



Nafferton School

Chess Club



Origins

The idea to start a chess club at Nafferton School came out of a conversation with staff regarding the lack of engagement of a group of our children in extra-curricular activities. The school provides many sporting clubs as well as cooking, singing and music, but there was still a group of children that were not taking part in any of the current clubs. Mr Johnson (headteacher) and Mr Murray (teaching assistant) thought that chess would provide a stimulating, challenging and engaging activity for all children including those we were not currently reaching.

After a short consultation to see if there was sufficient interest amongst the children, the club was established in the Spring of 2015. The club was open to all Key Stage 2 children (ages 8-11) and ran for one hour each week.

The club has three guiding principles:

- To teach the game of chess. Chess is akin to learning an international language, regardless of culture, gender, language or age, two people can sit across a chessboard from each other and bond as they play the game together.
- To have fun. Chess is a game that friends and soon-to-be friends can enjoy – it is a perfect way to spend time together, enjoying each other's company.
- To enjoy the challenge. The rules of chess can be taught in a day but take a lifetime to master – there is always something to learn.

We have always set high expectations within the club and students must commit to attend regularly and to demonstrate the highest standards of sportsmanship.



Figure 1: Sportsmanship is a core value of the club

View from a previous Nafferton School Chess Club member...

When I was at Nafferton, chess club was important to me and it greatly improved my skill and strategy in the game. Chess has always been big with me but chess club trained me, and many more, to improve my skill and help me completely understand the game. The highlight of all of this was probably the chess tournament I attended, it was a great life experience for me and is something I would recommend for any others interested in the game. Chess club has taught me loads and has almost certainly changed my life.

Joseph (now at Driffield Secondary School)



Development

The chess club started with a modest twelve members. In the first year, two of our club members were encouraged to attend a junior chess event in Hull ran by the Hull and District Chess Association. The two club members and Mr Murray were so enthused by the event that when the school was contacted to host a chess event at the school, all readily agreed. The event held in 2017 was a great success with children travelling from all over the region to attend.

Figure 2: The chess event in 2017 spurred the club onto holding its own tournament each year

It was hosting the event in 2017 that boosted the regular attendance of our club session to 25-30 attendees each week. By popular demand from the children, we began holding an annual chess tournament in the summer term. In the first year we had 40 children attend and by the 2020 we had over 60 children taking part.



This event is now firmly established in the school calendar and members of the club look forward to it each year, hoping to win the coveted school chess trophy. It is always gratifying to see many other children from the school attend the event.

We had contacted other schools to take part in our next chess event and were building on our previous events when Covid-19 struck and regular chess sessions and school activities ceased.



Figure 3: Riley (on the right) took part in the 2017 chess event and went on to become the first winner of our school event in 2018.

View from the headteacher...

The chess club had offered a fantastic opportunity for the children to improve their concentration and social skills. It is wonderful to see so many children, many who do not attend any other clubs, focused on their games. The children in the chess club are always smiling and chatting about the game they have just played or a new tactic they have learnt or discovered. Each year at the chess tournament it is quite awe-inspiring to enter the school hall with nearly 70 children sat in complete silence concentrating on their match. I am convinced that the club really benefits all those that attend.

Paul Johnson





Figure 4: school competition 2020

View from a new Nafferton School Chess Club member...

I have wanted to learn chess for a long time. My friend tried to teach me but I didn't understand the rules. Now I have started chess club I am picking it up very quickly.

Lillianne (Age 9)

Chess Sessions

Each chess session begins with a whole group 10 minute 'teaching element.' This is usually exploring a tactic or looking at a common endgame. During the majority of the session the children play several games. During this time, Mr Murray would be either teaching new players the rules of chess, instructing others, or playing - as every child likes to try and 'beat the teacher'. The session ends with a few mating problems as this has proved very popular with the children. In addition, prior to the school tournament, sessions are often held for those who want to improve their game before the event, this can include tactics homework that the children complete between the sessions.



Figure 5: A typical busy chess club session

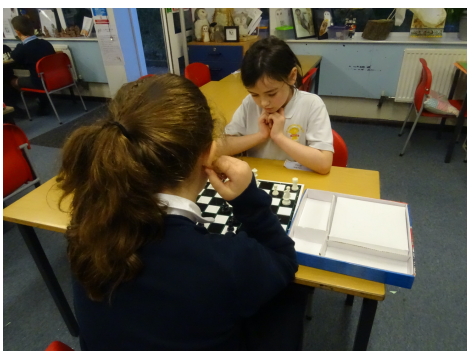


Figure 7: Two focused players...



Figure 6: Four new players playing 'pawn only' game



View from a current Nafferton School Chess Club member...

Playing chess is a great experience – I really love the game and going to the club. It is not an easy game but I like the challenge. Each week we learn something new that we can try in our games. I am really happy that the school started the club.

Christopher (Age 11)

Impact

The club is inclusive and welcomes any child in the school to attend, including those with special educational needs and those with social, emotional and behavioural issues. Chess is now ingrained in the school culture, it is not an uncommon sight to see at wet breaktimes chess being played in the school, often it is a member of the chess club teaching a classmate the rules of the game.

Members of our chess club have been involved in establishing a chess club at Driffield School, the local secondary school. This is currently in the process of being set up with the help of several of our ex-club members.

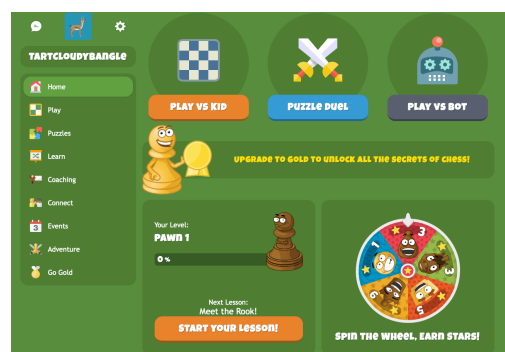
View from a parent...

Chess Club has provided the opportunity for my son to learn about chess strategy and he has relished the challenge of competing with his peers. Over the years, he has gained confidence and developed his communication skills whilst taking part in the club.

Mrs Fox

Covid-19

Like many clubs Covid-19 has had a significant impact on our chess club as all school clubs were suspended and schools closed for a substantial period. But the closure of the school to all but essential workers did not prevent the club from functioning, the club quickly established itself online using the ChessKids portal to provide regular opportunities for the children to play each other, take lessons and practice tactics.



View from the club's organiser...

I learnt chess from my father at an early age and have played casually all my life. I took on the challenge to run the club eagerly although I did have to brush up on my game and read a few books to be confident enough to keep it going. I am a keen boardgamer and play a wide range of games with friends and family and recognise the value it has in developing key skills, social as well as cognitive. We hope to keep building the club, and it is great to see previous members take their love of the game on to secondary school. But above all it is fun!





Figure 8: Black realises it has not gone to plan...



Figure 9: Concentration is the key!

Future

After the enforced suspension from Covid-19, the club is back with regular meetings and ready to build on what we have already achieved. There are two goals we have set ourselves this year. The first is to expand our annual chess tournament by encouraging participation from our surrounding schools. The second is due to Hull and District Chess Association recognising the school's achievement and inviting us to become one of only six schools to take part in a new online primary schools league covering the East Riding and North Lincolnshire.

‘Chess is the gymnasium of the mind.’
Blaise Pascal

View from a previous Nafferton School Chess Club member...

I think attending chess club helped create the sturdy base layer of my skill at strategy, planning and understanding - it is a great skill to learn. I really enjoyed the chess tournament and have continued to play in my spare time.

Emilie (now at Driffield Secondary School)

