

ENGLISH CHESS FEDERATION

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Visit to HMP Hewell and the Grange on Wednesday 12th December 2018

HMP Hewell and The Grange has two prisons on one site. Hewell is a multiple security prison holding prisoners up to Category B and The Grange holds Category D prisoners.

This was a return visit from my last one in January when it was so popular that I couldn't accommodate everyone. This time I would be talking only to Vulnerable Prisoners (VP's) and the session began very early in the morning when prisoners were released from their cells.

My sessions, as always involved chess coaching, a question and answer session and finally a simultaneous exhibition against all comers. There were only a few people playing but a lot of prisoners came as spectators, interested in what was going on. As the session progressed there were more and more questions. They were all very good. Especially the one about *'Isn't chess just for the rich and intelligent?'*. This gave me the opportunity to explain how chess is for all regardless of age, gender, (dis)ability, background etc. There were also questions about strategy, tactics and the rules of the game. Castling was particularly misunderstood but everyone now knows that you cannot castle out of, into or through check as well as the other rules that apply to castling.

I donated another chess set and board to add to their club collection and some copies of 'Your First Chess Lessons' that the ECF had procured at a heavily discounted price along with a couple of chess magazines donated by Chess and Bridge of London. My opponents were not very strong so my simul turned into a coaching session on all boards, allowing moves back, giving general hints and tips and explaining rules as I went. The prisoners enjoyed this and the coconut sponge cake that had been made for the occasion – they would not normally be allowed this luxury!

Staff commented that the session was very productive and that all of the men were attentive and focussed on the chess. None of them left the room at any point, which is always a good sign. Prisoners and staff have assured me that they are keen on chess and the development of the game for everyone at the prison.

Many thanks to the ECF for supporting the visit.

Carl Portman
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