

Sir James Dyson donates £19m for education centre at his former school

Education at Gresham's School in Holt is set to be revolutionised by a £18.75 million donation from former pupil and billionaire inventor, Sir James Dyson.

Sir James, 72, is funding a new centre for science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) education, to be called the Dyson Building. The founder and chief executive of Dyson Ltd has always been grateful to Gresham's, after the school continued to fund his education after the death of his father when he was aged nine.



Douglas Robb, Gresham's headmaster (right) said the donation was "by far" the largest the school had ever received, and it would have an "immense impact" for decades to come.

Mr Robb said: "We are hugely grateful to Sir James and are excited that our partnership will be a long-lasting one. "We look forward to working with the James Dyson Foundation to develop new and inventive approaches to teaching and with the Dyson Institute of Engineering and Technology to explore exciting long-term opportunities for our students to pursue careers in engineering."

Dyson's architects Wilkinson Eyre, the first practice to achieve two consecutive wins of both the Lubetkin Prize and the Stirling Prize, will design the new centre, which should be finished by September 2021.

Sir James called engineering and science "the most fulfilling of careers" which were vitally important to our society and economy.

He said: "To prime a pipeline of young people who want to study

STUART ANDERSON

engineering, we must inspire them at the earliest possible stage. I hope this building will do just that.

"For 20 years, my foundation has supported science and engineering education. "I've observed that from the age of around six, children are very engaged; they are inventive, dreaming up ideas, and curious, wanting to know how they can be made.

"But these traits get stamped out of them, partly by the system and partly because the teaching of these subjects in schools has not kept up with the pace of technological change.

"By creating state-of-the-art spaces I hope that we can foster, inspire and educate more brilliant young minds.

"I am so pleased Gresham's will be leading the charge."

The Dyson centre will enable new approaches to teaching, encouraging project work and collaboration.

Spaces will be equipped with the latest technology to enable the highest levels of teaching in areas such as robotics, programming, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning.

The centre will also bolster an outreach



Sir James Dyson, centre, with Gresham's chair of governors Michael Coff, left, and headmaster Douglas Robb. Picture: GRESHAM'S



Sir James Dyson, left, with Gresham's School's former headmaster Logie Bruce-Lockhart. Picture: GRESHAM'S

programme Gresham's runs with other local schools.

Sir James was born in Cromer and joined Gresham's aged nine, attending the school from 1956 to 1965.

He has always acknowledged the school and its then headmaster, Logie Bruce-Lockhart, for giving him the financial support to continue his education after his father, Alec, died of cancer.

Alec Dyson was head of the school's classics department, and his mother, Mary, also taught at the school.

Sir James said of his father: "When he returned from fighting with the 14th Army in Burma during the war, he threw himself into the life of the school, producing plays, taking games, the CCF (Combined Cadet Force)

and the sailing club. "When he was ill, he carried on teaching but died when I was nine.

"The generosity of the school, particularly Logie, meant I could continue there after his death.

"I am hugely grateful to Gresham's for the enlightening and inspiring education that I enjoyed so much."

Thanks to his stellar success as inventor and entrepreneur, Sir James has donated more than £10m to engineering education.

Sir James Dyson and family came in at number five on this year's Sunday Times rich list, with an estimated worth of £12.6bn.

Gresham's, a day and boarding school for pupils aged two to 18, is one of the top 30 International Baccalaureate schools in England.



Gresham's School in Holt, Norfolk. Inset: James Dyson, aged 16, won a cross country race in 1965 at Gresham's School. He has always been thankful to the school for continuing to fund his education after the death of his father. Pictures: GRESHAM'S ARCHIVE LTD

Sir James Dyson: His path to success

His inventions are many and varied, but it is the vacuum cleaner with which Sir James Dyson has always been most closely associated.

After leaving Gresham's, Sir James studied furniture and interior design at the Royal College of Art, where his interest in the links between engineering and design was sparked.

This prompted his idea for a vacuum which would not lose suction as it picked up dirt, which became the first bagless Dual Cyclone vacuum, also called the G-Force, launched in 1983.

Sir James worked for years on the product, churning out more than 5,000 prototypes before finally producing a satisfactory model.

But manufacturers rejected the design, fearing its impact on the market for replacement dust bags.

Not to be defeated, Sir James set up his own firm, Dyson Ltd, opening a factory and research centre in Wiltshire in 1993.

The Dual Cyclone became the UK's fastest-selling vacuum cleaner and one of the country's



Sir James Dyson with one of his groundbreaking vacuum cleaners. Picture: PA/FIONA HANSON

most popular brands, and the company now employs more than 12,000 people and made profits of more than £1.1 billion last year.

In 2002, he launched the James Dyson Foundation to inspire the next generation to become engineers with a simple message about how to succeed: "think differently and make mistakes".

As well as schools including Gresham's, the

foundation has supported a range of institutions including Cambridge University, Imperial College London, The Royal College of Art and establishing the Dyson Institute of Engineering and Technology.

Sir James's first invention was the Ballbarrow, a type of wheelbarrow which uses a ball instead of a wheel.

In his early career he worked at Rotork Controls in Bath, where he and company chairman Jeremy Fry invented the Sea Truck - a high-speed boat made for transporting goods without needing to dock at a jetty.

His other successes include the Airblade hand dryer and the Supersonic hair dryer.

Although Sir James earlier wanted the UK to join the Eurozone, he became a prominent Brexit supporter in the lead-up to the 2016 referendum.

He attracted some criticism in January this year with plans to move Dyson Ltd's headquarters from Wiltshire to Singapore. He was knighted in 2007.

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