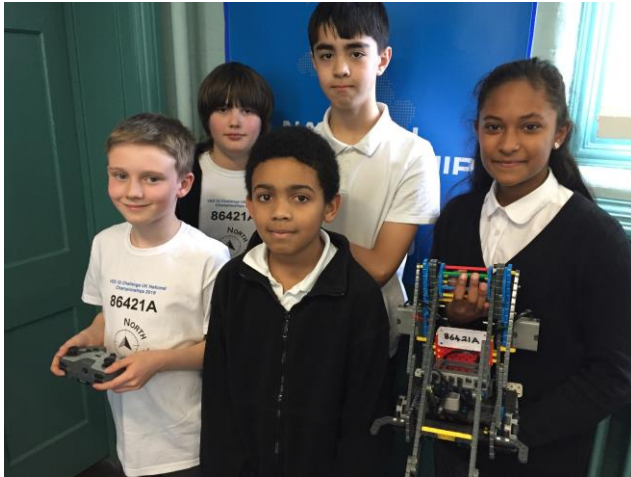


Essex primary school children taking robot to USA for world finals



It's like the plot of a movie - a team of primary school children from Essex got through to the international finals of a robot competition in the USA, and although at first they thought they would have to turn down the opportunity, next month they're off to represent the UK thanks to the generosity of sponsors.

Little did the five roboteers, Talia, Joe, Alex, Joel and Will, imagine that when they joined the Robot Club at North Primary School, Colchester, they would be destined for Kentucky, USA.



Led by the school's IT specialist and club organiser, Sheila Walker, the young engineers, aged 10 and 11, built their robot "JAWTY" out of a plastic construction system, similar to Lego.

They've designed, built and programmed it to perform tasks in the form of a game.

The road to the world finals has surprised this unassuming but talented team at every stage.

First came success against mostly secondary school opponents at the regional VEX IQ Challenge heats in Colchester.

This earned their place at the action-packed two-day national finals in Telford earlier this month which saw primary and secondary schools from across the UK competing to be crowned UK champion.

After being judged on their driving skills, remote control, programming skills, teamwork and collaboration, the team won the top award – the Elementary Excellence Award – and were named best primary school robot team in the UK, with a place in the world finals of the Vex IQ Challenge, in Louisville, Kentucky, from 28 April to 1 May.



Chris Calver, Head of Education at Colchester-based company Rapid Electronics which supports and sponsors the challenge said: "It's no secret that the UK is facing some turbulent times. We need students to have a strong interest in STEM from an early age and for them to understand what engineering careers actually looks like.

"Programmes like the VEX IQ Challenge are vital in providing the spark that these children need to make the connection between what they learn in the classroom and how this can be applied in the real world.

"What Sheila Walker and the team at North Primary have done is an incredible achievement."

At first it looked impossible for a group of children from a town centre school in Colchester to take their robot to the USA, but sponsors Qumodo and Google stepped in, and what was just a dream has now become reality.

Sheila Walker said: "The children worked tirelessly building and adapting their robot and then practised programming and controlling it during their lunchtime breaks and after school.

"They were so excited to win the nationals, but we really thought that was the end of our journey. To get sponsorship so that we can take the robot to the USA to represent the UK is an amazing once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for these children, which they will remember forever."

Alan Garnett, headteacher at North Primary School and Nursery, said: "We've been running Robot Club for three years now, as an extension activity for children with a particular aptitude for science.

"Never for a minute did we foresee that the club would lead to taking a group of children to America to represent their country in an international competition.

"I'd like to thank our generous sponsors for enabling us to give our children such an incredible experience.

Benjamin Gancz CEO of Qumodo said: "As a company we rely heavily on science, technology, engineering and maths to build intelligent machines which help make the world a safer place."

"Our collective passion for these subjects were formed from a young age, which is why we are very excited to be partnering with North School to support, inspire and nurture the next generation of scientists and engineers. We are proud to be working with such an amazing group of youngsters."

The roboteers, accompanied by Mr Garnett and Mrs Walker, will fly out next month to compete against teams from across the globe including China, Australia and Bahrain. They will share their progress with the rest of the school with video updates from America into their classrooms.

If any local business would like to sponsor the robot club to enable the school to participate in future regional and national VEX IQ events and to take advantage of other STEM activities, they can either contact the school or make a donation here: <https://mydonate.bt.com/events/northstem/489600>.