

King Edward's School Birmingham is the most recent recipient of the *TES* best independent-maintained school collaboration award. Their success under recently retired chief master **John Cloughton** has seen 11,000 state school pupils benefit from extra teaching and learning programmes. **Tim Martin** catches up with him to discuss the school's creative approach to collaboration

A KING'S TALE

GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY

Having spent a lifetime in independent education John Cloughton is deserving of a happy retirement. Consider his last 10 years spent as chief master at King Edward's where his vision and dedication to the school's fundraising for Assisted Places and Outreach Programme led to collaborative links with over 200 different state primary schools. Once a former pupil at the all-boys day school, he was then the beneficiary of the government-sponsored Direct Grant system which provided free independent education for the vast majority of boys at King Edward's— something that he didn't forget when returning as leader to King Edward's in 2006.

Indeed, he says the notion of introducing a fund-raising scheme for assisted places was due to the school seeming to have lost its once strong identity throughout the city of Birmingham and beyond. "When I came back there was a sense that the school was no longer as close to its community as it had been. We were funding a number of places ourselves with funds from the King Edward's Foundation, but not enough. We wanted to be a school open to the entire community, not one tucked away where nobody sees it. The Outreach Programme we developed was part of a much wider strategy to try and increase accessibility to the school. It is something that's close to my heart." King Edward's Assisted Places are directly funded by alumni contributions and they have given £10m for that purpose in the



last seven years; almost a quarter of King Edward's total number of pupils – over 200 – currently receive this type of funding. "The Assisted Places allowed us to make places available for pupils from many diverse primary schools. The Outreach Programme was designed to create demand," says John. "What we have always tried to do is make contact with as many different primaries as we could to raise aspirations in those schools and to encourage the teachers, pupils and parents of those schools to think they could come to King Edward's."

CONGRATULATIONS ON A JOB WELL DONE

The sheer scale of collaboration is complemented by academic and extra-curricular projects delivered to a standard of excellence; it is for this reason, John says, that King Edward's were awarded the *TES* best independent-maintained school collaboration award. "When we won other nominees came across to our table and said, 'I'm glad you won because we know you're doing a fantastic job.' The quality and scale of what we are providing is perhaps unique. It's integral to our identity as a school, not just a sideshow, sop or a bit of tokenism; it's at the very core of what the school is trying to achieve in terms of accessibility." While senior management decision-making has helped to expand collaborative partnerships, John says the selflessness of teaching staff in giving up their time to help when they can has been remarkable. "Our work hasn't cost

the school a great deal of money. We haven't had someone employed on a salary of £50,000 a year to act as an outreach officer. The system relies on one teacher who has a four to five period allowance to oversee the whole project and then colleagues who have helped in a wide range of ways. They are happy to do that because they know how valuable Outreach is to the school. "The catalyst for all of this was appointing English teacher Tom Arbuthnott," John says. "When we decided we needed a member of staff to take Outreach forward, we appointed Tom. He happens to be someone I taught at Eton when he was young, so things really have come full circle. Tom's terrific contribution, to my mind, was working a miracle. In six years we went from collaborating with 12 primary schools to 200." If staffing has been a factor in approaches to collaboration, so too has location. There are over 60 primary schools within a three-mile radius of the school's main site and hundreds of primaries around Birmingham city centre – less than two miles from King Edwards. "Essentially we had fertile ground which we could work on," says John.

CREATIVE COMPETITION

On the subject of creative approaches to collaboration John acknowledges that this was largely Tom's domain. Some of his imaginative ideas have been embedded in school practice. A telling example of the lasting influence he has had on collaborative education is King Edward's

maths competition. With up to 96 state primaries participating, the competition offers each school the chance to showcase their best mathematical minds. "Year 5 pupils, typically, form a team of four and they compete every Friday afternoon against eight other schools until, eventually, we reach our grand final. This competition is run largely by our senior boys, which is a great way for them to show leadership," John explains. June this year also saw the school host a concert at the prestigious Symphony Hall, Birmingham, featuring 500 children from 20 different primaries singing with King Edward's symphony orchestra to an audience of 1500 parents. And, as the summer

holidays began, the school was running its second summer school for 140 pupils from 40 different junior schools, partly funded by an alumnus.

Whether it's putting on a show or making independent education more accessible, it's clear John has always led by example. As he departs the stage, he does so safe in the knowledge that his work has truly inspired the next generation of children – something he is immensely proud of. His own words describe this best. "Our original idea was to help expand the educational experience of school children and raise their aspirations. That's what we've cared about this whole time." ■

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