Code Club - Creating a Positive Learning Environment

If you're not used to it, working with children can seem a daunting prospect. But fear not! Follow these simple tips and you will be leading a great Code Club in no time.

Establish a routine

Running an awesome Code Club can be mostly be achieved by establishing routines and sticking to them. If children know what to do and what to expect then you will find it easier to teach and they will find it easier to learn. Before starting the club consider the following:

What do you want the children to do when they first walk in the room?

Should they sit and wait quietly for all the children to arrive and further instructions?

Should they log on and get started right away?

If a child is stuck on any part of the project instructions what should they do?

Should they raise their hand and wait for you to come to them?

Is it okay for them to call your name across the room?

Decide what you want them to do and clearly explain this at the start of each session.

How will you get the whole group's attention?
Most schools have signals that the children will be familiar with (e.g. raising one hand, counting down from 5, clapping). Ask what the teachers in your school do and use the same, or invent one of your own!

Tell children when the club is half way through, and tell them again when they have 5 minutes left. This will mean they know how long they have left to finish their projects.

At the end of each session it might be a good idea to have a five or ten minute catch up with the group. You could get them all to save and log off and then discuss what they have learnt during the session, including the key concepts that have been covered. What did they find most fun? Easy? Difficult? How did they overcome any difficulties they faced? This is also a good time to thank them for their hard work and perhaps mention a few individuals you feel have worked particularly hard.

Positivity

Children learn best in a calm and positive environment where their efforts are noticed and commended. Here are some tips to help you achieve this:

• Always speak calmly, politely and enthusiastically to the children.

• Do not criticise them or raise your voice.

• You should model the behaviour you expect from them, positivity breeds positivity!

• Most schools have reward systems (house points, sticker books etc.). Find out if the school are happy for you to use theirs, and if so reward children for good effort and behaviour as you see fit.

• Try to focus on good behaviour rather than poor. Praise the children who are doing the right things constantly (and loudly!). If a child is not doing what you expect them to do then quietly remind them what they should be doing. There should always be a teacher from the school to help you deal with any disruptive behaviour.

• Ask the teacher if Code Club certificates can be given out in assembly. This will give the children's achievements a high profile in the school.

Differentiation

Differentiation is teacher speak for adapting lessons to suit the different needs of the children in the group. Doing the following will mean all children can learn happily in your Code Club.

Find out from the teacher if there are any children with Special Education Needs (SEN) in the group. Ask what you can do to help them during the time they spend with you.

Find out if there are any children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) in the group. These children could find following lots of instructions in English difficult so they might require additional attention and time. You could consider pairing them with a child who can read English well.

Remember all children have different strengths and learn at different paces so be patient and give them time to work things out for themselves. If there is a child who is consistently struggling with the tasks then consider pairing them with a more able child for some of the work.

At the end of most projects are some 'Challenge' tasks. These can be used to stretch more able children, but all children should be encouraged to try them once they have finished the core tasks.