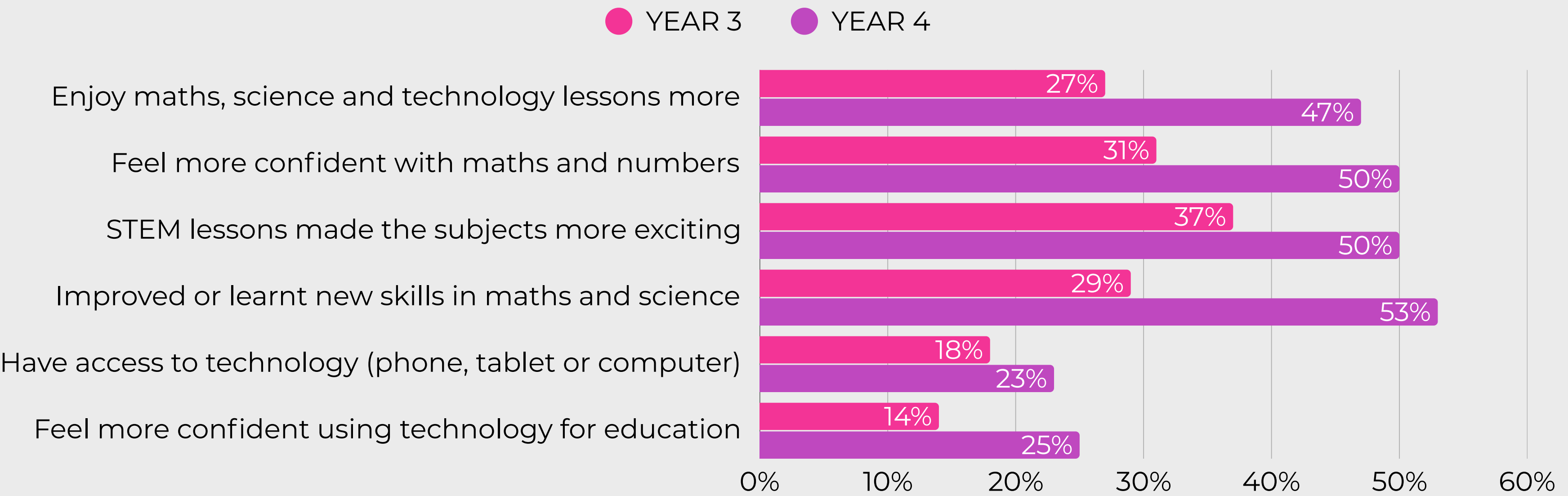
Analysis of the programme's data over four years highlights a consistently positive trend across all key measures. Comparing Year 1 with Year 4 shows significant improvements in participant outcomes, with the strongest gains seen in physical activity levels and Impact 3.5, which focuses on the development of curriculum skills.

- **1.1 Improve Healthy Lifestyles** - There was an initial dip in Year 2 before a significant increase in Years 3 and 4. This may reflect children having greater exposure to the programme (8 weeks rather than 5) and becoming more aware of the links between physical activity, healthy habits and wellbeing.
- **1.2 Increase Frequency of Physical Activity** - This impact shows steady growth across all four years. Alongside regular rugby sessions, pupils may have become more confident in participating in additional physical activities during break times, extracurricular clubs, and at home. Positive experiences in sport often encourage children to remain active beyond organised sessions.
- **1.3 Understanding Behaviour and Inspired by Rugby's Core Values** - This demonstrates one of the largest overall increases. The programme evolved over the 4 years to incorporate more core values of rugby weaved throughout the classroom and rugby sessions. Repeated exposure to these values across different activities may have helped embed them more deeply in children's everyday behaviour.
- **1.4 Improve Mental Wellbeing** - Data was not collected in Years 3 and 4. However, the Year 1 result suggests that mental wellbeing was a notable impact. The lower score in Year 2 may reflect differences in cohort needs or increased awareness of wellbeing challenges due to the deprived area which the delivery took place.
- **2.1 Increase Overall Participation** - This impact was not measured in Years 3 and 4 because participation was already being monitored through the register of them taking part in the programme, and by taking part in the programme their overall participation in sport has already increased.
- **3.2 Improve Life Skills** - Although only measured in Year 2, this impact likely contributed indirectly to improvements seen later in confidence, curriculum engagement and understanding of values.
- **3.5 Improve Curriculum Skills** Following a dip in Year 2, curriculum skills increased substantially in Years 3 and 4. The STEM-focused activities supported by Sage volunteers may have become better integrated into classroom learning, allowing pupils to see clearer links between practical activities and subjects such as maths, science and problem-solving. We were also able to dig deeper into this impact in years 3 and 4 with additional questions - this is shown in the next slide
- **4.1 Improve Confidence in Social Interaction** - This is the highest impact recorded in Year 4. The programme likely provided increasing opportunities for collaboration, teamwork, leadership and communication - this may be linked to the core values elements of the programme. Working with external role models and volunteers may also have encouraged children who were previously less confident to participate and contribute more actively.
- **4.5 Opportunity to be Inspired by the Brand** - This impact was not measured in Years 3 and 4. The relatively high Year 1 score suggests that the association with professional rugby and external partners was initially very motivating for pupils.

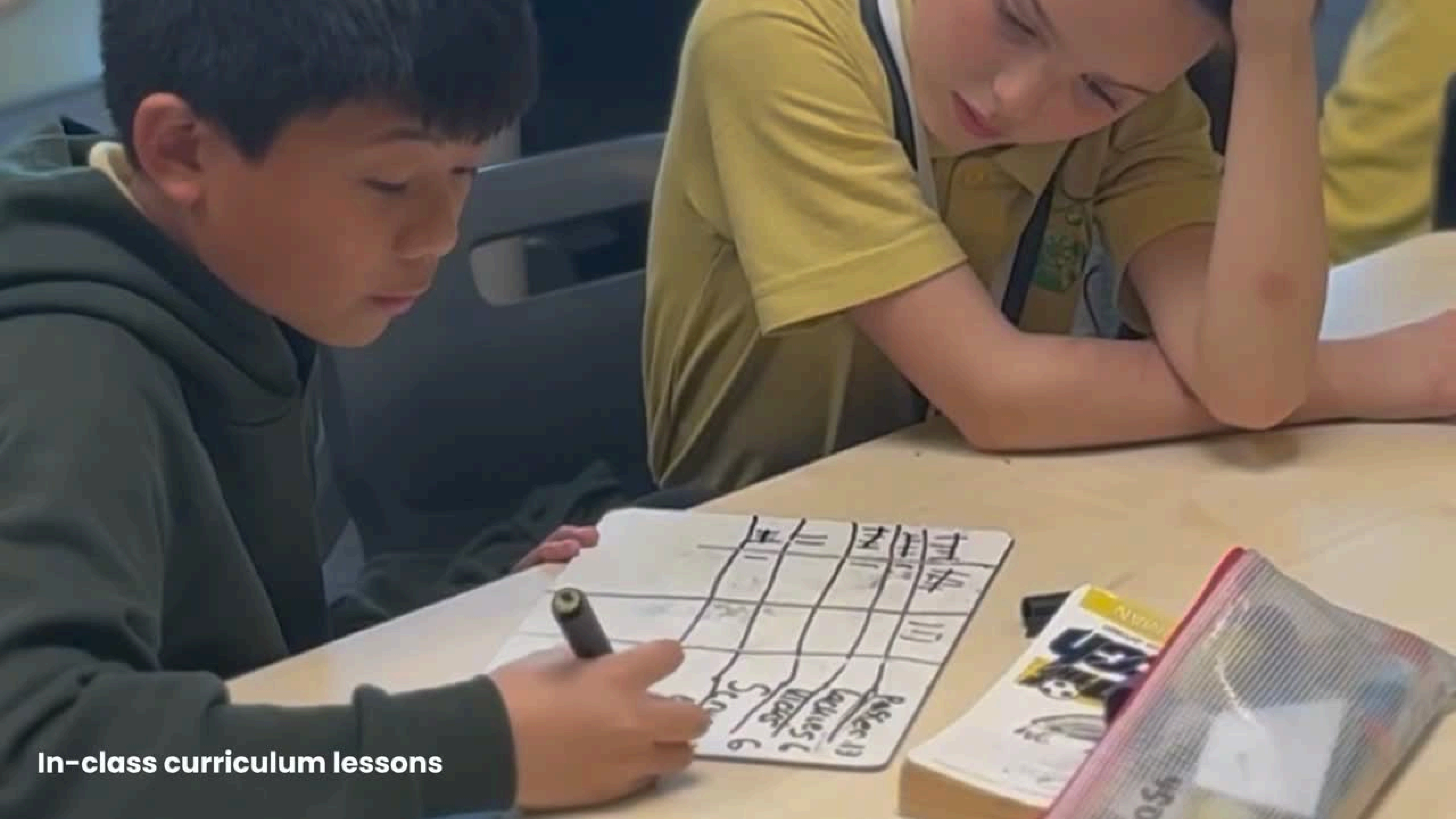
These findings demonstrate the programme's growing impact on both educational engagement and learner confidence, particularly in STEM-related subjects.

the curriculum detail.

3.5 Improve curriculum skills – individual question responses, Year 3 to Year 4 of Tackling Insights



The previous graph shows that 3.5 Improving Curriculum Skills was already identified as an important impact in Years 1 and 2, with 26% of pupils reporting a positive impact in Year 1 and 14% in Year 2. However, in these years only one or two broad questions were asked, which limited the ability to understand exactly how pupils' curriculum skills were being developed. As a result, a deeper investigation was carried out in Years 3 and 4, where additional questions explored specific areas of learning, particularly within STEM. This more detailed analysis revealed substantial improvements, with pupils reporting increased confidence in maths and numbers (31% to 50%), greater enjoyment of maths, science and technology lessons (27% to 47%), and improved or newly developed maths and science skills (29% to 53%). These findings suggest that the programme was successfully supporting curriculum development by making learning more engaging, providing practical STEM experiences, and helping pupils apply classroom knowledge to real-world situations. The involvement of Sage volunteers also gave pupils access to role models and career-related learning opportunities, which may have further increased confidence, motivation and enthusiasm for STEM subjects.



In-class curriculum lessons

Where we go from **here.**

**694 CHILDREN RECEIVED A RUGBY SESSION, A
SCIENCE LESSON AND A REASON TO THINK
DIFFERENTLY ABOUT WHAT THEY'RE CAPABLE
OF.**

THANK YOU FOR MAKING THIS POSSIBLE.

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That was

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