Insch Ceilidh Club was established in April 2023. The village of Insch has a population of around 2,500 but a large catchment area.

A key part of the approach is to describe the events as “sessions” rather than “classes”. The emphasis is on creating an enjoyable, welcoming social occasion rather than something that feels like formal dance tuition.

Sessions currently take place on the last Sunday of each month, from 2.00–3.30 pm. This is generally long enough to keep the attention of the children attending

The overall aim is to make the sessions:

- welcoming and accessible to families;
- relaxed and sociable;
- energetic without being intimidating;
- suitable for people with different levels of experience; and
- enjoyable even for those who are simply coming along to watch, listen or join in occasionally.

Promotion and communication

The club uses Facebook and Instagram, with around 800 followers on Facebook.

Social media activity includes:

- posting regularly, particularly video content;
- sharing posts through relevant community groups;
- using photographs and videos to show the atmosphere and experience of the sessions; and
- obtaining appropriate permissions before posting photographs or videos of children.

A mailing list is also used with a Google Form providing a simple way of collecting contact details. The mailing list is deliberately not over-used, with approximately one or two emails per month. As well as promoting the club's own activities, emails can include information about other local ceilidhs and relevant events, helping to build the wider community rather than promoting only one organisation.

Practical arrangements

The cost is currently £5 per family (regardless of size), making the sessions accessible and encouraging families to attend together.

The hall can accommodate around 70 people, although the space is comfortable operating with much smaller numbers. The message is essentially that a small session is still worthwhile – even 8 or 16 people can make a good event.

Other practical considerations include:

- providing refreshments such as juice and, occasionally, pancakes/homebakes;
- having helpers available to support the session;
- using live music where possible, with an indicative cost of £50 per musician; and
- keeping the overall environment informal and welcoming.

Creating the right atmosphere

The atmosphere is central to the success of the sessions.

The guiding principle is fun and snappy, rather than making the dancing feel like a formal lesson.

Some thoughts:

- If people want to dance, great – but don't force people to take part.
- Avoid introducing new dances too frequently.
- The dances are not made progressive. Children and less experienced dancers need time to become comfortable.
- Encourage a relaxed approach to clothing and footwear.
- Use themes and special occasions, for example Halloween or St Andrew's Day.
- Keep people moving and don't worry too much about perfection.
- One round is enough.
- It is important to accept that not everyone will attend every month.
- Smaller numbers should not be seen as a failure as other events in the village/area have an impact – keep trying and keep building the group.

Choosing the dances

The choice and structure of dances can make a significant difference to how inclusive the session feels.

Think carefully about the terminology and where people are placed within a set. For example:

- consider if you should refer to men/women and boys/girls or perhaps bigger person/smaller person;
- where appropriate, use Line 1 / Line 2 arrangements to help manage the set; and
- think about positioning adults on both sides of the set where children are dancing eg in the Flying Scotsman have 2 adults in line 1 and 2 adults in line 2.
- Dances that work well with three-person groups can be particularly useful for families, for example, a group of two parents and one child can work well in dances such as DWS / Britannia Two Step. This can make it easier for families to participate together without children feeling that they are being separated from the adults they have come with.
- Use silly/different dances eg The Boogie Dance, The Buffalo Dance, The Cornish Pastie.

Energy and progression

Energetic dances can work particularly well, but don’t make them progressive. Dances such as the Circassian Circle, Riverside Jig and Strip the Willow are high energy.

The emphasis should be on keeping the energy up while avoiding unnecessary complexity.

Working with other organisations

There is value in working with other organisations that may have a wider reach.

It’s important to accept that:

- some families will come regularly;
- some will attend occasionally;
- some months will be quieter; and
- smaller sessions are still valuable.

The key is to keep providing a welcoming experience and encourage people to come back. Keep it simple!

Gary Coull