

USING 'MATHS ATTACKER' IN THE CLASSROOM

A personal note by Ian Whittington, one of the designers of the program and a classroom teacher of over 30 years continual class teaching responsibility

It is self-evident to every practising teacher that, in a single year group, there are children of vastly differing abilities in all subjects. In classes where there are two or even three age groups (my own class), the range of ability is even greater. It is also obvious to the practicing class teacher that children have different abilities in different areas and that they progress at different rates.

Classroom teachers are very busy people – often functioning under a great deal of pressure and with these needs in mind, the idea of 'Maths Attacker' was born. It allows pupils to use the software without direct teacher intervention – where the teacher is safe in the knowledge that:

- a) the program will gradually be adjusting to the individual level of each pupil, setting questions which will range from quite easy to some at the limit of the individual pupil's range of competence.
- b) the teacher will be able to check on the pupil's responses at a quiet moment and print them out for the pupil's file if required.
- c) it is possible to produce an informative printed report (complete with progress graphs) on each pupil, with examples of the current level of question and most recent errors – all at the click of a mouse button.

'Maths Attacker' is most appropriate in Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 although at the top end it will tax all but the most able.

If I was using this program with a class of pupils aged 8 to 11 years I would:

1. Enter the names of all pupils into the database, setting the starting level to 'Simple' with all but the most able pupils where I would set it to 'Intermediate'. I would probably have the football teams assigned incrementally – it is the fairest way especially if you use the names of REAL football Clubs.
2. I would explain to the pupils how they would use the program – having used it first on my own.
3. I would tell the pupils that I expected all of them to play at least two matches a day. N.B. It is easy to check if this is happening by clicking on 'Overview'.
4. I would have at least one computer running the program all day and allow pupils to 'have a game' during spare moments. This is my own favoured mode of operation.
5. I would allow each pupil to have had at least 10 games before I assumed that 'Maths Attacker' had adjusted to a particular child's level. N.B. With 90 minute games this might be less.
6. I would look at the latest 'Roll of Honour' and take a few minutes to 'Cut' and 'Paste' the information in an attractive form and display it on the classroom wall. Remember it records those pupils who have 'moved up a question band' – not who is best, so all pupils could expect to see their names there at some time.
7. Once pupils had played 20 or 30 games I would consider printing a report and sending it home. I would certainly do so if a parent asked how their child was 'getting on'. This is another good reason for starting a pupil at a lower level if in doubt!

Ian Whittington