Dyson’s former school hoovers up a £19m gift

Sir James Dyson has donated £19 million to the school where he and his brother attended on scholarships, the Woodhouse School, Cheltenham, where their father taught there (Nicola Woodcock series).

The money for Woodhouse, an independent school in Harlaxton, will be used to open a science, technology, engineering, arts and maths centre in 2023. Sir James, 72, told ITV: “I’m extremely grateful to Woodhouse for all sorts of things — providing my brother and myself with a great education, but also it was a non-pressurized school. We were encouraged to be individuals. I was able to enjoy all the things the school did: we were in the choir, playing every type of sport, being in the orchestra, being in different bands and groups. Because I played the harmonica, I think. I enjoyed everything at the school almost, just the academic side.

The billionnaire added that he was on a mission to increase the number of engineers and scientists in Britain, adding that about five times as many engineers were needed as 20 years ago to develop technology. Asked about his decision to donate to his former school, he said: “Until now I have invested in state education, to the tune of about £600 million. There’s nothing wrong with private schools, people save up a lot of money and spend everything they have on educating their children, and yet the state is still not seen as first-rate at school. More women could be attracted to engineering by making relevant products rather than focusing only on the academic, he added.

Dugdale House, Woodhouse head teacher, added last year that he was worried some young people faced a future without fundamental technical skills, expecting to find a ‘one-size-fits-all’ job.