



Engaging Parents and Pupils in Astronomy

Rod Stevenson

United Kingdom (rocketrods@btopenworld.com)

“The British National Space Centre partnership has recognised for some time that Space and Astronomy are particularly attractive subjects for school students and that including these in the science curriculum can have a positive effect on student interest in science.

Drivers are that the number of young people studying science and engineering subjects at A-level and beyond is declining; young people should have an understanding of the importance of science and technology to the world around them; and that UK space industry (including technology, engineering, space science, Earth observation science) must renew itself.”

BRINGING SPACE INTO SCHOOL

Professor Martin Barstow, University of Leicester

Published by PPARC on behalf of the British National Space Centre Partnership
October 2005

“It has become more and more difficult to persuade young people to follow a career in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics) subjects. Across the EU, the number of graduates in STEM subjects has dropped from 24.3% in 2002 to 22.6% in 2011” (Source EUSTAT)

It was Martin Barstow’s report in 2005 that started my attempt to interest people in Science and Technology,

At Ormiston Victory Academy (OVA) for the past two years, we have embarked on a program to enthuse pupils to study science related subject through the medium of Astronomy. We teach Edexcel GCSE Astronomy to a joint parent and pupil group. They study together and at the end of the course, both take the GCSE examination.

The idea is that the pupils see that science is important to their parents and that a very practical facet of science is also fun. Astronomy is a multidisciplinary course bringing together elements of Science, Maths, Technology, Geography and History. It is hoped that the enthusiasm shown by the pupils will spill over into the mainstream subjects including maths.

The parents get an idea of the work and level of knowledge required by their children to complete a GCSE level subject. They also report back that they find it a confidence raising activity that they can still learn new information. It is also an opportunity to take Science out into the community as an outreach event.

Spaceschool.org.uk is a company that takes space and rocket themed activities out to primary and secondary schools in East Anglia along with youth and adult groups such as Rainbow, Brownies, Guides, Cubs, Scouts and Aeronautical and Engineering interest groups. It also provides advice to TV, film and museums in the area.

Future plans include launching a mobile digital planetarium scheme to interested parties in East Anglia to replace the current holes in a dome system available for only three months of the year at present. East Anglia is often viewed as behind the times in terms of infrastructure and outlook by the rest of the UK. I want to show that we can have cutting edge resources along with all of the UK.