

Up with the Big Boys!

After winning the Halton Indoor Athletics Championship in November, the St. Bertelina's team were asked to represent the borough in the Merseyside version of the competition. The best 14 schools from across the 5 districts of Merseyside were ready to compete against each other to see who the best of the best was. In the previous 2 years, St. Bert's had finished 7th and 9th – so they knew the competition would be really difficult.

The determination of the group was clear to see weeks before the event, with speed bouncers spending their break time practicing and runners begging for batons so they could practice at lunch time – the team were ready to give everything they had. And boy did they!

On the morning of the solar eclipse, the team of 27 children turned up at the Kingsway Leisure Centre, and apart from Michael M having panic attacks, and Lauren H twisting her ankle the day before (she was in 3 events) every single athlete was excited for the competition.

Unfortunately, until the results are sent through, I have no definitive marks for the field events, so this report will focus on the track for now.

Up first was the tricky Obstacle Relay that requires athletes to forward roll, go through a quick feet stepper, then do 10 speed bounce before jumping over 2 hurdles and sprinting the entire length of the sports hall to tag a team-mate. St. Bert's were in heat one which had 7 teams in and heat two also had 7 teams. Regardless of where the team finished in the heat, the only thing that mattered was the time as it was compared to the other heat and a maximum of 32 points were awarded to the quickest team with 2 point jumps for other teams. Here were the heats:

Heat 1	Heat 2
St. Bertelina's	St. Lawrence's
St. Sebastian's	Lister Junior School
St. Michael in the Hamlet	Dovedale
Leigh Vale	Bleak Hill
Farnborough Road	Great Crosby
St. Monica's	St. Peter's Heswall
St. Bridget's	Poulten Lancelyn

Ellie S, a veteran of sports hall athletics, started and had St. Bert's in the leading group; she tagged Eva F, who went like the road runner and stormed through the course. She did have a funny moment on the speed bounce when she criss-crossed but she kept Bert's in the top 4. Molly was 3rd and with her excellent speed bounce, moved Bert's into 3rd and gave Maicey a real chance of catching. She charged after the front 2, but this is no easy event and every child who races is quick. Still, a confident start... 3rd. The boys were next and had a strong team of Fenton, Kyle, Zach C and Jamie - the three year 6 lads had been in the exact same race the year before. The experienced showed and all the lads flew through the course, even with Kyle's unusual running technique! They finished 2nd in their heat. They had been 5th the year before.

Up next... the fastest of the fast! The one lap relay (both races are on the school website) For the girls – Naomi Mc and Maddie A were up and had practiced their baton changes all week. Naomi stormed off and had St. Bert's in FIRST!! She passed the baton to Maddie and she held on until the last turn where a little stumble meant the team in 2nd caught up. In an exciting finish, they crossed the line neck and neck - the timing judges didn't know what to do! Even after watching the video 49,752 times there is still no clear winner! In the boys' race though, there was a C L E A R winner and it was.... St. Bert's! Panic attacks aside, and with the pep talk from Mr. M ringing in his ears, Michael destroyed the first leg and handed the baton to Joe L, the baton change was crisp, clean and allowed Joe to storm even further ahead, the boys won by an absolute mile; the video is proof of it! It is scary viewing! Remember, these are the quickest schools in the whole of Merseyside.

After the hype of winning, up next was the 2 lap relay which had Amy O and Maicey running for the girls and Rhys Mc and Matty L for the boys. Maicey went first leg for the girls and you can see how close every race is from the video. Maicey passed the baton in 6th place but was less than second behind first. The baton change was sheer perfection as Amy charged through the field to get in the lead and once she is in the lead; there is no hope for anyone. The girls WON the race and the day was already becoming glorious. St. Bert's did not win any of their heats last year. We had 2 clear wins and an equal first already. The boys were ready to go. Matty L and Rhys, both veterans, were in a tough battle all the way through the race. They were toe to toe with Farnborough Road right up until the last turn were Farnborough just managed to squeeze a little advantage and take first. Still, 2nd is very impressive!

Hardest race next... the 6 lap paarluf! A real muscle killer! A lung buster! Now, if you want some dietary advice, do not start eating Pringles moments before a race, as it can have an effect on performance. Ask Naomi about this when you see her! Her partner Maddie kept her cool and helped her partner out, running more than she should have. The girls finished 4th in their heat. The boys of Joe and Tom Y, finished 2nd... Both exhausted but happy with their efforts.

The over, under relay is one which requires timing, concentration and speed. Ellie started for the girls again, with team of Eva, Molly and Jess with her. Ellie had the girls in 2nd after the first leg, but the speed of the other teams showed in the other legs as the girls finished 5th in the heat. The boys' race had a comical element with Fenton and the scariest showing of speed from Michael you will ever see. Fenton, unfortunately, got a little stuck in the tunnel which put him off a little and had the team in 5th after the first leg. Kyle and Zach got the lads to 4th, and then... Michael showed his blistering speed and ripped through everything in sight; he didn't even stop at the tunnel... he just carried on running. He was catching the front 2, and if the race was 10 seconds longer, he would have won. Still 3rd is very credible in this event.

The final relays were last and came after the speed bounce competition and javelin. Apart from Eva throwing her javelin in the basketball net and James throwing one of his javelins in the time keepers, St. Bert's showed they had the most muscle of all the teams there. The speed bounce videos are on the website and it is just incredible how fast children can make their legs move. In 20 seconds Joe L scored 60, Toby, 58 and Jamie 46 (he lost his balance halfway through) for the boys and the girls' team - made up of entirely year 5 children - had... Molly score 54, Lauren C 53 and Lucy (in her slippers) 56!!! Imagine what that team will do next year??? Frightening!!! At this point of the day, there were teacher competitions for the speed bounce and javelin. Mr. Morland won the speed bounce with 34 in 10 seconds and Mr. O'Neill won the javelin with a massive 22 metre throw. Great role models or what? Both videos are on the website.

The relays were last but sadly, didn't go exactly to plan for St. Bert's. The girls finished equal 4th and the boys, who were winning by some distance, until the last leg, missed a baton change and had to settle for 6th. Disappointment was etched on their faces, but that shows how far the whole team had come in a competition of this calibre!

The final results came through and St. Bert's must have been unbelievable in the field events because where they came was just amazing (the field event results will be posted

online for you to look through)... Now remember, the highest position St. Bert's had ever finished was 7th and they had the record for a school from Halton as well. So once the results were being read out... nerves were jangling!

Here they are in full.... In reverse order – as they were read out to the schools

14 th Great Crosby	224
13 th St. Lawrence's	318
12 th St. Monica's	326
11 th St. Bridget's	414
10 th St. Michael in the Hamlet	430
9 th St. Sebastian's	436
=7 th St. Peter's	444
=7 th Lister Junior	444
6 th Bleak Hill	462
5 th Poulton Lancelyn	506
4 th Dovedale	568
3 rd St. Berteline's	604
2 nd Leigh Vale	622
1 st Farnborough Road	660

St. Bert's had finished 3rd, they had 'eclipsed' their highest ever position; they had changed Halton's highest ever finish in the competition which shows what an incredible achievement this is in an outstanding event! The team performed superbly and should be so proud of themselves. Hopefully, they'll be back next year.