



The School Chess Club



department for
education and skills

Produced by the English Chess Federation

In conjunction with the Department for Education and Skills

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Introduction

The game of chess holds a unique fascination. The strategic complexities offer lively minds an immediate challenge and stimulating exercise. It can be played for fun, or with increasing degrees of seriousness up to the highest levels of international competition.

We want to encourage more schools and teachers to provide opportunities for children to learn and play chess. It is a game with no barriers. People of any age, sex, physical ability, and social class can all play on equal terms. Chess is truly a 'Sport for All'.

Chess has many educational benefits, giving children intellectual capital and transferable skills such as focus, discipline, concentration, spatial awareness and strategic thinking. Save the Children believe that "education is a key to improving the life chances of children....." and chess can be an integral part of that education. Evidence clearly demonstrates that chess-playing school pupils significantly outperform their non-playing contemporaries in literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills. Perhaps of greater importance is the fact that young chess players become more confident, have enhanced self-esteem and are more able to organise their thinking and behaviour. Providing children with the opportunity to play chess is a gift they keep for the rest of their lives. Chess is a sociable activity that helps to bring children together and break down barriers, whilst at the same time encouraging a healthy sense of competitiveness.

Why teach chess in schools?

- Chess has a mathematical basis. Mathematics is the tool of science, the language of technology and organised thought.
- Chess develops cognitive ability: attention, memory, analysis, and logic; all fundamental building blocks for personal growth.
- It is applicable to everyday life. It helps children develop the skills and social dexterity so important in society.
- Chess encourages self-assessment, healthy competition and teamwork.
- Chess encourages study and preparation as the way to achieve pre-set objectives and for the purpose of individual improvement.
- Chess is an excellent use of a child's free time.
- The playing of chess can be exciting and therefore undertaken with enthusiasm.
- The equipment necessary to play chess – boards and sets of pieces – are cheap, durable and easily available.

Starting a School Chess Club

Equipment

First of all you will need sets and boards. There are several types of inexpensive plastic chess pieces and boards available. Good advice is to purchase easily available standard equipment so that additional sets can be obtained in the future which match your original purchase. This is helpful because inevitably pieces get lost or damaged and you will need to 'make up' full sets from your 'spare' pieces. It looks better if your sets are of the same design and size.

Typically, a chess set and board can cost about £10 each. When setting up a chess club you should start with about 20 such sets. You may need more later as the club increases in size. You will also need a suitable lockable cupboard to store the equipment and have access to an appropriately-sized room in which to play. As the club develops and starts holding competitions and entering tournaments, you will also need to buy chess clocks and score sheets. Clocks are typically about £25 each, and score sheets can be bought for about £7.50 per 500.

Leading chess suppliers usually have special offers for schools and clubs. The English Chess Federation will also be pleased to advise on purchase of equipment.

How Many & How Often?

Enthusiasm for chess is infectious. In our experience, the number of children in a chess club does not depend on the school's catchment area, it depends on the enthusiasm of the teacher and on the size of room and number of sets & boards available.

Many schools encourage children to play during lunch break as well as at weekly after school-clubs. In a well-run club, children's appetites for chess can expand to consume whatever time is available for it. It is up to you to decide how often chess is made available.

Don't try and do everything yourself, get other staff, school governors, parents, lunchtime supervisors, teaching assistants or even local chess clubs involved. You may be pleasantly surprised how many people have enough knowledge to help.



ECF Coach with children from Enderby Road School

First Chess Lessons



Children with no previous experience of chess will need to be taught the basic laws of the game. This is best done in small groups of no more than four, perhaps with the aid of diagrams. Older, more experienced members of the club can be encouraged to help out with new younger members in this way.

Once you have taught the moves, chess will take on a life of its own. Encourage children to explore their own ideas and learn from their own mistakes. Many teachers find that they can be of most use simply circulating when play is in progress, commenting when necessary. Children usually just want to get on with playing and may be 'put off' with too much formal tuition. Finding the right balance is the real skill.

Consider establishing a routine so that the youngsters know what to do from the moment they enter the chess room. Planned activity means progress, inactivity has potential for trouble. You could do something along the lines of:

1. Children pair off as they enter the room and play a 'friendly'. They can also help to put out equipment if not already done.
2. As soon as all children are present – STOP PLAY and bring focus of attention on to yourself.
3. Give out information/news, present certificates etc.
4. 'The lesson' – very briefly demonstrate a tactic, theme etc. This should not take much time and may not be

necessary every time the club meets. Perhaps just limit to once a week.

5. Now the games can begin. This is the most important part of the chess session. If the children choose who they play, the same pairs will always tend to play together, and 'unpopular' children may feel left out. Also there may be good reasons why particular youngsters should be kept apart. It would be better, therefore, to have a system where you display desired pairings. In this way you can have stronger players helping starters, 'sympathetic' youngsters helping the 'not so popular', and players of equal strength having a serious competitive game. You are in charge!
6. When games are in progress there should be a minimum of noise in the room. Children who persistently talk loudly, make other unnecessary noise, or misbehave in other ways, should be asked to leave the room. If they are unable to conduct themselves in a manner appropriate for a chess club, they should be excluded. Time-wasters merely upset and distract other members.
At the end of a game, players should be encouraged to shake hands, and discuss the game in low tones.
7. Ending the session. STOP PLAY and bring focus of attention on to yourself. You could now:
 - Make general announcements and give out information about the next chess session.
 - Follow an established routine for packing and locking away the equipment and leaving the room as you find it.

A package of support material is available from the English Chess Federation.

Once children are beginning to play competently, you will want to encourage them to slow down their play and adopt more disciplined thought. This is a good moment to teach chess notation. The recording of moves introduces another routine into play, and also helps to eliminate silly rushed errors.

At this stage you may consider adding to your range of equipment by purchasing chess clocks, notation score sheets, and a demonstration board. You will then be ready to organise internal tournaments and to enter the club into competitions with other schools.

Serious Play in the Club

An important benefit of the school chess club lies in its potential for education by stealth. The recreational nature of the game can be harnessed to provide enjoyable learning. The organisation of the club should be designed to encourage a serious, yet enjoyable, approach to playing chess. For example in a school tournament, when a game is finished the players should leave the playing area. This keeps the room quiet for those still in play.



Guidance for Parents: -

If your child enjoys the game and does well in their school chess club, you should consider whether they might want to join a local 'outside' chess club. There may be a junior chess club in your area or an adult club which welcomes juniors. Not all adult clubs can offer facilities for juniors and this advice could help you in selecting a suitable club for your child.

You should visit the club to ensure that the environment and level of supervision meets the needs of your child. The choice of your child's first chess club is important in ensuring that they get maximum benefit from the game - take time to make sure that the club is providing positive experiences and opportunities.

Look for: -

The club premises

- location and atmosphere.
- No-Smoking area.
- somewhere for parents to stay if they wish.
- welcoming/positive attitude to juniors & parents
- adequate toilet facilities

Junior policy

- is there a 'named person' you can contact to get information.
- will juniors get regular advice on chess basics and etiquette.
- do juniors get the chance to play in teams.

The structure of the English Chess Federation includes:

- President
- Chief Executive
- Finance Director
- Director of Home Chess
- International Director
- Director of Junior Chess & Education
- Marketing Director
- Manager of Coaching
- Manager of Women's Chess
- Manager of Congress Chess
- Manager of Grading

Calendar of Events

An up to date list of chess events in England.

ECF Membership

The ECF offers various categories of Membership, including Junior Membership at a reduced rate.

World and European Tournaments are available for juniors as young as U10

For details of all the above and chess stockists please contact

English Chess Federation

The Watch Oak, Chain Lane, Battle, East Sussex TN33 0YD

Tel: 01424 775222, Email: office@englishchess.org.uk, Web: www.englishchess.org.uk

You can find out about chess clubs from:

- Your local library.
- English Chess Federation
The Watch Oak, Chain Lane, Battle, East Sussex TN33 0YD
Tel: 01424 775 222 Web: www.englishchess.org.uk



Headteacher at Leys Farm School gets 'expert' advice to solve a chess puzzle