It was the 4th May when Alan Parr and I visited Highbury to meet Scott Cohen, the Arsenal Double Club Coordinator. It was one of the first warm days of the year; a couple of weeks earlier Arsenal Football Club had beaten Villarreal to reach the final of the Champions League for the first time, so football was in the air. Although Scott is employed by Arsenal and is an amateur footballer, he is a career teacher who is able to bring his considerable experience and administrative skills to the project. Consequently, we were delighted to realise that we were talking to a teacher committed to what is first and foremost an educational project.

The Arsenal Double Club is an innovative education and football programme offering a range of subjects: literacy, numeracy, ICT, modern languages and healthy living combined with football coaching. Teaching and coaching sessions are run after school, in lesson time and in school holidays. With Scott we visited St Aloysius’ College, a boys’ comprehensive school, which is one of six secondary schools where the Arsenal Double Club runs in lesson time.

The aim of Double Club in this school is to raise confidence and improve levels in pupils’ literacy, maths and football, although in other Double Club schemes ICT, languages and healthy living may be targeted. Most of the teaching materials are related to Arsenal and football. Like other teachers in the scheme, Chris Thomas, the full-time Arsenal track-suited teacher at St Aloysius, is employed by the local authority, but runs a programme of work for selected pupils, which is managed by Scott, the Double Club Coordinator. Chris has his own Arsenal room in the school which not surprisingly is brightly decorated with many Arsenal football posters and work done by the boys in maths and English which is linked to football.

How does the Double Club work?

The pupils taking part are in the lower ability range from years 7 and 8. They are selected by members of school staff, who consider they will benefit from more focused teaching in English and maths. In general these students have achieved national curriculum level three at primary school. While an interest in football may be advantageous, it is not a prerequisite. Since students are also withdrawn from other lessons to join the club, consideration is given to the balance in other class groups to avoid too many coming out of class at one time. Everyone involved is informed of the purpose and expectations of the club, not least the students taking part, and if students opt to attend then parental permission is sought.

Girls as well as boys can join though in practice the clubs, even in the mixed schools, consist mostly of boys. However, there are plans to run some girl-only groups in the future. At St Aloysius, two Y7 groups and one Y8 group run each term. The groups change every 12 weeks but students may return to Double Club if teachers feel they would continue to benefit from additional literacy and numeracy lessons. In the current year Chris has been involved with about 50 Y7 St Aloysius’ students altogether.

What happens in Double Club time?

On entering the Arsenal classroom a large poster sets out for students the aims and expectations of Double Club (see figure 1).

Over a two week period students have three maths sessions, three English sessions and six
football coaching sessions, and every 50 minute lesson of maths or English is followed by 45 minutes of football coaching. The schemes of work, which follow the key stage 3 curriculum, are devised by Scott and the participating teachers. Each Monday morning there is a session for all the Arsenal teachers to go through the schemes of work for the following week and a sample of a two-week scheme that focuses on the World Cup is shown in figure 2.

All resources used have a link to Arsenal, football and sometimes other sports. Match day programmes are distributed weekly by Arsenal to the schools involved, offering up-to-date real life resources for students and a range of incentives such as match tickets and stadium visits are also available. Players often visit the schools to present certificates and awards, making the Double Club experience different and special.

In order to track progress while they are in the club, students are given a short 30-minute test at the beginning and end of each 12-week session. The questions relate to Arsenal and football and a sample page from one of the maths tests is shown. See figure 3.

**How effective is the Arsenal Double Club?**

Students show great commitment and enjoyment over an extended period of time as well as considerable improvement in their behaviour, confidence and self-esteem.

‘I love Double Club; it has given me great help and confidence. Before Double Club I was on a level 2 in English and now I am on level 4 and want to go higher.’ (Y8 pupil)

‘We get to do fun activities while learning and to play football.’ (Y7 pupil)

Qualitative evidence from students is supported by 100% attendance at Double Club by many students, some of whom previously had a poor attendance record. In addition, at St Aloysius 98% of students showed improvement in their maths and English scores on the pre and post test results. Across all the schools, although there has not as yet been any official analysis of maths improvement, in English 46% of students improved their scores by 20% or more and 87% of students by 10% or more over a 12 week period. Similarly, significant improvement has been displayed in students’ football skills, measured by pre- and post-practical assessments and more generally by their wider participation in sports.

Other teachers and staff in the schools have been very supportive of the Double Club initiative, not...
least because they have seen so much improvement in some pupils.

‘... At first I wasn’t happy about him being taken out. However, in joining the Arsenal Double Club there has been great improvement in his self-esteem and his literacy. I am of the opinion that the club has been beneficial because he has thoroughly enjoyed all aspects of the combined lessons and he returns refreshed and ready to learn.’ (Teacher)

‘... The change in their education standard, behaviour and general all-round improvements inform us that the club is a success.’ (Teacher)

**Double Club in the primary school**

The Double Club also operates in some 30 primary schools. Alan Parr made a separate visit to Winton Primary School near Kings Cross. The primary scheme is very similar in conception, though in practice there are some differences in the way it operates. It runs once a week as an after-school club and the club is taught by the normal class teachers – there is no dedicated Arsenal teacher or Arsenal classroom. As with the secondary classes, the work is devised by Arsenal and is built around football in general and Arsenal in particular, and even at 5pm in SATs week children were happy to tackle the tasks. Certainly the group I was with saw the football as the highlight of the session, but there was no feeling that the numeracy work was a chore. For all too many children their maths lessons offer little apart from a succession of repetitive and meaningless exercises. For these pupils there was a feeling that the work was set in a context – the heights and weights of footballers in the Arsenal squad – that had at least some connection with reality. The momentum of doing work which seemed to have a purpose carried them through, even though many of them might otherwise have found the tasks too challenging. If no teacher is available to run the football session Arsenal can provide someone to do this. The session I saw featured some skills training with a game to finish off. Clearly not all the pupils were top-notch footballers, but the session was professionally run and thoroughly enjoyable for all.

**Using resources from football**

If you haven’t looked at a programme from a football match recently, just take a look at the statistics which are included on the back page of the Arsenal programmes every week (see figure 4). You could also try some of the ideas in Scott’s world cup scheme of work (see figure 2).

This is just one of many pages that could spark off enough work for several maths lessons. For example:

1. Round each of the figures given in ‘attendance watch’ to: a) the nearest 1000 and; b) the nearest 10 000.
2. Find the average number of goals scored per match for each team in the premiership. Use the results to create a new premiership table and compare this with the table showing the number of points gained.
3. Draw a scatter plot of home wins versus away wins for each premiership team. Does your scatter plot suggest any relationship between home and away wins?
4. Investigate the rank correlation between: a) goals for and goals against; b) goals for and the number of points gained; c) ‘shots to goals ratio’ and the number of points gained.

The bottom line is that the Arsenal scheme is capitalising upon the appeal of football to give focus to the literacy and numeracy work of a substantial number of disaffected, demotivated and low achieving pupils. Many of these might otherwise get little from their lessons, but we saw every sign that their commitment to these was considerable and was not short-term. The success means that the Double Club itself continues to grow. New schools are joining the scheme, modules are being developed in subjects across the whole range of the curriculum and there is the possibility of similar developments in cricket and other sports.

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Alan Parr is a writer, INSET provider and lifelong Brighton and Hove Albion supporter.

For more information on Arsenal Double Club Schemes go to [www.arsenal.com](http://www.arsenal.com) or contact the Arsenal community department on 020 7704 4140.

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Julie and Alan’s visits focussed on the work being done by Arsenal Football Club. How do you feel about incentive schemes such as these? Do they help pupils learn to enjoy or gain satisfaction from mathematics work? Or do they work against any sense that mathematics is worth doing for its own sake? Please add your comments to [www.atm.org.uk/mt/](http://www.atm.org.uk/mt/).

If you aware of similar schemes, Julie and Alan would enjoy hearing about them.

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Figure 4: Barclays
Premiership: Season
Statistics on 11th
February 2006
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