

Bridge can be ace in pack for Scottish pupils

By **Paula Murray**

A SCOTS academic is calling for bridge to be introduced in schools in a bid to boost children's mental health and wellbeing.

Professor Samantha Punch, of Stirling University, is leading research into the many benefits of "mind sports" like the classic card game.

Initial studies prove that bridge boosts mental sharpness, as well as improving life skills such as communication and social connections.

Northern Ireland has recently introduced the game into its school curriculum and Prof Punch, *below*, wants Scotland to... follow suit.

She said: "We are well aware of the benefits of physical exercise that pupils get at schools. But, let's face it, not everyone is good at physical sports, so why not give the option of doing mind sports as there are clearly benefits to it.

"In the era of personal digital devices, there are issues with face-to-face communication skills, and soft life skills like empathy. Bridge teaches you about all of those and much more.

"We are looking into the impact of the game on pupils in Northern Ireland by interviewing them about the learning process and their parents and teachers about



SKILL: Bridge has been brought in to Northern Irish schools

what sort of changes in their skills they may have noticed. Hopefully the results will encourage schools in Scotland and elsewhere to introduce bridge in their curriculum."

Bridge was developed in the 19th century from whist and other similar trick-taking card games across Europe.

It is still one of the world's most popular card games, although it has

lost ground in recent years to poker and online games.

Prof Punch said: "Bridge has such a strong human element.

"As a four-player partnership card game, bridge facilitates face-to-face social interaction, develops a range of deductive, critical reasoning skills and brings individuals together all in a fun, supportive and engaging environment.

"Bridge may not have all the answers to social isolation and loneliness, but it enables and fosters communication and connection regardless of age, physical ability, gender or ethnicity.

"Bridge is a mind sport for all ages."

With a proven impact on concentration and focus, it enhances problem-solving skills and encourages analytical thinking. Because the game is played in partnership, it also develops communication and cooperation skills and demands patience, empathy and emotional control.

Bridge has a number of famous fans, including US President Dwight D Eisenhower, IT billionaire Bill Gates, tennis ace Martina Navratilova and Lawrence of Arabia star Omar Sharif.

