

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

Sir James Dyson has donated £19 million to the school where he and his brother boarded on scholarships after the death of their father, who taught there (Nicola Woolcock writes).

The money for Gresham's, an independent school in Holt, Norfolk, that charges up to £36,000, will be used to open a science, technology, engineering, arts and maths centre in 2021. Sir James, 72, told ITV: "I'm extremely grateful to Gresham's for all sorts of things — providing my brother and myself with a free education. But also it was a non-pressurised school. We were encouraged to be individuals. I was able to enjoy all the things the school did, from being in plays, playing every type of sport, being in the orchestra, being in quartets and quintets because I played the bassoon. I think I enjoyed everything at the school almost, bar the academic side."

The billionaire said 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 a fee-charging school,

he said: "Until now I have invested in state education, to the tune of

about £100 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 saving the state a great deal of money. Gresham's has about £5 million worth of scholarships a year."

Sir James said that software designers could earn £100,000 a year and were poached by US companies but the subject is still not seen as interesting at school. More women could be attracted to engineering by making relevant products rather than focusing only on the academic, he added.

Douglas Robb, Gresham's head teacher, said last year that he was worried some young people lacked grit and locked down on certain vocations, expecting to land a "one-in-a-million" job.

