

## Space Education Quality Mark Case Study 2022

### Sharples School, Bolton

#### Bronze award 2020/21



Sharples School is a secondary school and the only Science Specialist College in Bolton. The school has its own observatory. In 2020/21 the school had 1078 pupils on roll. Just under 43% of pupils on roll did not speak English as a first language (substantially higher than the 2020/21 national average of 17.2%) and 32.7% of pupils were eligible for free school meals, again higher than the 2020/21 national average of 23.7%. The school's most recent Ofsted report in May 2019 rated Sharples as a 'good' school. The school's Progress 8 score<sup>1</sup> is 'well above average'. In 2019, 86% of pupils entered achieved GCSE combined science grades of 4-4 and above.

The Space Education Lead at Sharples School, Jake Harding, is relatively new to the school, having joined in September 2020. Jake teaches physics but also has a Masters in astrophysics and so was keen to revitalise the observatory. The observatory was built on school grounds in 2015 but had not been used following the retirement of a previous member of staff. With the support of the Headteacher, Jake explored the options to develop space education within the school and discovered the SEQM. Jake saw the SEQM as a potential 'framework' to help develop the space curriculum at Sharples School.

#### Experience of applying for the SEQM

Jake found the SEQM application process straightforward and made good use of the example evidence slides provided to ensure that the submission included the right level of detail. Jake gradually collated the evidence required for submission and valued the fact that this could be done over time without having a significant impact on his existing workload.

*"That's why I picked to do it [SEQM], because I knew that it wouldn't increase my workload throughout the year."*

Jake also appreciated feedback from a SEQM assessor on the draft action plan, particularly on ideas for visits and activities. The action plan was written during a period of increased COVID-19 restrictions in schools, and the assessor was able to offer suggestions around virtual alternatives to meet the SEQM criteria. The assessor awarded Sharples School a Bronze award.

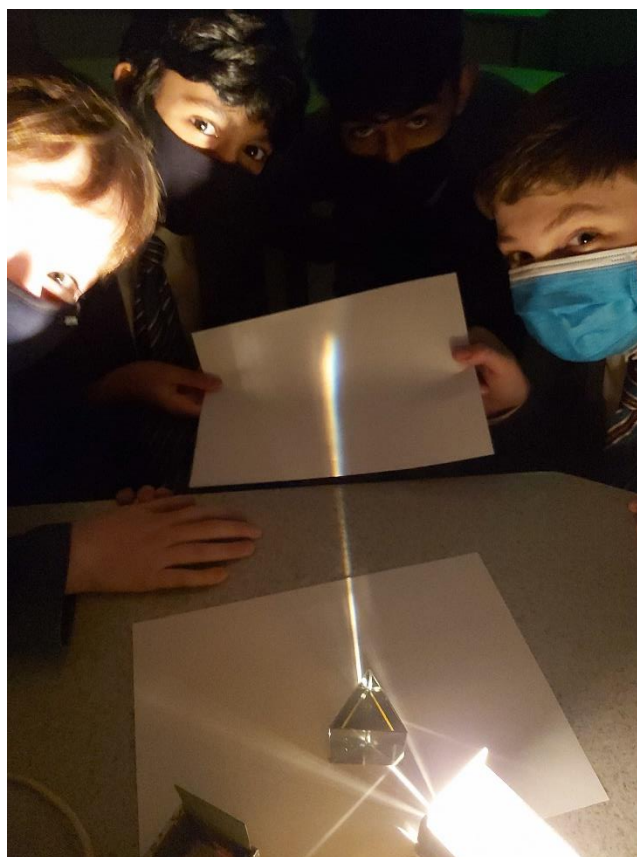
Despite COVID-19 restrictions Sharples School has been able to offer pupils a range of virtual experiences, including a talk from a Canadian astronaut.

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<sup>1</sup> This score shows how much progress pupils at this school made between the end of key stage 2 and the end of key stage 4, compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

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*"We had a Canadian astronaut talk to us from Houston, which was fantastic. That was the highlight of our space programme last year... that was really great, they were happy to do it, because it was virtual, of course."*



### **Impact of the SEQM**

Having the SEQM as a 'framework' for space education has enabled the school to increase the amount of space-themed learning across the curriculum. The school library also has enhanced space content so that interested pupils can be directed to this.

*"Every year group, across all abilities, have now some sort of space themed activity, whether it's in lessons or outside of lessons, throughout the year. And that will continue now as they go through, now that we have that programme."*

The feedback from pupils on the various events was very positive, and alongside the expansion of key stage 3 space resources in lesson time, this has stimulated interest in space. The increased focus on space has led to the introduction of GCSE Astronomy as

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an option with an initial cohort of 30 pupils, which has expanded to at least two more classes.

*"We've made Astronomy part of our actual curriculum now. So that was a big success for the school."*

In terms of extra curricular activities, the school runs a STEM Club and a Star Wars Club, which provides a fun route into space education and STEM more widely.

*"We found that [Star Wars Club] is a hook to get [pupils] into the more serious events that we run, and observatory sessions."*



Jake noted that space education plays a key role within the school as a source of 'awe and wonder' and has widened the aspirations of some pupils to consider a career in Astrophysics. Two pupils are currently putting letters together to see if they can secure shadowing opportunities with a local university Physics and Astronomy department.

*"They're seriously considering now Astrophysics as a career. Whereas, you know, this time last year, it wouldn't have even been on their radar. So I think it's inspirational and aspirational."*

Some parental/community involvement has also happened on the back of the SEQM activities, for example a parent who volunteers as a Scout leader invited the school to

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organise an astronomy evening including activities that would count towards the Scouts Astronomy badge.

The SEQM award and subsequent introduction of GCSE Astronomy has sparked an interest amongst other STEM teachers. For example, a chemistry teacher has expressed an interest in teaching on the GCSE Astronomy course.

**The future**

Sharples School is keen to build on the momentum that has been generated by the SEQM award and are in the process of applying for a Silver award. A key objective of Jake's is to engage more teachers with the delivery of space education to ensure that this becomes embedded within the school for the long term.

*"It has accelerated very quickly, and we're at a good place now. But I think now my goal is to sustain it. And that needs other people, rather than just me, involved with organising and facilitating these sessions.*