



HRH The Duke of Edinburgh Opens RSA Academy in Tipton

November 4th 2008

A new Academy school, sponsored by the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA), was opened today by His Royal Highness, the Duke of Edinburgh.

The RSA Academy, Tipton, is leading the way in developing the RSA's innovative curriculum framework 'Opening Minds' in which young people are encouraged to develop life skills or 'competences'. These cover five main areas: citizenship, learning, managing information, managing situations & relating to people.

The RSA Academy joins over 200 schools across the country now following the Opening Minds framework. In a recent survey of schools using Opening Minds, 78% had their curriculum provision graded as outstanding or good by Ofsted (11% higher than the national average).

Unveiling a plaque to celebrate the opening of the Academy, the Duke of Edinburgh was joined by RSA Chairman, Gerry Acher, and the Chair of the RSA Academy Board, Sir Mike Tomlinson. His Royal Highness then took a tour of the school before meeting parents and pupils of the school over lunch.

Commenting on the launch of the Academy, RSA Chief Executive Matthew Taylor said:

"We are delighted that His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh has been able to join us today for the launch of the RSA Academy. For the RSA the decision to sponsor an Academy was based on the strongest of educational grounds. We have seen the impact that Opening Minds can have at key stage three, the Academy gives us the opportunity to apply OM principles across the school. As a Society that believes we need to radically rethink schooling for the 21st century we believe the Academy can implement other school effective and innovative ideas, for example the five term year. We are truly fortunate to have chosen a school that was already fast improving and a community that is so excited and supportive about the idea. All of us at the RSA look forward to working together with the school in order to help provide a first class education for the young people of Tipton."

Academy principal, Michael Gernon said:

"The Academy will provide a first-class education for its students by providing a mix of academic and vocational courses and qualifications. We need to raise students' aspirations and build the expectation that they are aiming for university. This, together with the Opening Minds competences, creates a powerful and effective vision for an education which will enable all our young people to realise their potential."

The RSA Academy is organised differently from other schools with three hour lessons, a longer school day and school year - five terms, and classes regularly joining together for group lessons. Through its radical new approach to education, the Academy aims to equip its students with the skills to face a wide range of environmental, technical, social and economic challenges that go far beyond the scope of the traditional National Curriculum.

Schools using the Opening Minds curriculum have reported increased motivation levels, greater engagement and enjoyment in learning, and higher self esteem. Young people following the curriculum also demonstrate strong listening skills, both to each other and to staff, and considerable expertise in supporting their peers.

The Academy hopes to play a major role in the economic and social regeneration of Tipton by providing the area's young people with opportunities for both educational achievement and instilling in them greater social awareness and a sense of responsibility towards their local community.

Academy Facts:

- The Academy specialises in healthy living. All food is cooked on the premises, including breakfast which is served to pupils and staff together. The Academy is also developing its own allotments in partnership with Sandwell Market Garden
- The Academy has 1100 students aged 11-18, and is divided into three 'schools': Maths, Science and Technology; Arts, Humanities, Sport and Leisure; Language and Communications
- There is a wide range of courses available for post-16 students including AS/A2, BTEC, OCR Certificate and Diploma Courses at Levels 2 and 3
- The Academy is divided into 3 Houses – Romney, Shipley and Adam – historical figures of great significance to the RSA
- The current building has had a £1m facelift over the summer. The new £30million building will be ready in September 2010; it is being constructed by Willmott Dixon. The architects are the John McAslan Partnership. The building is the first to be designed around the Opening Minds curriculum with large classrooms providing flexibility of space
- The Academy year is divided into 5 terms with a 4 week break in the summer and 2 week breaks between the other terms; The teaching day is divided into 2 sessions each of 3 hours; teams of staff work with groups of students
- Classrooms for Opening Minds lessons are larger than usual so that students can work in large or smaller groups as well as working individually
- The Academy owns a residential centre in Wales which it uses for the benefit of the pupils;
- All students have access to two Enrichment sessions each week, including courses such as Chinese for beginners, Spanish for beginners, Grow your own (on the Academy site) and Young Enterprise
- The Academy's motto is *Transforming Learning, Transforming Lives*

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Notes to Editors

1. Financial support for the RSA Academy came from donations made by individual Fellows, some of which were substantial contributions. There were several donations from charitable trusts and foundations. The largest contribution came from RM plc, a leading educational ICT provider, who will provide technical as well as financial support. The RSA also made a contribution from its Shipley Fund, our endowment fund which is specifically intended for educational purposes.