

## Pupils to be given chess lessons in school standards drive

Thousands of pupils from inner-city primary schools will be given lessons in chess amid claims that the game can boost children's concentration levels and numeracy skills, it was announced today.



The Education Endowment Foundation will provide almost £700,000 to promote chess in state schools. Photo: GETTY IMAGES

By Graeme Paton, Education Editor

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Some 6,000 children will receive specially-structured classes as part of a £700,000 taxpayer-funded programme designed to raise standards in poor areas, it emerged.

The scheme will target 10-year-olds in 100 schools to test the impact that chess has on pupils' abilities across a range of academic disciplines.

Experts believe that the game – which is already part of the curriculum in some other countries – can dramatically improve pupils' levels of concentration, boost problem-solving skills and develop their thought processes.

It is also claimed that chess can boost numeracy levels with knock-on benefits across other subjects.

But figures suggest that fewer than one-in-10 pupils in state schools currently get access to chess at school, placing them at a disadvantage compared with privately-educated peers.

Today, the Education Endowment Foundation – a Government-funded charity established to help boost standards among poor pupils – announced the award of a £689,000 grant to help spread the game in state primary schools.

The funding will be handed to the charity Chess in Schools and Communities to stage special lessons in primaries across Liverpool, Bristol and Manchester.

Pupils will spend an hour a week on chess over 30 weeks, learning how to play the game and developing thinking and problem-solving skills through chess. Chess clubs will also be established in the schools.

In the first move of its kind, the scheme will compare the progress of pupils who take up chess with standards reached by similar pupils who have not taken up the game.

It is hoped that the move will lead to the expansion of chess lessons across the country.

Chess is already given official backing in the curriculum in countries such as France, Hungary and Armenia, it was revealed.

Malcolm Pein, chief executive of Chess in Schools and Communities, and the Telegraph's chess expert, said: "Chess has been making a comeback in state schools in recent years, having become a preserve of independent schools in the 1980s. But fewer than one in 10 state school pupils get the chance to play chess today.

"We hope that this trial will provide evidence of its impact, particularly on the poorest pupils, to convince many more heads to adopt chess in schools."

The EEF was set up in 2011 with a £125m grant from the Department for Education. The chess programme is among eight projects being funded as part of a £4.3m deal being announced on Wednesday.