Petts Wood and Orpington Chess Club

Petts Wood and Orpington Chess Club was formed in 2000 when the Orpington club, at that time down to four active members, agreed to merge with Petts Wood Chess Club. The combined club continued to meet with a steady membership of around 25. Things took off after the club moved to spacious premises at the St John’s United Reformed Church halls in Orpington with the membership increasing. The club started a junior section in 2012 with a weekly coaching session and a junior tournament. The coaching does not focus exclusively on chess, but includes profiles of leading GMs. and short talks on the cities they came from or the places where key games were played. Several of the parents have become involved in this, giving talks to the children on Paris, Kiev and Moscow. Thus the children receive short lessons in history and geography alongside the chess. In general, the parents are most enthusiastic about this this, particularly the non-chess players for whom this is the only part of the proceedings they understand.

At the moment the club has around 30 adult and 70 active junior members. The members, particularly the juniors, have very diverse backgrounds. At the last count there were 17 different nationalities. In 2017/18 the club won the Kent county championship cup for the first time, and repeated that in 2018/19.

The club fields ten teams in the various divisions of the Kent league and currently holds trophies for four of the divisions.

Currently, four of the club’s junior members, Aaravamudhan Balaji, Aditya and Shlok Verma, and James Merriman are regular England internationals, while Balaji and Merriman were British champions last time these were contested. Orla Dorman is in the Ireland girl’s squad.

During the pandemic. the club has been very active in online chess. Coaching is carried out every Friday evening at three levels, beginners (coach Paul Jones), intermediate (Jean-Baptise Jugand) and advanced (Mikey Watson). Mikey is a junior himself and among his achievements in chess has been winning the Kent open championship at the age of 14. Conrad Allison and John Cook deputise for the coaches when necessary.

The internal online junior tournament has 45 players taking part.

The club has taken part in the Worldwide Online Chess Tournament run by Peter Hornsby from the start of that event in early 2020. The club finished third in one of the stages. There are currently 127 teams in the tournament, in which all the continents are represented.

The juniors have played numerous online friendly matches against other junior clubs, including ones from Italy, Cyprus, Borneo, Ecuador, South Africa, Wales and the US.