



Specialist Schools
and Academies Trust
THE SCHOOLS NETWORK™



Using business and enterprise to raise achievement: case studies of three outstanding schools

Acknowledgement

The SSAT is very grateful for the help and contributions made to this report from the headteachers and other staff at:

- Fulston Manor School, Sittingbourne, Kent
- Heath Park School, Wolverhampton
- Stockwell Park High School, Lambeth, London

Introduction and background

One of the main reasons behind the original development of specialist schools was that of raising the achievement of all students. This report focuses on three business and enterprise (B&E) schools that have been judged as outstanding by Ofsted and where GCSE results are well above national averages and have shown substantial improvement in recent years. Short visits were made to the schools to identify the key factors underlying their success and to evaluate the role that the business and enterprise specialism has played in this.

The generic evidence on the impact of the specialism

While the evidence suggests that the specialism has generally had a positive impact on students' learning and preparation for adult life, its impact on whole school achievement is less well established. It is in any case notoriously difficult to demonstrate cause and effect when there are so many variables to take into consideration.

Starting from a lower base, GCSE results in B&E schools have been rising at a slightly faster rate than in other schools. Ofsted judgements from whole school inspections on the curriculum, students' economic well-being and leadership and management were on average higher in B&E schools than in other schools. These are all areas where the specialism might have been expected to make an impact. However, judgements on the overall effectiveness of business and enterprise schools, achievement and teaching and learning were slightly lower than those in other schools. Not surprisingly, the evidence from Ofsted survey visits shows economics and business education to be stronger in B&E schools than in schools with other specialisms.

The impact of the specialism clearly varies between schools but many headteachers of B&E schools firmly believe that is an important contributor to whole school improvement, as well as helping to equip young people more effectively for the world of work. The three case studies attempt to identify the extent to which the specialism has been influential in raising achievement.

The case study schools

The criteria used to select case study schools included:

- a substantially increasing proportion of students obtaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C, including mathematics and English
- a well above average proportion of students obtaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C, including mathematics and English
- an improving and well above average proportion of students passing GCSE mathematics at grades A*-C
- an improving trend in Ofsted judgements on the overall effectiveness of the school with the most recent judgement being outstanding.

Around 15% of B&E schools are judged as outstanding by Ofsted in terms of their overall effectiveness and several of these schools also met the other criteria. The three schools selected were chosen because they are in different regions of the country and represented different contexts. However, other B&E schools, including those that have not been judged as outstanding, are likely to be able to provide equally valuable case studies.

Overall findings on the impact of the specialism common to the three case study schools

In order to be judged as outstanding by Ofsted all three schools, almost by definition, have highly effective teaching and strong leadership and management but the schools were also asked to identify the contribution they felt the specialism had made to their success in raising achievement. The following were common to all three schools.

- There was a very strongly held belief by the headteachers and senior staff in all three schools that B&E is a key driver for improvement and an important influence in raising students' achievement.
- The specialism permeates all aspects of school life, including teaching and learning, the curriculum, community involvement and leadership and management. The specialism is seen as a catalyst to encourage managers, teachers and students to be enterprising and innovative in everything they do.
- While examination results are regarded as being vitally important, there is an equally strong focus on the all-round personal development of students and preparing them effectively for their futures. B&E is seen as being a key contributor to this, particularly in terms of improving their self-confidence and self-esteem.
- All three schools are creative in designing their curricula, with a strong focus on meeting the needs of individual students and on applied learning.
- There is strong leadership in business, mathematics and IT.
- The schools make effective use of their additional funding for B&E to enhance their staffing by appointing high calibre teachers, TA's and support staff.
- The schools have strong links with business and use these to enrich and enhance teaching and learning across the curriculum.

Case study 1: Fulston Manor School, Kent

Context

Fulston Manor is a large 11-18 school located in Sittingbourne in Kent. It is a non-selective school operating in an area which has selective grammar schools. Most students are of White British heritage. The school was designated as a business college in September 2005. The school was judged as outstanding by Ofsted in 2008 and the report praised its commitment to the specialism and the positive impact it was having on students' learning.

The proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE passes at grade A*-C, including mathematics and English, has increased from 35% in 2004 to almost 60% in 2010. The proportion of students gaining A*-C passes in GCSE mathematics has increased from 47% in 2006 to 66% in 2010. These results are well above national averages and represent excellent progress, given the context of the school. In 2010, 35% of passes in GCE A level courses were at grades A or B and 60 students went on to university.

The factors that the school identifies as underlying its success in raising achievement and the contribution the specialism has made to this

Changing the mindsets of students and staff

Many students enter the school with relatively low aspirations and low self-esteem. The specialism is seen as being important in promoting a 'can do' attitude through encouraging students to take on responsibilities, to manage a wide range of projects and initiatives and to engage with the business community. The specialism has been equally important in encouraging staff to be enterprising in their teaching and set high expectations for their students. Changing the mindsets of staff and students is seen as the most important factor behind the step change in GCSE results.

High quality data and effective monitoring of students' progress

The school has developed high quality and 'user friendly' performance data. There is very rigorous tracking of students' progress which triggers targeted intervention. This work was originally piloted in mathematics and IT, two of the specialism subject areas, and then disseminated across the school.

Enhancing the quality of staffing

There is strong leadership and management in the three specialist subjects areas of business, IT and mathematics. Key appointments, that have been made possible through the additional specialist funding, include enhanced staffing and the appointment of high level teaching assistant in mathematics and the appointment of a non-teaching member of staff to promote community liaison, including links with employers. The school's very strong links with the community have done much to enhance the curriculum and make it more relevant to students' learning. The Co-op group is one of the sponsors of the school's specialism and 'co-operative thinking' permeates the ethos of the school and has enabled it to gain from the sharing of good practice with its partner schools.

Encouraging staff to work together and share best practice

The school organises six cross-curricular 'focus days' each year. These often include a business and enterprise theme and enable staff in three or more curriculum areas to work together on a range of projects and to share their ideas. This has helped to develop more innovative teaching with a strong emphasis on encouraging students to take on more responsibility and become more actively engaged in their learning.

Developing a curriculum that meets the needs of learners

The school has a strong tradition of vocational and applied learning and the specialism has enabled this to be extended further to meet the individual needs of students. It has also included developing better links with businesses in 'academic' subjects to help make them more relevant to the interests of learners.

Embedding enterprise and personal learning and thinking skills across the curriculum

There is a strong emphasis across the curriculum on the development of personal learning and thinking skills (PLTs) and enterprise skills, which are seen as inter-related. Enterprise skills/PLTs are included in all lesson plans and teachers are expected to focus on at least one of them in each lesson. All curriculum areas have an 'enterprise ambassador' who is responsible for promoting enterprise learning in their subjects, including embedding it in schemes of work. Enterprise skills are seen as a key part of effective learning and are assessed and recorded in students' 'enterprise passports'.

A strong pastoral system

The academic work of the school is underpinned by a very effective pastoral system which provides high quality support for students and helps them fulfil their potential. This is based on a strong house system with mixed aged tutor groups. One aspect of this is having five house dining areas which enable staff and students to meet together outside of the classroom.

Case study 2: Heath Park School, Wolverhampton

Context

Heath Park is a large 11-18 comprehensive school, located in Wolverhampton. The school was designated for business and enterprise in September 2004. The school serves an area of high social and economic deprivation and the proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above average. A significant number of students have English as an additional language and the proportion of students with learning difficulties and other special needs is above average.

The overall effectiveness of the school was judged as good by Ofsted in 2003 and as outstanding in 2006, which was again confirmed in an interim assessment in 2010. The proportion of students attaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C, including English and mathematics, has improved from 42% in 2007 to 74% in 2010. This represents a remarkable achievement, given the context of the school. The proportion of students attaining grades A*-C in GCSE mathematics has increased from 46% in 2006 to 78% in 2010. GCE AS/A2 results have also shown considerable improvement from an average points score per student of 578 in 2007 to 703 in 2010. A substantial proportion of students go on to higher education.

The Ofsted report of 2006 identified the exceptional leadership of the headteacher as the most important reason for the effectiveness of the school. The specialism was seen as an important influence on the development of an innovative curriculum which met the individual needs of students and prepared them exceptionally well for adult life.

The factors that the school identifies as underlying its success in raising achievement and the contribution the specialism has made to this

A step change in the quality of teaching

The specialism is seen as a major factor behind the development of much more effective teaching. In particular, it has helped achieve a move away from didactic teaching, which often got students GCSE passes but did not prepare them well for post-16 education or employment, to a much a greater emphasis on the quality of learning. Teachers are encouraged to 'let go' and involve students more actively in learning. The business and media departments had a lead role in promoting more innovative teaching and modelled their excellent practice for other subjects.

A radical change in the curriculum

The specialism acted as a 'trigger' for a radical re-organisation of the curriculum. Key Stage 3 was reduced to two years, with students spending between 50-60% of time with their base tutor. There is a strong emphasis on the development of skills during the base time. The advantage of this 'primary style' model is that it helps transition and enables the base tutors to get to know their students very well, including monitoring their personal development. The school has appointed several expert primary practitioners to support the development of this new curriculum and ensure its effectiveness.

Students start their GCSEs and equivalent options in Year 9 and most take GCSE in Year 10, depending on how well they are progressing towards their targets. Year 11 is referred to as the 'access year', with some students re-sitting GCSEs to try and get higher grades, or taking them for the first time, while others take new level 2 courses (for example, in work skills or management) or GCE AS qualifications. The curriculum is viewed as a 13-19 continuum, with students moving through it at different rates, according to the progress they are making.

The curriculum throughout the school is organised in large blocks of time, with up to half a day, or even a day, in some cases, being allocated to a subject. This allows for more extended pieces of work to take place, cuts down the disruption caused by lesson changeovers and facilitates the use of visits and visiting speakers.

Business and enterprise permeates the curriculum

The headteachers sees the specialism as 'being at the heart of everything we do'. Enterprise skills and personal learning and thinking skills (PLTs) are embedded in the curriculum and are part of all lesson plans and included in lesson observations. Enterprise skills are recorded by students and endorsed by teachers. One of the benefits of the 'base tutor' system that operates in Key Stage 3 is that it provides time for the tutors to assess students' development of enterprise skills. In addition to enterprise skills being developed through the curriculum, there is a strong programme of events to support enterprise learning, including a wide range of extra curriculum opportunities. Around half of students take an accredited business course at Key Stage 4 and over half take one post-16. Having the curriculum organised into large blocks of time facilitates more enterprising teaching and enables students to be more actively engaged in their learning through undertaking extended projects.

Challenging targets and close monitoring of progress

Students are set challenging but realistic targets, based on good quality performance data. There is tight monitoring of progress and an effective intervention strategy to support students' learning. The school has developed its own 'electronic mark book' that is not only used to record attendance but provides the classroom teacher with a bank of data on the students which is in an easily accessible form and is already interpreted for them.

Extensive links with business and the local community

The specialism has helped to further develop effective links with businesses and the local community. All subjects have links which help to make their curricula more relevant and provide enrichment opportunities for both staff and students. The Ofsted report comments very positively on how the specialism is used to promote good community links.

A strong programme of professional development

The school has a strong programme of professional development for staff that includes the promotion of enterprise learning. Staff are given the opportunity to work together to plan and team teach an enterprise initiative, with a different subject area taking the lead every six weeks. The school is very outward looking and keen to learn from best practice elsewhere and to share its very considerable expertise with others.

Case study 3: Stockwell Park High School, London

Context

Stockwell Park is an 11-16 comprehensive school located in the inner London borough of Lambeth. The school was designated as a specialist business and enterprise school in September 2004. Many of the students come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and the proportion of students entitled to free school meals is well above average. More than 50 different languages are spoken in the school and over half of students come from homes where English is not the first language. Over half of students have learning difficulties or disabilities.

The proportion of students passing five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C, including English and mathematics, has increased from 42% in 2004 to 70% in 2010. In 2010, over 80% of students passed GCSE mathematics at grades A*-C and the pass rates on the BTERC ICT and business courses were both close to 100%. These achievements are exceptional, given the context of the school. The overall effectiveness of the school was judged by Ofsted to be satisfactory in 2002 and as outstanding in 2006, a judgement again confirmed in an interim assessment in 2010.

The factors that the school identifies as underlying its success in raising achievement and the contribution the specialism has made to this

Unlocking the potential and building on high aspirations

The headteacher's view is that the specialism has been a catalyst for unlocking the potential and building on the generally high aspirations which parents have for their children. Many parents are relatively recent immigrants to the UK and are keen for their children to do well. Education is seen very much as the route to future economic success. B&E is seen as being relevant to all aspects of the school and fits very much with its aspirational culture and its emphasis on positive thinking. For example, in Year 9, all students set themselves an ambitious future career/life vision (based on the Real Game) and consider what they need to do to achieve it. This is then used as a basis for their personal development.

An innovative curriculum

The school has moved to a 'primary model' for the lower attaining band of students in Years 7-9 (3 out of 9 classes), with students spending the majority of their time with one teacher. This approach helps transition from primary to secondary education and reduces the level of turbulence for students who have often had unsettled backgrounds and who need greater stability in their lives. It also means that 'class tutors' get to know their students well and can monitor the progress that they are making both in terms of their academic work and their personal development, including the acquisition of enterprise skills. Students are moved into more specialised subject teaching when it is felt they are ready. There is a strong focus on developing literacy and numeracy and students are taught in single sex groups. The school took the bold and effective step of appointing several primary expert practitioners to help support the teaching and learning of students in the lower band.

A strong emphasis on business and enterprise education throughout the school

All students in Years 7-9 have one lesson of business and enterprise education, called 'portfolio for life', which includes developing the skills, knowledge and understanding the school regards as essential for future learning and adult life. This leads to accreditation through the Edexcel work-skills qualification. Enterprise skills are embedded in all subjects and are considered a 'natural' part of teaching and learning. Lesson observations include monitoring how effectively enterprise skills are being delivered. There is a very wide range of opportunities for students to extend their business and enterprise skills in practical ways in lessons and through extra-curricular activities. For example, the school has a commercially run art gallery and a hand made jewellery business where students' work is sold. The majority of students take a business course in Key Stage 4, chosen from a very wide range of business-related options. The school feels that this strong focus on business and enterprise leads to better teaching and helps make the curriculum more relevant for students.

The development of students' leadership skills, supported by effective links with employers

There is a strong emphasis in the school on developing leadership skills to boost students' self-confidence and self-esteem. This is closely related to the promotion of enterprise skills. Each form has a president and vice president and there are several head boys and head girls. These officers are responsible for organising a range of events, including the 'CHABOP' day (see below). Links with businesses underpin the development of management and leadership skills. For example, the school's army cadet unit (one of a few in state schools) is supported by the Worshipful Company of Fuelers and the unit provided the national runners up in a social enterprise competition. Other sponsors provide prizes, help in the evaluations of students' presentations and support the 'academies' (see below).

The 'CHABOP' scheme system of merits and demerits

The academic work of the school is underpinned by an effective pastoral system, which is based on a strong house system. One aspect of this is the CHABOP scheme which students helped to devise to provide a system of rewards and incentives. Over a period of six weeks students are awarded merits or demerits in terms of their efforts in Class work, Homework, Attendance, Behaviour, Organisation and Punctuality. Merits are 'banked' by students (demerits are recorded by staff!) and top scorers receive various rewards and privileges. Those who fall below a certain threshold have privileges withdrawn. This includes not being able to take part in the CHABOP day, where students take over the running of the school. CHABOP points also contribute to house points, with the winning house receiving various awards.

A strong focus on English and mathematics

GCSE results in English and mathematics are exceptionally high, given the context of the school. Most students take GCSEs in these subjects in Year 10. Those that do not get at least a grade C, or wish to get a higher grade, carry on with the course in Year 11 and re-sit the examinations. The group sizes reduce throughout Year 11 as students reach their targets and more resources are focussed on the remaining students, including intensive one-to-one tuition.

An 'academies' programme to encourage excellence

The school has a number of 'academies', for example in drama, creative writing, science and sports. These operate in extra-curricular time and are open to all students who need to meet certain criteria to become members. The academies enable students to pursue their particular interests and apply for various bursaries and to take part in events and competitions. Business sponsors are encouraged to become involved and to support a particular academy, both in terms of funding and giving time.

Close monitoring of students' progress

There is frequent monitoring of students progress throughout the year, which is underpinned by high quality performance data. Students are set appropriate targets and there are effective intervention strategies in place to support students who appear to be slipping behind in their progress.