

Guide to Building a School Tri-Golf Course



Rednal Hill Junior School

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Setting up a Tri-Golf Course.

Tri-Golf provides an excellent introduction to the sport which is both accessible and fun. The games and activities create enjoyable competitive elements that promote essential skills acquisition. It can be used in the limited space of the school hall or outside on the playground or school field if available.

Once pupils experience the fun of golf they soon take an interest in the adult game. They begin to emulate the stars of the game by wearing a cap or putting on a glove. They also see examples of the game being played in the media and are drawn towards playing a 'hole'.

With this in mind it is possible to take Tri-Golf on to another level by setting up a course (whether temporary or permanent).

Getting Started

At the simplest level the creation of a 'tee' using Tri-Golf cones as markers is easily done. A further cone (ideally coloured red for danger) provides a safety zone and doubles as a queuing point. A hole (keeping it really simple and achievable) may be as simple as a hoop. Added difficulty can be achieved by increasing the distance, using a smaller hoop or a loop of string, or by introducing hazards from the equipment in the Tri-Golf bag e.g. blue cones for water, yellow for sand. Pupils can have a lot of fun designing a course and playing the game whilst satisfying National Curriculum attainment targets. This in itself can be very worthwhile using sketching, design, measuring, and above all group discussion and decision making. A simple three-hole circuit can provide a good lunchtime or after-school activity.



Building a Permanent Course

At the next level, something more permanent can be created. Once a design has been tested and proven to meet safety and playability requirements, permanent tees can be fairly easily created using treated wooden boards surrounding a marine ply base. Astro turf or winter tee bases provide a good teeing area without the need for tee pegs. It might be worth asking your local driving range or golf course if they might be willing to donate some older mats. They can be traditional square mats or some prefer a diamond shape to encourage a triangle set up of feet and ball. This is suitable for either left or right handed players. A post with a hole number creates a dual use safety zone marker.



The hole itself (a large plastic cup) can be purchased along with a hole cutter. Again, ask your local golf facility for older unwanted equipment or



check with the Golf Foundation to see if they have any in storage. Due to the size of the ball, winter holes (approximately 6 inches in diameter) are best.

Ordinary flags can be used and may be easily resourced from the supplier your local golf club uses. (Who knows they may even donate a few). The most readily available are a lightweight plastic construction and too long to be in-scale for pupils use. By all means cut them down though make sure that the tops are well above eye level for safety reasons. 6ft is probably about right for most situations.



Before the tees and greens are made permanent it is a good idea to set out a temporary course design which makes the best use of the available area. If you are lucky enough to have ample available space, then nine holes may be possible although as shown earlier a circuit of three or more holes can still give a worthwhile course. Either three or six holes still give the chance to play a nine or 18 hole 'round'.

Pupil involvement in the design process gives them a real experience and may involve sketches and drawings based on actual ground measurements taken by the children themselves. As a good guide,



a distance of up to 20 metres will give a par 3 hole. Longer holes are also possible depending on space e.g. Par 4 to around 40 metres or par 5 to around 60 metres. Whilst it is possible that accomplished players can strike the ball up to 40 metres, the vast majority need to be able to gain success and 'hit the green'. 20 metres provides sufficient challenge whilst emphasising that control is more important than hitting the ball as far as you can on every shot. Part of the skill is to judge the distance we strike the ball so to have holes at the limit of the distance a shot will travel is probably counter-productive. It is much better to have shorter holes that demand accuracy rather than just monster lengths. The use of dog leg shapes (a fairway with a corner in it) may allow for the best use of available space whilst creating a natural limit to the best distance to strike the ball. Natural hazards such as trees or hedges may actually help here.

Defining the Course

Any mown area provides a good surface for outdoor play although the use of the blue low-bounce balls makes an indoor hole easily possible.

You may decide to take it one step further with mown fairways and greens. By allowing the area surrounding the hole to grow longer the notion of rough and increased difficulty provides another challenge. Taking it to extremes, a second cut of rough and a closer mown green provide the ultimate test of skill. If the course needs to provide greater challenge, as pupil skill



increases, simply narrowing the fairways or letting the rough grow will keep the degree of challenge.

Much of this will be determined by the mowing contract that the school has and careful negotiation

of additional cost. It may be possible for the school to maintain the course itself although this can mean quite a significant regular commitment of time, purchase of a mower etc. So what about hazards? Now we really are getting serious! Selective tree planting using soft (non spiky) varieties such as beech, mountain ash, flowering cherry or dwarf conifers can create interest and line fairways. Planting of low bush areas create added shape, or boundary hedges for the course. It is worth asking local conservation and tree planting groups whether they would like to be involved.

Hazards



Bunkers can be made in the traditional way by digging out turf and filling with sand. Raised bunkers can be made using lawn edging to simulate the shape. In one case, an old long jump pit has been adapted to good effect.

You may decide not to add water features to the course simply for safety and the



added supervision this would require although there is no reason not to create dry ditches.

The Cost of Building a School Golf course

It is difficult to provide an accurate guide to the cost of building a school Tri-Golf course as much of the equipment and course features at the featured school were donated or negotiated with the local golf facility. However, it is estimated that the cost of building and maintaining the golf course at Rednal Hill Primary School was in the region of £1,000, with most of the cost built into the grounds maintenance contract with the local authority. The key point is that costs can be reduced by:

- local businesses each sponsoring a hole;
- equipment being donated by local golf facilities (second hand mats and winter holes);
- contacting the Woodland Trust for free tree planting.

Rules

Of course the more detail you have the greater the need for rules to accommodate the features. As a general principle we want to encourage the rules of golf but need to keep them simple and in child speak. These will be local rules according to the actual course and such things as



out-of-bounds and drop zones may be considered. It is a good idea to have an 'escape clause' for pupils in order that they do not become disillusioned. This can be achieved using a 'declaring the ball unplayable' rule similar to the adult game. A good simple measure is one club length not nearer the hole at a penalty of one shot. This works well when the ball finds itself in a bush or behind a tree.

Staked tree and other free drops can use the same one club length rule although you may decide that for simplicity the ball is placed not dropped. All local rules can be printed on a simple score-card not dissimilar to one easily obtained from your local club. Pupils can soon learn to use a score card and add up the total for their round.



Competitions

It is probably not necessary to go to the lengths of introducing a handicapping system although medals, stablefords and match play are all possible game formats that can be taught. A simple match play whereby pupils play either a stipulated number of holes or as many as they can in the time available can easily be scored by the number of holes won rather than getting into more difficult 2 and 1's or 4 and 3's.



Older pupils can take responsibility for managing tee times and the course becomes self-regulating. At the featured school, pupils book a starting hole shotgun style (each team of pupils starts at the same time but on a different tee) with play commencing at 1pm after they have eaten lunch. Score cards are used and completed over one week with pupils picking up where they left off until the whole round is completed. It puts a new meaning to a weekly medal and is managed by a pupil committee. Several local schools have their own courses varying in length from 6 to 9 holes and there is a slowly developing match culture.



An annual open tournament is held using a team format with each school providing eight players. They each play nine holes giving a 72 hole total (just like the four rounds in 'The Open' to give it an authentic touch). Each player's scores are shown without names in order that no player can be identified if they have a bad round. The winning school hold the Claret Jug for the year and have a replica to keep. A trophy for the lowest individual score is presented along with medals for all the winners. A long drive competition is held on a temporary 'range' with a suitable trophy as the prize. Add some coaching nets and a real festival is created.

Impact



The impact on lunchtime behaviour has been shown to be significant. Pupils are actively engaged and require limited supervision, although it is a good idea to run an induction and safety session before pupils can sign up to use the course. Responsible monitors and the use of a junior organising committee also impact well on citizenship education. Having a golf course certainly looks good on the school prospectus and may also have positive impacts on attendance.

Perhaps one of the greatest impacts is within the inclusion agenda. Evidence from the featured school shows that golf has

increased the uptake of girls playing sport. It also appeals to a different set of pupils from the usual sporting suspects. Pupils who do not shine in team environments are quite happy to play and compete as

well. The game also appeals to mixed playing groups. Self regulation appears to have positive effects on children playing to the rules, truthfully recording scores and even dropped shots. The addition of after school access has increased the hours of sport available in school too. Besides all of these we are beginning to see pupils go on to local clubs and take up the game into secondary school and beyond as sports leaders and junior club members.



Who knows we may have even produced a Tiger Woods of the future!

Forming a School Golf Club

The Golf Foundation has developed a resource to encourage schools to develop their own club, run and managed by a pupil committee. For further information, please visit: www.golf-foundation.org

Questions you need to ask

What available space can I use? (around the edges of the football pitch)

Does the space need to be used for anything else?

Are there any safety restrictions in the area ie paths, roads, access, obstacles, etc?

Permanent or temporary golf course? (advice: plan a temporary course anyway as a test)

What funding can I get? (school budget, fund raising, small lottery grants, local grants)

Who can I approach for support? (local golf club, Golf Foundation, local authority, PTA, School Sport Partnership)

How will we make/ have made the tees? (Cost of materials, parent help or professional carpenter)

Where can I get the holes, cutter and flags? (local golf facility, Golf Foundation)

Where can I obtain trees, hedging etc? (Possible local authority parks, Woodland Trust)

Who will carry out the initial mowing, planting and construction?

How will on-going maintenance be arranged? (mowing contract, or volunteers?)

How do we involve the children (design, build and maintain)

What hazards do we want to include and what are the costs?

When will the children have access to the course? (lunchtime, lessons, after school, weekends?)

Who will be in charge?

What happens if they leave?

What level of supervision is needed?

How will play/ competitions be organised? (see Golf Foundation's 'School Golf Club' guide)

Who designs the score-card? (print or photocopy?)

What are the daily tasks and who will perform them? (eg putting out and collecting flags)

What extra equipment do we need? (eg supply of balls, extra clubs)