



Dr Simon Rhodes of Hereford Cathedral School

Changing lives

Independent and state school partnerships range from sharing expertise to encouraging sixth formers to volunteer as mentors and teaching assistants. **Dorothy Lepkowska** reports

The teaching of physics can be a rarity in state primary schools. While most teachers feel reasonably confident with biology and chemistry, they are less so with physics. As a result, the subject is sometimes overlooked.

Three years ago, Simon Rhodes decided to remedy this. As head of physics at Hereford Cathedral School, he contacted local primary schools with a view to setting up partnerships to bring science, and specifically physics, to the fore.

"I wanted to teach pupils, and their teachers, how they could use everyday objects to bring physics to life in the classroom," says Dr Rhodes. "They now know, for example, how a gherkin can be turned into a lightbulb and why their hair stands on end when they rub a balloon on it. There is sometimes a 'whizz-bang' element to it, but the pupils love it because it is engaging and motivating."

Dr Rhodes gave up his role as departmental head to spend more time nurturing the partnerships between his

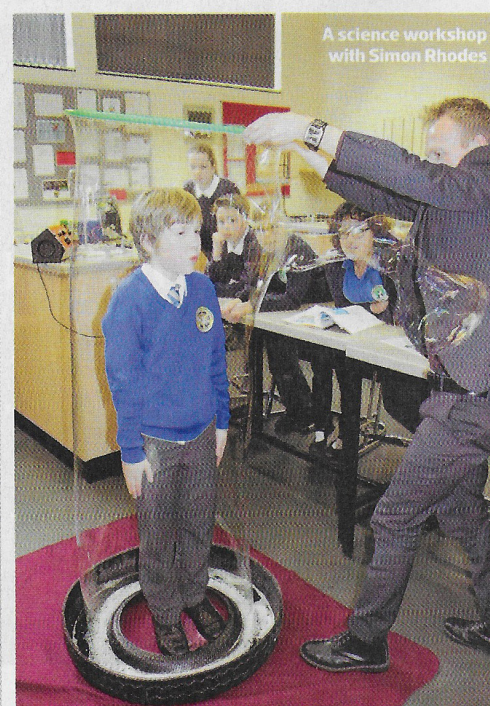
own school and local state schools. The challenges facing the maintained sector were evident.

"We are well-blessed with equipment here, but it's not always the case in state schools," he says. "This is a rural county which has historically been under-resourced, and there is a focus in schools on literacy and numeracy.

"It was also apparent there often isn't the expertise in primary schools when it comes to physics, so there was a lack of confidence among teachers to teach it. I told my head teacher that I believe we had something to offer as part of our outreach work and he agreed."

With support from The Ogden Trust, which helps establish partnerships between schools, Dr Rhodes now devotes a day a week to working with ▶

"Partnerships were set up with a view to bringing science to the fore"





Science Week
at Hereford
Cathedral School

state primaries, delivering lessons and workshops to pupils and continuous professional development (CPD) to staff – to give them the knowledge and confidence they need to do it themselves.

“In the private sector we can have quite a traditional and didactic way of doing things, teaching from the front in lecture-style lessons,” he says. “Seeing how it is done in the state primary sector has made me review my own classroom practice.”

One of his main observations has been how effective learning takes place when pupils are given time to work things out for themselves, rather than being rushed along or given the answer without thinking it through for themselves.

“This was never obvious to me previously, but I am now applying this to my own teaching at Hereford Cathedral School and giving pupils more time to establish for themselves how or why something works,” he says.

To date, children and staff in some 30 schools have experienced his lessons on aspects such as waves, magnetism and electricity, either through direct involvement with him or with sixth formers at Hereford Cathedral School, who help to organise science clubs.

Many independent schools use sixth formers as part of their outreach work with state schools, offering their students vital experience in the workplace and in developing their personal skills.

At University College School (UCS) in Hampstead, north west London, lower and upper sixth formers act as volunteers in local schools – either as teaching assistants in literacy and numeracy or helping with conservation- or art-based projects.

“Seeing how it is done in the state sector made me review my own classroom practice”

UCS has several state partners but some of its most notable work has been with Westminster Academy in delivering a maths breakfast club, and with the London Academy of Excellence, with which the school shared its ideas for establishing a new curriculum and schemes of work. It has also worked with a number of primary schools.

“We are well situated in terms of proximity to other schools, which makes it relatively easier to develop and maintain good links,” says Edward Roberts, the school’s assistant head and director of partnerships.

“We have had partnerships in place for the past ten years, with a wide range of activities taking place.”

Local primary schools are encouraged to use the facilities at UCS as much as possible. In the past year, state pupils have attended sessions in science, chemistry and languages and participated in a matinee performance of *The Tempest*, specially written to be suitable for young children.

UCS also offers its swimming pool to primary schools, including providing teachers for swimming lessons and meeting the transport costs.

Older students are helped to prepare for university applications and entrance. Sixth formers from state schools are given practice in interview techniques, specifically for those seeking places at medical schools.



This picture and above: science sessions at University College School, Hampstead



“Universities can sometimes try to catch applicants off-guard at interviews, which can be very intimidating, so we invite in former pupils, parents and other contacts who perhaps have experience of being on interview panels to put them through some of the situations that might crop up,” says Mr Roberts.

Staff are also seconded to work in the state schools. Earlier this year a group of trainee teachers spent three weeks in the partner schools to gain a perspective on different school environments. ▶

“The partnerships are mutually beneficial to staff and our students as they help to build confidence and communication skills,” says Mr Roberts. “It is important for us to facilitate collaboration and share ideas and to have a visible presence in the local community.”

Meanwhile, Hampton School in Middlesex works with more than 50 maintained schools, as well as the seven schools within its independent and state school partnership (ISSP).

Schools share resources and opportunities and often take turns to host events, notably an annual music day attended by more than 100 local pupils, many of them playing in orchestras and ensembles.

Teachers deliver lessons in Latin and other subjects that might not be otherwise available to state school pupils. They also share expertise in music and adventure activities, such as rock climbing. CCF (Combined Cadet Force), with army and RAF sections, is available for the benefit of Hampton’s neighbouring state partner school.

Hampton also runs a 13-week programme in maths, English and science on Saturday mornings, attended by around 40 state school pupils every year. Meanwhile teachers are offered sessions on mindfulness, which is embedded into the curriculum at Hampton, and helped to introduce this into their own schools.

Mark Nicholson, assistant head with responsibility for partnerships, says the school has worked with more than 1,700 state pupils in the past year.

“It is important for us to be part of the local community,” he adds. “There are multiple mutual benefits. We are excited about sharing the wide range of resources that we have and intend to strengthen and build upon the links with our partner schools. Our goal is to have a positive impact on our wider community.”

The partnership between St Peter’s School in York and the Archbishop Sentamu Academy in Hull grew out of a chance meeting between the head teachers and a mutual realisation that they were striving for similar outcomes. The most significant impact of the partnership has resulted in a Hull student taking a place at the sixth form at St Peter’s annually, on a fully-funded bursary.

St Peter’s School’s head master Leo Winkley explains: “The current student



Learning Latin at Hampton School

underwent an admissions process with 30 other students and was among the handful who took the entrance papers. It had to be someone who was up to the challenge because they go through full immersion here and we really stretch them.”

St Peter’s is also a member of the York Independent State School Partnership, through which it runs Latin and astronomy classes for pupils who might not otherwise get to experience such diverse subjects. Students from independent and state schools attend master classes together on Saturday

mornings. The schools in the partnership also participate in residential trips and study programmes. For many pupils, this is their first time away from home.

“The student who joined us from Archbishop Sentamu arrived here wanting to be a lawyer but, as a result of her experience with us, she wants to change the education system with a role at the Department for Education,” says Mr Winkley (who takes up the headship of Shrewsbury School this term). “She believes that all students should be given the opportunities she has had.”

HELPING CHILDREN TO ACHIEVE THEIR POTENTIAL

The biggest obstacles to a child reaching their potential include disadvantage, poverty and coming from a vulnerable background.

The Royal National Children’s SpringBoard Foundation works with 16 partners, including charities and local authorities, to identify disadvantaged children for fully-funded places in boarding schools. The charity also receives referrals from parents and schools directly.

There are currently some 500 pupils studying in 120 independent and state boarding schools, but the

aim is to reach 1,000 pupils in schools within five years. Most of the pupils have moved from state schools, after being referred by them as being suitable for a bursary.

Alexandra Hanratty, the charity’s deputy chief executive, says: “We look at the whole child, and not just their academic achievement. We work with the children and their families, who often live in vulnerable or traumatic environments. There is a whole pastoral structure to the work we do.”

Children who are eligible for a boarding school bursary need to demonstrate

resilience and the desire to give the opportunity their best shot. The charity also looks at their mental wellbeing and how well they are likely to adapt to a new environment.

“Some of our students end up in Russell Group universities, and one has recently graduated from St Andrews with a first-class degree in medicine,” says Ms Hanratty.

“It is a holistic experience, which aims to change lives and improve young people’s wellbeing where otherwise success might have been difficult to achieve.”