



PARTNERSHIPS

Interview with Stuart Block, Director

After graduating from Cambridge University in 2001, Stuart initially pursued a career in the City for eight years before moving to teach economics at Cranleigh School. While at Cranleigh, he became very interested in partnerships between schools and other sectors and with schools abroad. That led to his first long-distance cycle ride to raise money for Beyond Ourselves, an educational charity in Zambia, which St Paul's School also supports.

On his return, he worked for two and half years for a state school in Tower Hamlets, setting up an economics department from scratch, before returning to his tandem to cycle from the UK to China. On his return, he started as a part-time economics teacher at St Paul's before becoming Lower Eighth Undermaster and then Director of Partnerships and Public Service, a position he has held for the last 18 months. He also coaches Rugby and Cricket at school.

What does your role at the school entail?

I manage a great team and together, we deliver on the three main areas of partnership work at school. Our main activity is partnerships with schools in the state sector, largely locally but nationally as well, at both primary and secondary levels. Our work ranges from Saturday Science extension classes for Year 12 pupils and then supporting their university applications beyond that, to weekly GCSE Latin classes and two Science residential schools for 50 Year 10 students in July. At a primary level we offer a range of interesting sports-based programmes as well as academic enrichment programmes through St Paul's Juniors.

I also oversee our volunteering programme whereby our students, largely driven by the Lower Eighth, volunteer in the local community. Much of that work is in local schools whether it is mentoring GCSE maths students or working as classroom assistants or sports coaches in primary schools.

The third part, although they are all interlinked, is the work with local, national and international charities, led by the two Mr Taylors – Rob at the senior school and Tom at the junior school. At a local level, our pupils volunteer with organisations including Viera Gray House, Castelnuovo Community Centre, City Harvest, Thames 21 and Ace of Clubs. The St Paul's Juniors community supports FiSH Neighbourhood Care and the Hammersmith and Fulham Food Bank. We also support national and international charities, through fundraising initiatives and raising awareness. These include Children with Cancer, our national charity of the year, Senahasa Trust in Sri Lanka and Beyond Ourselves in Zambia.

Could you tell us about your own studies and previous roles and how they have prepared you for this one?

I guess two roles spring to mind. Having worked in both the state and private education sectors, understanding strengths and weaknesses of both is important to this role. A key aspect of our partnership work is, as the name suggests, working in partnership that delivers mutual benefit rather than any sense of dispensing largesse.

Linked to that, having worked in another private school with a number of partnerships, I've learnt some valuable lessons about working effectively and

sustainably with charities. Finally I think my business background helps with the strategic side of the role, supporting the school's fundraising initiatives and longer term business planning.

Can you please tell us what projects your department has underway at the moment?

This academic year we've expanded the volunteering opportunities available to our pupils to really open their eyes to the charitable and educational initiatives that they can get involved in beyond St Paul's. The new Lower Eighth volunteering programme, run by Head of Volunteering Sam Roberts, takes pupils off the academic timetable on a Friday afternoon. As well as volunteering placements with over 15 different organisations, they also participate in a general studies, life skills and leadership programme, part of which is in partnership with St Paul's Girls' School.

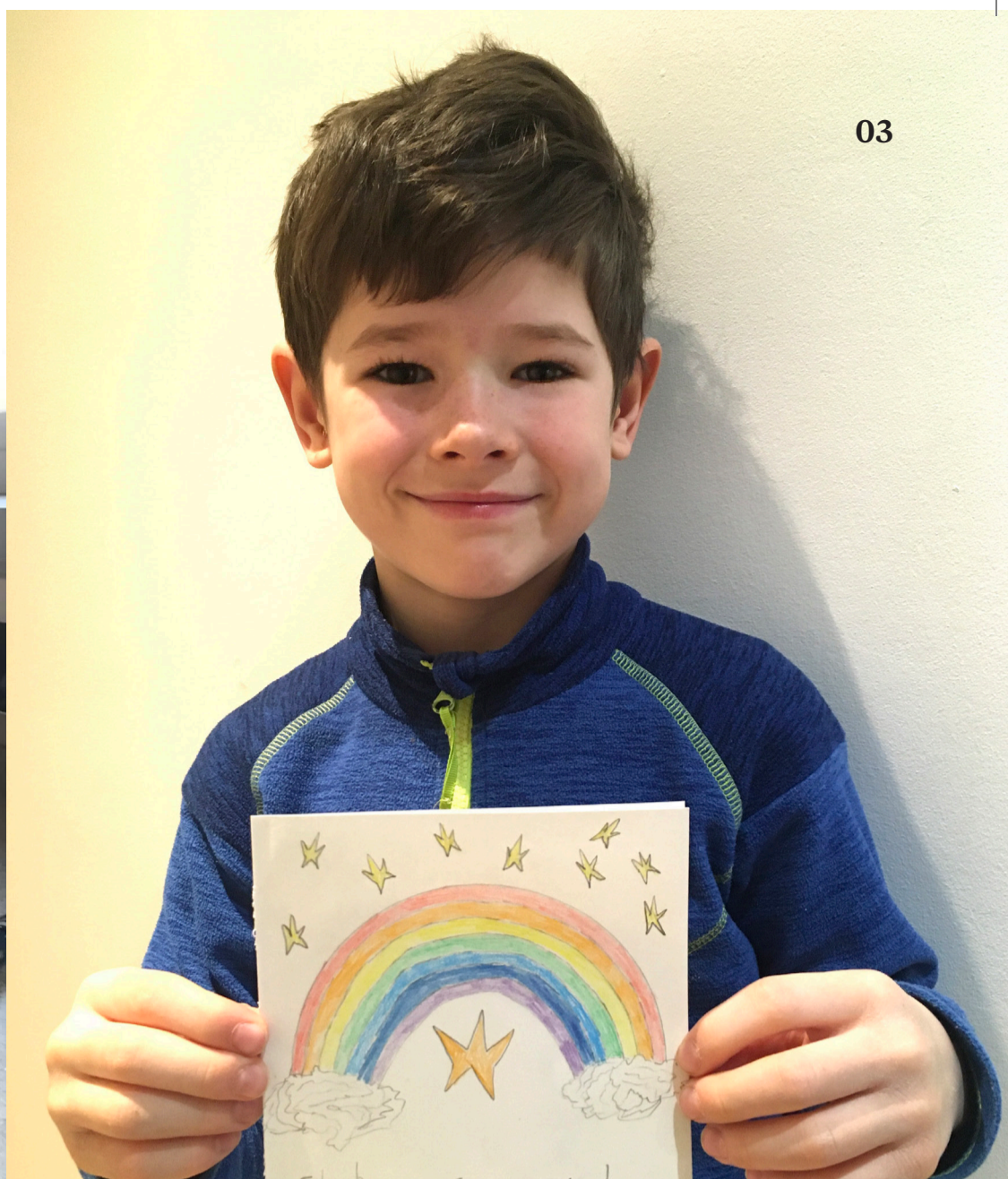
We are also giving pupils more opportunities to work with pupils from other schools, often in partnership with St Paul's Girls' school. One of the joint projects is at St Paul's C of E Primary School, where we jointly run a fitness assessment programme known as Gymrun, which coincidentally was set up by the former Director of Sport at St Paul's Juniors. This really exciting programme allows our Year 12 pupils to act as role models for the younger kids, getting them excited about sport and exercise and then organising a fun fitness based assessment for them twice a year so that we can evaluate the programme and potentially scale it up. The music department has also been running 'Music Junction', a programme with SPGS and the London Chamber Orchestra, supporting music lessons in a number of primary schools.

What about other local partnerships?

Something we are hoping to have officially set up for the next academic year is effectively a West London Schools' Partnership Network. It will involve roughly an equal number of state and independent schools collaborating and sharing expertise for the mutual benefit. For the first year, we are looking to focus on two initiatives. One is entrepreneurship, led by Senior School teacher, Nick Troen, building a network of schools in West London that are passionate about entrepreneurship and the value and soft skills that gives to students. Nick's existing programme will become part of this and we're hoping the first event run by students will be a competition to come up for a name for the overall network.

Secondly we are hoping to use the partnership as a means for joint staff CPD (Continuing Professional Development) events. For example, some will be training and support with mental health and wellbeing in conjunction with Deputy Head Mental Health, Wellbeing and Life Skills, Sam Madden's team, but there will also be the opportunity to allow the organic growth of teacher on teacher sharing of best practice within departments.

We are also proud to be the Education Partner for the Barnes Children's Literature Festival for the second year running. It's the largest children's book festival in the country and also offers a free programme of events for over 6000 primary school children. This year, we're hoping pupils from both St Paul's School and St Paul's Juniors will be helping at the festival if it is able to go ahead, and we are also providing the Wathen Hall for one of their major events.



of partnerships and public service

What partnership activity is happening at St Paul's Juniors?

I have been working with Matt Young who has run the St Paul's Juniors partnership work for the last year. They offer an extensive academic enrichment programme for pupils from local primary schools on Saturday mornings, mainly focusing on maths and science. We are looking to extend that to include other subjects as well as exploring working with Putney High School GDST and Roehampton University to extend their 'cool to be curious' programme. Alongside that, the sports department runs football tournaments for local schools on a Friday afternoon. Overall, the feedback from 25-30 schools involved in these various initiatives has been fantastic.

Why is it important for schools such as St Paul's to run a partnerships programme and how do you feel the programme helps our students?

There may be a degree of cynicism from some that this is ticking a box to maintain charitable status. That's definitely not the case. John Colet's original vision for the school was to equip its pupils to serve wider society and this is still the case today. From the governing body down, we believe that we should be enabling more pupils to benefit from the education available here through participating in events or courses, using our facilities or having our pupils volunteering and supporting the local community.

It is really important to help our pupils to appreciate what they have here and to have a greater understanding of the challenges that many others face and that they might face themselves in the future. It also helps promote greater

social cohesion in the local area and helps break down some of the barriers that have unfortunately grown up in London over the last 10-20 years.

Our pupils volunteer at Viera Gray House, Castelnau Community Centre, City Harvest, Thames 21 and Ace of Clubs. The St Paul's Juniors community supports FiSH Neighbourhood Care and the Hammersmith and Fulham Food Bank.

How do our partners benefit from the programme?

We are in the process of enhancing our evaluation of the programme through a partnership with ImpactEd, an evaluation charity. However, what we have seen through our own surveys is that our programmes are really inspiring students from outside the school to try new things whether it be co-curricular (e.g. entrepreneurship or sport) or academic extension, at both primary and secondary level. For Year 12 & 13 students, there are many we have supported through their A Level studies and with university applications and several have gone on to top universities including Oxford and Cambridge.

Meanwhile, some pupils who have taken part in our programmes, have gone on to become successful bursary students at St Paul's.

What are your ambitions for the programme over the next couple of years?

It's clear that we have many inspiring programmes already in place, many set up by my colleague Janet Mee. However, one of my aims has been to develop a clear strategy and foster long-term relationships with other schools and charities, to allow the existing work to flourish and for new initiatives to take place.

What I think I am most excited about over the next couple of years is the West London Schools' Partnership Network, which will allow the sharing of new, exciting ideas as well as the entrepreneurship programme and the opportunities for staff CPD. Although it is initially focused at secondary schools, it is our vision to set up a similar partnership with primary schools in the future.

We are also exploring a potential partnership with local rowing club and charity, Fulham Reach, to meet the needs of pupil premium students during the summer holidays by offering rowing opportunities. Additionally, we are working to form a bilateral partnership with the Lyric Theatre in Hammersmith, driven by Senior School Head of Faculty - Creatives & Performing Arts, Edward Williams and Christian Anthony, Director of Drama, to give all local state schools the opportunity to participate in a full drama performance.

As this issue goes to press, we are all currently dealing with the Covid-19 crisis. What is your team doing to support our partners during this time?

We are encouraging all members of the school community to continue to support our charity partners where they can financially, particularly the local community partnerships who are supporting vulnerable people on the front line. We have also encouraged all pupils and staff to become Pauls4All pen pals, writing letters and cards of good wishes which we are sharing through our partners with isolated and vulnerable people within our local community.

In addition, we are working with schools in the West London Schools' Partnership to support their (temporary) shift to becoming virtual schools, helping to source funding for the necessary IT hardware and software as well as sharing best practice within the group around teaching and learning.

Do you have any final message you would like to share with the St Paul's community?

We are extremely grateful to those parents and former parents who have directed their *Shaping Our Future* donations towards the partnership programme. We have had some great enthusiasm from parents and Old Paulines for this work and many offers of help so thank you very much for that. We'd also be very keen to hear of anyone else who would like to support this work financially or any new ideas you may have in this area, so please drop us an email via partnerships@stpaulsschool.org.uk. Also, in this current crisis, we send our best wishes to all the St Paul's community and hope you stay healthy and safe.