# We're partners, not patrons

Independent schools have recently come under fire in the press over their charitable status. This is unfair, says **Lucy Higginson**, who explains how they've become, quite rightly, more altruistic and voluble about their community work

NDEPENDENT-SCHOOL pupils are often described as "braying",' muses Kirsty von Malaisé, head of Norwich High, a Girls Day School Trust school. 'My girls don't *bray*—we do a huge amount of good in this region. I don't think our efforts are widely understood.'

With the charitable status of independent schools a regular hot potato for cash-strapped Government departments, such schools are learning to trumpet the huge panoply of partnership and charity projects they undertake and which are, unfairly, overlooked in the media's lazy condemnation.

Visit a website such as www.schoolstogether. org and you'll find a staggering array—more than 4,000—which, increasingly, are run or overseen by a dedicated school partnerships director. To count them all is, perhaps, a disservice, however, as they're not merely done to stave off the taxman or to improve town/gown relations—such projects are good for everybody involved.

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'We want to get away from that very unhelpful idea of patronage,' agrees Cheltenham College's director of partnerships, Adam Dunning. 'Partnerships are the right thing for us to be doing as an educational charity, but a school in partnership is better than a school that isn't; both sides benefit.

'We have deep and extensive programmes with some local schools, such as All Saints' Academy [a church academy founded in 2011], and one-off or repeated ones with a whole range of other schools and sporting organisations.'

These extend from chorister and youngscientist programmes to the '7 Up' programme in which Cheltenham sixth-formers who have scored 8 or above at GCSE mentor Year 11 pupils at All Saints to help them do the same.

Funds raised by students have helped provide everything from security fencing and fire escapes to dormitory refurbishments, dental care, solar panels and play equipment in schools in Kenya, Romania and South Africa. Hundreds of their pupils have also volunteered at these schools in post-GCSE trips—at least one pupil branded it 'the most important week of my life'. Cheltenham continues its work outside of term time, with a group of Afghan refugees staying at a boarding house each summer on a cricket tour.

Giving up time, as well as money or facilities, is perhaps a surer way of promoting true community. As well as hosting athletics days, science roadshows, swimming galas, football tournaments and more for neighbouring State schools, Dulwich College sets aside one Friday in June for 1,400 pupils and 200 staff to help community projects and fundraisers in their School Service Day.

Mrs von Malaisé is rightly proud of Norwich High School's award-winning Inspiring Females programme, now in its fourth year. An event that started in the school hall is, this year, being hosted at Chelsea FC, with more than 100 State-school pupils attending.

Some 30 high-profile women from the worlds of business, sport, science, charities, the Armed Forces and beyond come to speak and lead workshops, which Mrs von Malaisé credits with having made girls 'noticeably more ambitious and drivers of their own destinies. There is a culture of ambition and openness that I think has been generated by the programme'. Girls have become interested in careers they previously knew little about 'and have become much more confident to network'.

Please Give Generously

Sam Price, headmistress of Benenden, agrees that links such as that between her school and The John Wallis Academy in nearby Ashford, Kent, may have a lower profile, but much wider reach

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than a small number of 110% bursaries. 'We provide John Wallis with teacher training, we share facilities and best practice and run mentoring schemes. I'm on its governing body and its head is on ours.

'Our sixth form mentors its GCSE year and, after a couple of hours, you find them arm in arm as if they've known each other for ages. However, it can also raise awareness of the different personal situations people live with; one pupil said "I can't believe this girl looks after her siblings for so long each day".'

Schools such as Radley College and Desborough Academy, or Marlborough College and the Swindon Academy, take collaboration further still with joint classes. This can enable schools to access otherwise unavailable subjects, such as Latin, classical civilisation and astronomy.

Some ideas are entirely prompted by pupils, as in the case of a remarkable project taking shape at the Lancashire Jesuit school Stonyhurst—mantra 'Men and women for others'. 'Responding to Pope Francis's call for every community in Europe to settle a refugee family, a group of our pupils pitched the idea of becoming the first school in the country to be approved as a community sponsor,' explains lay chaplain Catherine Hanley.

# 6 It's to everyone's benefit if independent schools are seen as assets that enrich

Named Hummingbird Project (after the story of the bird that tried to extinguish fire in his forest with beakfuls of water—'doing what I can'), the pupils have worked with their local village of Hurst Green, the Home Office, CAFOD and Caritas Diocese of Salford to bring the idea to reality.

The school is providing a house that local people have furnished and Stonyhurst's pupils have prepared the groundwork for the new family with nearby schools, banks and more. 'The scheme requires you to raise \$9,000—for example, for interpreters' fees—and aims to support the family to full independence within a year,' explains Miss Hanley. 'It's hoped our pupils will be able to help with social integration, conversational English and so on if the family wants.'

One of Stonyhurst's older programmes, running for more than 40 years, is an activity holiday staffed in part by volunteer sixth-formers for children with severe disability. 'They even sleep over and help the children

if they're unwell in the night.

For some families, it's the only time of the year when they have some respite,' says Miss Hanley. Impressively, it's not only holiday places that are oversubscribed—so are the volunteer numbers. As British society becomes, lamentably, more polarised, it's to everyone's benefit if our independent schools are not seen as symbols of privilege, but assets that enrich their entire community.

Whether it's Homefield Preparatory School providing a conductor and rehearsal space to Sutton Symphony Orchestra, the swimming lessons offered by Alleyn's, Dulwich, or Warwick School hosting local juniors for a Making Music day, independent schools are clearly assets to their communities.

# Doing their bit

#### Canford

The school has been commended for its charitable activities, which include, impressively, sponsorship of The Bourne Academy in Bournemouth, fundraising and teaching at schools in India, Ghana and Argentina, taking part in the national SHINE programme, visits to local hospices, charity shops and the elderly, swimming lessons for local children, learning sign language and providing activities for children in inner-city Southampton

#### Eton College

Each week, more than 200 boys visit hospitals and individuals as part of the Community Service. The school provides in-kind support to the Poor's Estate of Eton

#### Harrow

It runs 150-plus projects with local schools. The last set of accounts shows 86 pupils benefiting from more than £2 million of bursaries in one year

#### Repton

Sixth-form pupils choose a weekly activity, such as recycling, gardening, litterpicking, helping in primary schools and visiting the elderly. Repton is linked to schools in Ghana, for which it raises funds and where pupils go to teach English

#### St Mary's Calne

It has a mentoring programme with Springfields, a local school for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, and sponsors the Calne Food Bank, among other charitable enterprises. Pupils join in with community activities, such as planting flowers for Calne in Bloom

#### Westminster

All pupils are encouraged to participate in volunteering and sixth-formers can train in sign language or teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL). Some £40,000 is raised each year through the Charity Forum. The school has several educational partnerships in this country, including with the Harris Westminster Sixth Form academy, as well as some in India, South Africa, Tunisia and Zambia

### Woldingham

Each house selects a charity to support for the year, plus there's a link with the Cardinal Hume Centre for the poor and marginalised and a community-outreach programme through which girls visit nursing homes and help primary-school children with reading

## Wycombe Abbey

Girls make weekly visits to Cressex Community School to help with literacy and volunteer with numerous joint ventures and workshops with other schools. There's a weekly Skype exchange with the first girls' boarding school in Afghanistan