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The Wheelyboat Trust
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Students benefit from new wheelchair accessible boat

Two national charities, The Wheelyboat Trust and Young Epilepsy, have launched a brand new accessible powerboat at Weir Wood Reservoir in East Sussex, where it will be used as part of St Piers School and College physical education programme. Over 180 students, all of whom have learning difficulties related to epilepsy, autism and other neurological conditions, will benefit from the sensory stimulation and pleasure of being on the water.

On Friday 23 June the first students enjoyed a trip on the boat with the many donors, who supported the fundraising activities, and the National Partnerships Advisor at The English Federation of Disability Sport, Jess Cook.

Both charities worked together from July 2015 when seven students from St Piers School and College, were able to try out the Coulam Wheelyboat V20 for the first time and show the PE department staff how straightforward the purpose-built boat is to accommodate their less-independent students.

Designed by The Wheelyboat Trust, which is dedicated to providing people with access to waterborne activities, the Coulam V20 is the most important development in over 30 years. Its unique design with flexible seating, level deck and a watertight bow door, that lowers to form a solid ramp, present an extremely easy and safe access for people, who find boarding from an unstable floating pontoon particularly difficult.

Able to reach a top speed of 30mph with a 90hp Suzuki outboard, the boat will provide a more exciting sensory experience to the young people with disabilities, benefitting their overall health and well-being. Many of the students find focussing on one given task or even sitting still very challenging, but become instantly relaxed and take a definite interest in their surroundings as soon as they are aboard.

The St Piers School and College PE department is fully inclusive and offers the same opportunities to all students regardless of ability. It has run a boating programme



photos credit: Young Epilepsy

for 28 years, but this will be the first wheelchair-accessible powerboat in the school's fleet, extending the programme to more varied and adventurous waters around the UK and overseas.

Students will also be allowed to drive a powerboat and support the delivery of The Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme.

Paul Keenleyside, director of education at Young Epilepsy said, "The Wheelyboat will not only broaden our young people's horizons, but also encourage them to experience new physical activities and enrich their lives through adventure and challenge. We have had the most fantastic support from The Wheelyboat Trust and our charitable donors who have made this possible."

As part of the fundraising activities, Scott Baptie, head of physical education at St Piers School with his predecessor Marcus Frisby completed a Three Lakes Challenge

last year, paddling two open canoes down three lakes in 24 hours, raising £3,500. The Wheelyboat Trust raised 40% of the fully-fitted craft's cost, which was £41,000. Andy Beadsley, director of The Wheelyboat Trust said, "Our aim is to allow as many people as possible to enjoy taking part in waterborne activities and this project will benefit those who have the most complex and limiting health needs. This is the 183rd launch for us and we believe that the new Coulam Wheelyboat V20 will help the school's boating programme become even more successful."

The trust relies on the support of individuals, companies and charitable organisations to fund its activities. Donations can be made in a variety of ways including online at:

<http://www.wheelyboats.org/donate>.

