

It's checkmate at Pakenham

By **RUSSELL BENNETT**

A GROUP of gifted young chess players out of Pakenham Secondary College is taking on - and beating - their peers from bigger-name, inner city schools.

And this isn't a flash in the pan. The school's chess team, which started around five years ago, has enjoyed a series of brilliant results at both state and national level since.

"It takes real persistence to become good at chess," said Pakenham Secondary teacher Sergio De Lima.

"When you start playing, you'll be losing for a few months.

"You either build some resilience and come back stronger, or you'll never play again."

Mr De Lima said chess was great for increasing mental strength, problem solving, critical thinking and even how to deal with losing.

"It's changed my life as a teacher, to be honest," he said.

"It's a great motivation, definitely. In a classroom we have great days and bad days, but with chess I don't think we've ever had a bad day.

"We get an average of 30 kids - at least - at recess and lunch who want to play and learn."

Pakenham is competing against the likes of Mazenod, Mentone Grammar, Melbourne High School and Huntingtower this year.

Mr De Lima said Pakenham's chess team was helping to right some of the misconceptions out there about the school.

"We'd really like for more of them (the bigger name schools) to be playing chess so we could go there and compete against them," he said.

"We'd love that."

Students from a Melbourne High open secondary visited Pakenham on Friday for the first regional tournament of the year. Nossal and Gippsland Grammar were among the other schools competing.

Last year Pakenham came seventh in the National Chess Championship at Queen's College, Melbourne University; and sixth in the state finals - up from 17th the year before.



Yvan Cole ponders his next move.



Kalleah McCaw, front left, Minhong Yang and Evan Ibrahim took on Yvan Cole, front right, Teagan Comiac and Victoria Hendrick respectively in a friendly game of chess at Pakenham Secondary College on Friday.



Victoria Hendrick, front left, Kalleah McCaw, Rose Sollis, and teacher Sergio De Lima battle it out with Melbourne High School chess master Ari Dale, front right, Fabian Bonaudi, Brett Handly and Teagan Comiac. 151802
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