RUSSELL MARTIN FOUNDATION



Annual Report

2025–2026

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ANNUAL REPORT 2025–2026

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MESSAGE

Message from Russell Martin



It has been another busy year for the Foundation, and I am proud of what our staff, coaches and volunteers have achieved with children, young people and families across Sussex.

Through the Russell Martin Academy, young people have played, trained and travelled, from our own tournament at BACA to the tour in Barcelona. Our school partnerships have continued to grow, with all of our schools renewing their contracts and our work at BACA extended for a further three years.

It was a challenging year behind the scenes, with a lot of change in our staffing and leadership team, and I want to thank everyone who worked hard to keep things running smoothly for the players and their families.

Our education and mentoring work is still very much needed. Referrals to our alternative provision have continued to rise, and we have extended our probation mentoring to include women, who had not previously been covered by the contract.

None of this happens without our staff, our volunteers, and the schools, councils, funders and community organisations who work with us. Thank you all.

Russell Martin
Founder

MESSAGE

Message from CEO Alan Sanders



2025–2026 has been a year of change as well as progress for the Russell Martin Foundation (RMF). Demand for our education provision has continued to grow, with more referrals from Local Authorities, SENAT and schools across West Sussex, including for pupils with more complex needs.

In football, we made a big change to how we employ our coaches in order to meet updated legislation. A high turnover of staff and changes in our senior leadership team made it a challenging year for the Academy, but it finished with strong school partnerships and a well-attended tournament at BACA.

Our rehabilitation and mentoring work has also developed. Support now extends to women in the criminal justice system, and we have started to receive self-referrals from people on probation who have heard about the programme from friends and family.

We can only meet the needs of our community by working with partners from the public, private and voluntary sectors. Thank you to everyone who supports us, both as individuals and as organisations. Our work would not be possible without you.

Alan Sanders
Chief Executive Officer

RUSSELL MARTIN ACADEMY

Football





The Russell Martin Academy gives children and young people across Sussex the chance to develop their football in a positive, enjoyable environment. Alongside technical coaching, our sessions are designed to build confidence, teamwork and personal development. This season our centres covered Brighton, Hove, Shoreham and Burgess Hill, and our boys' and girls' programmes continued to offer pathways for players at different stages of their development.

It was a year of change for the Academy, with developments within our coaching team and our senior leadership team, and attendance was slightly lower than the previous season. One of the most important developments was a change to how we employ our coaches. To meet updated legislation, we moved away from ad-hoc coaching arrangements and now employ most of our coaches on full or part-time contracts. This has made us more compliant, given us greater certainty over staff placement and created a more settled coaching team. It was a big undertaking, and one that has proved successful in the new season.

Fixture Programme

Our PDC squads played a varied fixture programme across the season, with some fixtures competitive and others played purely for development. Regular fixtures give players the chance to put what they learn in training into practice against a range of opposition. At the start of the year we set out to secure more fixtures for our second-tier Select squads and for our girls' teams, and we are pleased to have achieved this.

PDC fixtures included LPA, EMC, Chelsea Foundation, Brighton & Hove Albion, Portsmouth and ACE Academy, while our Select squads played PCA Academy, Matchfit and local grassroots teams.
Our players also took part in the PROCO Cup in Surrey, the Soccer Elite Tournament in Hampshire and the Canary Cup in Norwich. The Canary Cup was another success for RMA, with age groups from our youngest to our oldest competing. All of our teams competed well, and our U12s won the final.

Tournaments

Our own tournaments were another success, bringing together a large number of teams across the boys' and girls' events. For the first time, they were hosted at BACA, and the venue proved popular with returning teams and attracted new teams too.

Trips and Tours

One of our squads travelled to Barcelona this year, and there was interest from several other teams. The trip was a real success both on and off the pitch. The accommodation was excellent and well suited to young players and families, and our squad had a successful tour on the pitch.

Saturday Morning

Our Saturday morning soccer school had another strong year, running at full capacity with waiting lists for some age groups.

Girls' Football

Girls' football remained an important part of the Academy. We supported PACA with delivery to girls and ran fixtures to mirror our boys' programme, so that girls had the same opportunities to play competitively. We also started new girls-only sessions at London Meed Primary School in Burgess Hill, which gave us access to new attendees. We ran school teams for PACA, BACA, Westdene and London Meed, delivering training and managing fixtures.

Numbers in our community sessions were lower this year following changes to venues and coaching, and we have moved girls' football back to Hove Park 3G this season.

School Provision

Our school provision remained strong, with all of our schools from the previous year renewing their contracts. There was also more demand for provision, particularly for running school teams, which has proved to be a popular service.

We continued our Academy-style provision for BACA as the school looks to replicate the success of its cricket academy. This year focused on improving school football provision and entering every year group into the school leagues. Our Year 8s won their league and were promoted, and our teams won their regional league and reached the later stages of the County Cup. The infrastructure we have put in place is attracting new students to the school, with a good intake of new Year 7s joining because of the football provision on offer. The contract has been extended, giving us a longer-term partnership with the school.
More success followed at PACA, where the Year 11s, led by Rob, won the district cup. They are now back-to-back winners, having repeated last year's success.

Social Football

We put a focus on birthday parties this year following a rise in enquiries the previous year, and thanks to Glenn's hard work we delivered a busy programme of parties across the year.
We continued to support the local community with free coaching. We delivered East Hill Park community football through June, supported school promotional days and helped PACA with their girls' football celebration day. Our thanks go to the coaches, staff and families whose support makes all of this possible.

Post 16 Football

Our Post 16 football programme has moved to BACA this year, where students can combine their studies with regular coaching and competitive football.

We have also continued our Post 16 programme at Shoreham College.

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Hove Park

The Hove Park 3G pitch gives the Russell Martin Academy a base for development sessions, elite sessions, holiday courses, birthday parties and 1-2-1 coaching. Our live booking system lets members of the public book single sessions or block bookings, and the facility is staffed seven days a week into the evening. After a period of extensive use, the pitch was re-surfaced, and we are pleased to be back at Hove Park this season.

Old Barn Way, Southwick

We continue to work closely with Adur District Council and the Football Foundation on the development of the Old Barn Way site in Southwick. The new facility will include a full-size 3G pitch for Russell Martin Academy activities and senior club football matches, and it will also be available for hire by the local community. It will include a new clubhouse that can be used for educational and health programmes when it isn't being used for football, giving us a permanent base for our work.

EDUCATION

Key Stage 3





We continue to deliver our respite alternative provision programme, the Extra Time Project (ETP), to students aged 11–14 across our Centres in Brighton, Crawley and Worthing. The programme continues to receive positive feedback from Ofsted Inspectors who have visited our Centres as part of mainstream school inspections.

Despite continued reductions in government funding, schools continue to place children and young people within our alternative provision. We have also seen an increase in referrals from Local Authorities and SENAT placements, reflecting the growing number of pupils requiring more complex and specialist support. This includes pupils with increasingly complex social, emotional, behavioural and learning needs who require a more individualised and trauma-informed approach. We have also experienced increased referrals from schools across West Sussex, demonstrating continued confidence in the quality and impact of our provision.

Our provision has enabled children to address not only their academic needs but also their social, emotional and behavioural development. Our holistic approach supports pupils to develop confidence, resilience, self-awareness, positive relationships and a stronger sense of belonging. Opportunities to

engage with their local communities, including library visits, cooking activities, guest speakers and community-based learning, help pupils develop practical life skills and greater independence.

Academic Progress and Accredited Learning

We have strengthened our academic offer through the implementation of online Maths and English learning platforms, enabling staff to establish individual starting points, monitor progress and provide targeted learning interventions. These platforms support personalised learning and allow progress to be tracked more effectively throughout a pupil's placement.

Alongside core Maths and English learning, we have increased opportunities for pupils to work towards certificated and accredited courses, providing meaningful qualifications and recognising individual achievement. This is particularly important for pupils who may have previously experienced disengagement, repeated educational difficulties or exclusion from mainstream education.

The combination of accredited learning, personalised academic programmes and targeted pastoral support enables pupils to make progress at an appropriate pace while developing the skills and confidence required for successful reintegration, further education, training or employment.

Personal Development, Mindset and Resilience

The delivery of our Mindset programme has been further developed to increase pupils' awareness of themselves, their emotions, choices and behaviours. The programme supports young people to understand the impact of their actions, develop emotional regulation strategies and build the resilience required to manage challenges more positively.

Aspiration sessions linked to our Random Acts of Kindness and Social Impact projects have provided opportunities for pupils to take part in question-and-answer sessions with a variety of role models. These sessions encourage young people to consider their hopes for the future, career pathways and the positive contribution they can make to their communities.

Learning and behavioural strategies developed within ETP are transferred back into pupils' mainstream schools wherever appropriate. This has contributed to improved engagement and has helped prevent exclusions and support successful reintegration.

Enrichment, Safeguarding and Current Issues

Our extracurricular programme has continued to evolve in response to the issues affecting young people today. Alongside sport, community activities and practical learning, we have introduced targeted programmes addressing knife crime, personal safety and online awareness, helping pupils understand risk, recognise potentially harmful situations and make safer choices.

We have also introduced dedicated boys' and girls' groups, creating safe and supportive environments in which young people can discuss identity, relationships, respect, equality and the pressures they experience. These sessions address issues including misogyny, harmful gender stereotypes, violence

against women and girls (VAWG) and the influence of online content and social media on attitudes and behaviour.

This preventative work is an important part of our safeguarding approach, helping pupils to develop critical thinking, challenge harmful attitudes, understand consent and respectful relationships, and recognise the consequences of harmful or unsafe behaviour.

Impact

The continued increase in referrals from Local Authorities, SENAT and schools across West Sussex, including referrals involving pupils with more complex needs, demonstrates the growing demand for specialist alternative provision and the confidence placed in RMF's approach.

Our combination of academic learning, accredited qualifications, personalised Maths and English provision, trauma-informed support, Mindset, enrichment and safeguarding education provides a comprehensive package designed around the individual needs of each young person.

RMF's holistic approach to supporting children and their families has resulted in positive testimonials from a range of education and professional partners, recognising the importance and impact of the programme for children and young people across Sussex.

EDUCATION

Key Stage 4





Our Key Stage 4 provision is designed for young people who benefit from a smaller, nurturing learning environment, where the curriculum can be tailored to their individual needs, abilities and aspirations. Many of the young people accessing our KS4 provision have experienced difficulties within mainstream education and require a more personalised approach to re-engage them with learning and prepare them for their next steps.

Our approach combines academic learning with personal development, vocational learning, life skills, careers and employability, ensuring that young people have opportunities to achieve qualifications while developing the confidence and practical skills needed for life beyond school.

Pupils have achieved Level 1 qualifications in Mental Health Awareness, and further CPD accreditation in Life Skills, Social Skills and Business Studies, providing recognised achievements and helping young people to build confidence in their own abilities. These qualifications sit alongside our wider programme of learning, which includes Maths and English through online learning platforms, enabling pupils to work at an appropriate level, address gaps in their learning and have progress monitored throughout their placement.

The KS4 curriculum also provides opportunities to develop an understanding of self and behaviour, supporting young people to recognise their emotions, understand the consequences of their choices and develop strategies to manage challenges more positively. This is complemented by learning around healthy living, relationships, personal safety and independence, helping pupils develop the knowledge and skills required for adulthood.

Careers, Enterprise and Future Aspirations

Preparing young people for their next stage of education, employment or training is an important part of our KS4 offer. Enterprise and careers activities enable pupils to explore different career pathways, understand the skills and behaviours expected within the workplace and identify their own strengths and interests.

Aspiration work, including opportunities to engage with positive role models and discuss future pathways, helps pupils to develop a greater sense of purpose and recognise that their current circumstances do not have to determine their future.

Personal Development and Safeguarding

Our wider programme responds to the challenges facing young people today. Pupils take part in activities addressing knife crime, online safety and awareness, healthy relationships and personal safety. Dedicated boys' and girls' groups provide opportunities to explore issues including misogyny, gender stereotypes and violence against women and girls (VAWG) in a safe and supportive environment.

These activities help young people develop critical thinking, understand risk, challenge harmful attitudes and make safer and more positive choices.

Longer-Term Engagement and Impact

In West Sussex, our KS4 programmes have been delivered twice weekly over the course of a full year. This consistency and longevity have been an important factor in supporting sustainable change. Rather than providing a short-term intervention, the longer placement allows staff to build strong and trusting relationships with young people and their families, understand individual needs and provide consistent support over time.

This relationship-based approach enables young people to develop greater confidence, resilience, self-awareness and independence, while improving their engagement with education. The stability provided by the programme also gives families a consistent point of contact and enables positive relationships to develop between the young person, their family, education professionals and RMF staff.

The continued increase in referrals from Local Authorities, SENAT and schools across West Sussex, including pupils presenting with more complex needs, demonstrates the growing demand for specialist KS4 alternative provision. Our ability to combine personalised education, recognised qualifications, personal development and preparation for adulthood provides young people with a pathway towards further education, training, employment and greater independence.

Overall, our KS4 provision seeks to achieve more than academic progress. It provides young people with the opportunity to re-engage with learning, understand themselves and their behaviour, achieve recognised qualifications, develop practical life skills and build a positive vision for their future.

EDUCATION

Adult Education

RMF have continued to exceed targets for the number of adults receiving education in English and Maths.

We have delivered a health and wellbeing qualification with a 100% pass rate for the course.

In response to the cost of living crisis, we have used “Multiply” funding from local councils to help adult learners to better deal with family and household budgeting.

From the adults attending our education programme, we have been able to recruit volunteers for our Foundation, assist with CV development and offer paid employment to some learners.

HEALTH

Health Improvement





RMF have continued to deliver diversionary programmes aimed at health improvement in Crawley, commissioned by Crawley Council, with Violence Reduction Partnership funds.

Through a programme of football and boxing, we engaged with young people at crime hotspots, provided mentoring and raised awareness of the dangers of drug and alcohol use.

We also provided meals for vulnerable children who may not have access to healthy food over the summer holidays. This further enhances our relationship and trust with these young people, often considered hard to reach by professionals. This led to protective factors such as signposting to other agencies and referrals being made to social services.

Nuffield Health have been supporting our work with disadvantaged students attending our Extra Time Project centre in Crawley, offering boxing lessons and PE sessions.

Response from the children was incredibly positive, as was the feedback from the council and partner agencies Crawley Town FC and Crawley Youth Boxing Club.

Collaboration with other agencies has increased this year. Contracts have been obtained to deliver sexual health advice to children and young people within West Sussex. Feelgood Factory in Worthing focuses on improving the mental and physical health of members of the community. Additionally, we have provided opportunities for socialising and mentoring, all of which have reportedly reduced loneliness of attendees.

We have received funding from Sport England to develop our Boxercise and mentoring programme in Crawley. Our referral numbers were so high we had a waiting list of children wanting to attend.

We have utilised the skills of our ex-professional footballers to support the health and education programmes, from their delivery of sessions, raising awareness and fundraising, to active engagement in the community. We are proud of the impact they are having.

EDUCATION

Key Stage 2 Transition

Our education programme continues to support Moulsecoomb Primary School, despite the cessation of funding from Fonthill Foundation. We remain committed to providing vital services for students who often face significant educational disadvantages. Our Transition Mentor continues to assist children transitioning into secondary school, particularly at BACA High School, focusing on building confidence and addressing specific social needs, including online safety. Additionally, we provide support with attendance mentoring and resilience-building activities to ensure our pupils are equipped for success in their educational journeys. We also continue our collaboration with Acts 435 Charity to aid the health and wellbeing of deprived children and families in Sussex, helping with essentials like clothing and household items.

EDUCATION

Further KS2 Support



We have recently started to work in partnership with several primary schools across Brighton and Hove as the need for this provision has developed. We support Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 pupils who have experienced significant difficulties accessing and managing within mainstream school provision.

This support has been delivered from our Brighton site, providing pupils with a safe, structured and supportive environment away from the pressures they may have experienced within mainstream education. Our approach focuses on understanding the individual barriers preventing each young person from successfully engaging with school, while developing the skills, confidence and relationships needed to support their longer-term reintegration.

We have supported children with a range of additional needs and neurodevelopmental profiles, including autism, Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) and ADHD. Our work recognises that behaviour is often a form of communication and seeks to understand the underlying reasons for a child's difficulties rather than simply responding to the behaviour itself.

For some pupils, difficulties had resulted in extended periods of non-attendance or an inability to access school at all. We have provided these children with a safe and consistent space in which they can begin to rebuild their confidence, develop communication skills and learn how to establish positive relationships with a range of adults.

A key part of our work has been helping pupils gradually develop their ability to engage with different adults, manage expectations, communicate their needs and regulate their responses in challenging situations. This has enabled young people to experience success in a setting where they feel safe and understood, before gradually working towards a return to school.

Through this approach, we have seen improvements in pupils' behaviour and engagement, as well as their ability to understand and communicate the barriers they have experienced in accessing education. Our aim is not simply to improve attendance, but to address the underlying needs of each child so that, where appropriate, they can return to school in a safe, sustainable and positive way.

CASE STUDY

KS2 Case Study

The Extra Time Project was approached to support a KS2 pupil who had been unable to attend mainstream school for several months due to significant emotional dysregulation and frequent emotional outbursts.

Prior to accessing our provision, the pupil was finding it increasingly difficult to manage his emotions and responses to everyday situations. His difficulties had resulted in prolonged school absence, which was beginning to have a significant impact on both his emotional wellbeing and his academic progress.

As his time away from school increased, his confidence in his own academic ability began to decline. He was becoming increasingly anxious about his ability to return to learning and was losing confidence in his ability to succeed within a school environment.

The difficulties were also impacting on family life. The pupil was becoming increasingly dysregulated at home and was displaying aggression towards family members, including his mother. This placed additional pressure on the family and increased concerns about his ability to safely manage his emotions and relationships with others.

Through initial discussions and engagement with the pupil, it became clear that a return to mainstream education could not simply focus on academic catch-up. The pupil first needed to develop the emotional and interpersonal skills required to feel safe, understood and confident enough to engage with learning again.

The Extra Time Project developed a bespoke package of support based around the pupil’s individual needs.

Rather than expecting the pupil to immediately return to the demands of a mainstream classroom, we provided a safe, structured and consistent environment where he could begin to rebuild his confidence and develop strategies for managing his emotions.

A significant element of the intervention was developing his ability to form positive relationships with a range of adults. Initially, the pupil could find interactions and expectations from adults challenging. We therefore gradually introduced opportunities for him to work with both male and female members of staff.

This was an important part of the programme as it helped the pupil understand that he could develop trusting and positive relationships with different adults, while also learning to manage different communication styles, expectations and boundaries.

Staff worked with the pupil to identify situations that could lead to dysregulation and supported him to recognise the physical and emotional signs that he was becoming overwhelmed. He was then introduced to practical strategies that enabled him to communicate his feelings, seek support and manage difficult

situations before they escalated.

The programme also incorporated learning and academic activities at an appropriate level. This allowed the pupil to experience success with his learning again and begin to challenge the belief that he was no longer capable academically.

Over the course of the intervention, the pupil began to demonstrate increased confidence in his ability to engage with adults and participate in structured activities.

He became increasingly able to communicate when he was becoming frustrated or overwhelmed, rather than immediately responding through emotional outbursts. He also began to develop a greater understanding of the connection between his emotions, behaviour and the situations that could act as triggers.

Working with a range of staff helped increase his resilience and confidence in managing relationships with different adults. This was particularly important in preparing him for the expectations of a mainstream school environment, where he would need to interact with a number of different members of staff throughout the school day.

The pupil also began to re-engage with learning and experience positive academic interactions. By providing achievable tasks and recognising his successes, the programme helped rebuild his confidence in his own ability to learn.

Importantly, the intervention provided the pupil with an opportunity to experience success outside of the mainstream school environment before attempting to return. This reduced the focus on his previous difficulties and allowed him to develop a more positive view of himself as a learner.

The ultimate aim of the support was to increase the pupil’s readiness and resilience to return to mainstream education.

The Extra Time Project worked on the principle that successful reintegration requires more than simply returning a pupil to the school building. The pupil needed to develop the emotional regulation, communication, confidence and relationship-building skills necessary to manage the demands of school safely and sustainably.

The bespoke package therefore provided a bridge between prolonged non-attendance and a potential return to education. The pupil was able to practise managing emotions, responding to boundaries, communicating with adults and engaging in learning within a supportive environment before facing the full demands of mainstream provision.

The Extra Time Project’s approach demonstrates the importance of providing early, bespoke intervention for pupils who are at risk of becoming permanently disengaged from education. By addressing the emotional and behavioural barriers to learning alongside academic needs, the project was able to provide the pupil with a pathway back towards education and the opportunity to rebuild his confidence, resilience and belief in his own ability to succeed.

PROJECTS

Rehabilitation for Offenders

RMF continues to use the power of mentoring and sport to support adults and young people affected by the criminal justice system. Through our Probation Service contract, delivered via Charlton Athletic Community Trust and funded by the English Football League (EFL), we support adults transitioning back into the community following prison sentences. Our work focuses on rebuilding confidence, improving wellbeing, developing aspirations and helping individuals access employment, volunteering opportunities and benefits to support their successful reintegration. By promoting positive connections and engagement, we also aim to reduce isolation and strengthen community cohesion.

In response to identified local need, RMF has extended its support to include women involved in the criminal justice system, addressing a gap in provision that had not previously been covered by the contract. This development reflects RMF's commitment to responding flexibly to community needs and ensuring that support reaches individuals who may otherwise face barriers to accessing appropriate mentoring and rehabilitation opportunities.

The programme's impact is also reflected in growing demand beyond formal referral pathways. RMF has begun receiving self-referrals from individuals on probation who have heard about the programme through friends and family. This is a significant indication of the trust participants place in the service and their willingness to recommend it to others who may benefit. The programme has proved incredibly impactful, demonstrating the value of relationship-based support that enables individuals to feel understood, rebuild confidence and take positive steps towards their futures.

Alongside our probation work, RMF has delivered targeted mentoring to young people aged 14–17 within youth offender institutions and prisons, including Cookham Wood, Feltham and HMP ISIS. Sessions have focused on building resilience, setting achievable short- and long-term goals, raising aspirations and exploring opportunities for personal development both within the prison system and following release. The mentoring provides an opportunity for young people to reflect on their choices, consider alternative pathways and develop a more positive outlook for their future.

Feedback from participants has highlighted the importance of building trusting relationships and providing consistent, relatable support. Young people have valued the honesty and understanding of RMF's mentors, with one commenting, "The sessions I have with Gerry keep me on the straight and narrow. I really look forward to seeing him and value his commitment to me."

Together, these programmes demonstrate RMF's commitment to supporting people at critical points in their lives, helping them recognise their potential, access new opportunities and build more positive futures. The continued demand for our support, including recommendations and self-referrals, reinforces the importance of this work in promoting rehabilitation, improving wellbeing and supporting successful reintegration into the community.

PROJECTS

Working with Professional Football Clubs

RMF continues to support young players navigating the demands and challenges of professional football through mentoring delivered by former professional footballer Charlie Oatway. Commissioned by the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA), Charlie works with Under-21 players at professional clubs, providing relatable, experience-led guidance on the realities of the professional game, mental health and wellbeing, and the educational and personal development support available through the PFA.

Through the League Football Education (LFE) programme, Charlie also helps young players develop the practical skills, resilience and forward-thinking needed to manage their playing careers and prepare for life beyond football. The continued positive feedback from participants, including requests from some cohorts for repeat sessions and further engagement, demonstrates the value of this work and the importance of providing young players with trusted mentoring, guidance and support at a pivotal stage in their lives and careers.

RUSSELL MARTIN FOUNDATION

Thank you for helping us build brighter futures across Sussex.

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