

**THERE were sixes and smiles galore at the Chance to Shine Special Schools Kwik Cricket Festival, hosted by Cheshire Cricket Board.**

“Brilliant,” “awesome,” and “inspiring” were just some of the words used by pupils and teachers to describe the annual soft ball competition, which was staged in glorious sunshine at Warrington Cricket Club.

More than 70 excited youngsters from seven Special Educational Needs (SEN) schools took part in the event, which was coordinated by Chris Edwards, the Cheshire Cricket Board Ambassador for Disability Cricket.

“It was another fantastic day at Warrington, with the children and staff really getting into the spirit of cricket and playing the games in such a positive manner,” explained Chris.



“This is definitely the highlight of the cricket calendar for me, and it’s brilliant to see the way the children interact and give it their all.

“Thanks to the support of our funding partners Chance to Shine, we are able to stage an event that everyone looks forward to and it’s something we’re all incredibly proud of.”

Russett School (left) from Weaverham, who entered two teams, were crowned winners of the Severe Learning

Difficulties (SLD) competition, which also featured runners-up Dee Banks, Dorin Park and Springfields.

Greenbank School (right, pictured with pupils from Ashley School) were this year’s MLD champions, with Tameside-based Samuel Laycock finishing runners-up and Ashley School completing the three-team round robin.

Several schools had received specialist coaching sessions from Cheshire Cricket Board staff members prior to the event, making the whole experience a memorable one for the many players taking part.



Samuel Laycock (pictured below left) PE teacher Ernie

Greenwood was full of praise both for the annual tournament, and the Chance to Shine programme in general.



He said: “My pupils really enjoyed the day. It’s a while since I’ve been to the Warrington tournament but the organisation as ever was superb.

“Thanks to Chance to Shine, we play a lot of cricket in school but having a competition to build towards and focus on is great and it’s a big thing for the children to come here and socialise with kids from other schools.

“The matches were great, but for me the best part was watching what happened in the lunch break. Instead of

messing round, the kids went straight back to the pitch to play some more, even inviting those from

other schools to have a hit. That's when you know you've cracked it because they are hooked now, and it's thanks to Cheshire Cricket and Chance to Shine."

Paul Hamilton, a teacher from Greenbank School, echoed Ernie's sentiments after watching his pupils lift the MLD Trophy.

"We have loved everything about today," he said.

"The tournament has not just improved the children's cricket skills, but their social skills too. It was great to see them interacting with pupils from other schools.

"Of course it was lovely to win and for the children to take home a medal, but the most rewarding part was just watching them have fun in a brilliant environment. Well done to all involved."

And the players themselves were equally fulsome in their praise of the event, demonstrating great sportsmanship throughout the competition.



Sixth form student Kallum, from SLD runners up Dee Banks, thanked Cheshire coach Owen Williamson (left) for helping his team prepare for the finals.

He said: "Owen came to our school to teach us batting, bowling and fielding. We really enjoyed the sessions and we made him proud with our play at the finals.

"I am very proud of all my teammates, who tried their best. We played well and we are very happy to finish as runners-up.

"I also want to say a big well done to Russett for being such great sports and congratulations to them on their victory."

Russett captain Brandon, a Year 10 pupil and veteran of three Chance to Shine Finals, was equally excited about his school's latest triumph.

He added: "I love coming here, and it was nice to win the trophy. Everyone did well.

"My favourite part is the batting, hitting fours and sixes. There were lots of them today and we look forward to coming back and having fun again next year."