



gifted®

CASE STUDY

Bede's School

Investing in a feasibility study can be the fuel for your fundraising ambitions

Exceptional fundraising partnerships

Based in East Sussex, Bede's School is a shining example of an independent school that puts personal flourishing on a par with the usual measures of academic success. Since its foundation in 1979, the school's ethos has been all about nurturing individual talent, whether expressed on the sports' field, in the science lab or front of stage in the spotlights.

"This distinct approach to developing the whole person was evident from our very first meeting with the school," says Gifted Director, Chris Goldie. "At the end of 2020, when we were invited to share our thoughts on Bede's future fundraising strategy, it was clear that the CEO, Peter Goodyear, wanted to capitalise on an outstanding reputation for bringing the very best out of the young people it served."

Gaining a sense of direction

Initially, there was some uncertainty about the direction and detail of any future fundraising plan. Several capital projects were on the drawing board, but equally pressing was the ambition to launch a transformational bursary programme. It wasn't until May 2021, when Covid restrictions were easing, that the school was able to invest in a more dynamic approach to shaping what might come next. "Up until this point, the school's fundraising had been extremely limited. We knew there was an opportunity to achieve much more and it was simply a question of determining where the philanthropic interest might be."

The fundraising feasibility study that followed, focused mainly on parents. It revealed that the greatest enthusiasm, in development terms, was for philanthropically funded bursary places that would benefit families who might not otherwise be able to afford a Bede's education.

"This is something we are seeing more and more of in schools' fundraising," says Chris. "People in their 40s and 50s, especially, have different priorities. Equality of opportunity feels more important than ever and, in Bede's case, giving to a Bursary Fund was also the perfect way to endorse the school's overarching ethos of helping every child to discover their particular strengths."

Using the Study findings

Whilst the school had no previous culture of fundraising, Peter quickly grasped the potential landscape of support, highlighted by the Study process. Gifted was engaged to provide on-going periodic fundraising advice, aimed at securing a handful of leadership gifts and recruiting a development board. The Study's recommendations also included searching for a suitable Development Director who understood the school's passion for personalised learning and Gifted was delighted to participate in this recruitment process.

"During this time, we worked with the school by focussing on the Planning Phase. Our weekly Zoom calls centred on recruiting board members, mentoring leaders and doing the strategic groundwork. We also recommended running a dedicated Giving Day as part of the fundraising mix."

Buying into the Vision

The vision, to create 20 transformational bursaries by the school's 50th anniversary in 2029, was clear and compelling. By the end of 2021, over £300,000 had been raised from a small number of major givers, identified during the Feasibility Study. And, supporters have continued to buy into this vision ever since. When the school went ahead with its first ever Giving Day in June 2023, the results were extraordinary. In only 36 hours, with the support of parents, staff, alumni and friends, the school raised almost £155,000, taking the Bursary Fund total close to £0.5m.

"This was a remarkable effort and a real testament to the school's leadership," says Chris. "It also demonstrated the difference it made in appointing Charlotte Sutton as Director of Advancement and Alumni Relations. Already a staff member, Charlotte absolutely got the school's DNA and could spell it out clearly in a fundraising context. She was able to mobilise a fantastic team of volunteers for the Giving Day and the results were outstanding."

Looking to the future

Like any school, Bede's is faced with the challenge of balancing different fundraising needs. Its thriving Bursary Fund sits alongside plans for major capital projects, most of which will require additional philanthropic income. What Bede's now has, though, is a culture and an appetite for raising money that it didn't have before. The Feasibility Study acted as a catalyst, a touchpaper moment that has helped to shape its development priorities and upskill its fundraising team.

Peter Goodyear, CEO at Bede's says, "I have thoroughly enjoyed working with Chris, his expertise in the field of fundraising within the education sector is encyclopaedic. He has been a great source of support in getting our Foundation Office off the ground, and to mentor and facilitate the steps needed to establish our Transformational Bursary Campaign."

IDPE recognition and a Special Award for Bede's

"It's incredibly fulfilling when you work alongside an organisation keen to fuse a defining ethos with aspirational fundraising," adds Chris. "This is exactly what's happening at Bede's and it's why the Independent Development Professionals in Education (IDPE) has honoured the school with a brand new 2023 Award for Ambition and Progress."

The Award, which celebrates those who have made a step change towards delivering on their vision and ambition for development, is well deserved. "It's an absolute joy, to see Charlotte, Peter and their wonderful team of volunteers be recognised in this way," says Chris. "And, it's especially rewarding for us, as consultants, to step back and watch them grow."

If your school is facing its next fundraising challenge and you'd like to learn more about how and when to conduct a feasibility study, get in touch with one of our Directors.

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