

The National Junior Indoor Rowing Championships, affectionately known as NJIRC, is officially the biggest junior event of its kind in the World.

Congratulations to **Ella Payne** in 8Wk who participated in NJIRC 2010. But how did Ella manage to end up competing in a National Tournament – and become National Champion?

In November, Sandham hosted the Area round of the Indoor Rowing Competition. Ella, along with the other Sandham teams competed against Ventnor, Lake and Forelands. Ella won her event and a place in the Isle of Wight Finals. Sandham were again to host the finals where Ella was up against competitors from all of the Island Middle Schools – again Ella won her race. This meant that she now went through to the Hampshire Finals as a representative of the Isle of Wight. The Hampshire Finals were last month in Southampton and once more Ella won. You might recall seeing a small write up in one of February's newsletter. For those of you who don't know Ella – she is a very quiet, unassuming girl who didn't want a big deal to be made out of her achievement. With what she has now achieved I'm afraid we are making a BIG deal out of it now!

I had the pleasure of being able to accompany Ella to the National Finals which took place on Tuesday in Battersea Park, London. The event was huge, like nothing I had ever seen before – let alone Ella, a Year 8 girl from a small middle school on the Isle of Wight! Ella was quite rightly nervous – she even asked if she could miss her race! Thank goodness I was, how shall I put it... "cruel to be kind?" There were 192 competitors that Ella was up against and the race was rowed in 5 heats. Ella rowed in the first of these heats. She started off in 5th place. A minute had passed and she had moved up to 4th place. During the second minute of the race Ella had managed to move up two further places and was in the silver medal position. We shouted and yelled words of encouragement to Ella but she didn't appear to have anything left inside of her. Then, with 3 seconds of the race left Ella found something – and she managed to move into Gold medal position, winning the race by 1 metre. This was awesome! I was speechless and had a huge lump in my throat. Ella, as usual, was calm and collected. She now had to wait for the four other heats to be raced before she knew whether she had achieved it or not... and she had! Ella Payne from Sandham Middle School is National Junior Champion 2010.

This is an amazing achievement for Ella, her family, her friends and the school, and it leaves me feeling like the proudest PE teacher on Earth. I am so impressed with how she has been dealing with this in school. She is still pretty quiet about it. I think it took several hours for Ella to realise just what she had achieved. However she is again taking it in her stride. It was lovely to see the number of pupils who wanted to stay back and talk with Ella after we held a presentation assembly for her on her return to school.

I think you will all agree with me when we wish Ella the best of luck and hope that she continues to find success in rowing. Remember her name... you may not see it in 2012 but you never know, perhaps Ella's name will be on the screens in subsequent Olympic games!

K Walker

