

# ENGLISH CHESS FEDERATION

A Company Limited by Guarantee  
Registered in England and Wales  
Registration No. 5293039  
VAT Registration No 195643626



Registered Offices – The Watch Oak  
Chain Lane  
Battle  
East Sussex TN33 0YD

(Affiliated to Fédération Internationale des Échecs)

Telephone - 01424 775222 | Facsimile - 01424 775904 | Email - [office@englishchess.org.uk](mailto:office@englishchess.org.uk) | Website - [www.englishchess.org.uk](http://www.englishchess.org.uk)

## Visit to HMP Grendon on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> December 2018

Governor: Dr Jamie Bennett

Grendon Prison holds category B & C adult male prisoners. Each the six wings of the prison is a therapeutic community which operates autonomously. Based on therapeutic community principles, the therapeutic programmes of the prison include teams of doctors, psychiatric nurses, counsellors and prison officers who work with inmates individually and in groups to promote rehabilitation and tackle reoffending. This is one of only two prisons of this type in the country. All prisoners here are volunteers who come to seriously commit to improving their lives.

Prisoners are encouraged to have shared responsibility for day to day decision-making and problem solving. This was music to my ears as chess is all about personal responsibility and problem solving and would set the theme for the day. It is one of the best prisons I have visited for positive attitudes.

I spent most of the day at the prison and the prisoners were totally attentive and focussed on their chess. Everyone attending was a volunteer and keen chess player. I held a chess Q&A session with many thought provoking and general questions coming from the floor. There were 12 inmates for the day and I gave a simultaneous display, playing all of them three times over some 5½ hours. As there were in effect 33 tough games (I am getting too old for this) we skipped lunch, which took the prison staff by surprise! I lost two games and drew a couple. The standard of opposition was as high as anywhere I have visited – they have chess opening books and play regularly which was great to learn. I should say I also played a prison officer (who drew with me!) and he was a real influence in ensuring that chess was available on his wing at the prison. This is further great news.

I had a tour of the prison wing and spent some time 'one to one' in a cell with an inmate, accompanied by his pet budgerigar! He was a young man who had committed a very serious crime but said that chess is helping him to cope on the inside. He is learning to think before acting and also learning how to concentrate. He also loves to learn chess openings, including the Slav. This was my 'Christmas visit' and I will return at some point next year for to see how chess is developing.

Many thanks to the ECF for supporting the visit and to the Governor, staff and prisoners at HMP Grendon for making the day possible. Chess in prisons is growing and there's no looking back.

Carl Portman  
ECF Manager of Chess in Prisons

[manager.prisonschess@englishchess.org.uk](mailto:manager.prisonschess@englishchess.org.uk)