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"We want children to develop mastery rather than a superficial knowledge or a few tricks to help them get through tests. We'd like to see them prepared for real life rather than exams."

McCormack said that a fear of maths among some parents was being passed to children, adding: "Not everyone is Stephen Hawking, but we believe that the majority of children can reach a good level of competency. At the moment, expectations are too low."

Meanwhile, maths hubs, 35 of which opened across the country last September at a cost of £11 million, are enabling schools to introduce mastery by bringing together local schools to share best practice. Pete Sides, until recently head of maths at Notre Dame High School in Sheffield, leads the South Yorkshire maths hub. "For a long time there has been pressure on teachers to achieve progress, at the expense of pupils gaining a balance between conceptual understanding and procedural fluency," he said. "Kids end up able to do the maths without really understanding it. Mastery blows that out of the water."

The South Yorkshire hub is led by Notre Dame, a successful Catholic school, and around 150 primaries in the area are currently registered. Sides is helping teachers from these schools introduce the mastery technique. "I believe we're on the brink of a revolution in maths education," said Sides. "It'll take five or maybe 10 years, but for the first time with the maths hubs it's the educators leading rather than academics and politicians."

This autumn, the Shanghai Exchange programme will be extended to secondary-school maths teachers. Through the hubs, those who have taken part help teachers in their area to benefit from their experience.

"A lot of schools are already experimenting and the hub is about bringing together good ideas and successful teaching and spreading them as widely as possible," said Sides. "We can learn from high-achieving countries such

THE TEACHER WHO INSPIRED ME



A music scholarship took me from my unremarkable local school in Doncaster to Stonyhurst College in 1973 at the age of 14, writes Jonathan Plowright. As I had already

shown a natural ability for playing the piano, my mother, who unknown to me had been diagnosed with cancer, organised the audition so my future education would be taken care of in her absence. She changed the course of my life forever, but the teacher I had there would eventually inspire me to keep to that course.

I initially studied with the excellent director of music and organist at Stonyhurst, Anthony John, who soon realised I needed more specialised piano tuition, and so it was arranged that I would study with his old professor from the Royal Academy of Music, Alexander Kelly.

Himself a pupil of Harold Craxton at the academy, Alex was a respected teacher. When he died, much too soon aged 67, his *Times* obituary said he "combined a capacity to judge at the highest level with an exceptional gift for inspiring young musicians of all abilities". A fine pianist, he made his debut at the Royal Festival Hall with Sir Thomas Beecham.

Once a month I would travel to London by train and have a generous four- or five-hour lesson at his house in Barnes. Afterwards it usually turned into a family affair around the kitchen table, as I was entertained to tea by his wife (the late cellist Margaret Moncrieff) and his

disarmingly bright daughters Alison and Catriona, before travelling back up to Lancashire. The whole day was completely exhausting.

However, I was like many boys of that age, a sullen and unresponsive teenager, not really wanting to play the piano at all. Alex knew that the last thing I needed was to be pushed into practice. Instead he encouraged and patiently let me find my own "voice". Later on, when I studied with him at the Royal Academy, he treated me more like an equal and we would have long discussions, and bounce ideas off each other. This relationship grew, eventually extending to late nights in the pub (much to the annoyance of his wife). He was a great character and his lessons were invariably entertaining – I remember once seeing him jump up on to a piano and dance a jig just to demonstrate a rhythm.

When the official lessons stopped and I started performing, after every concert I would receive a barely legible handwritten note of encouragement in the post, often finished off with a sharply observed and humorous witticism (usually written on the train back to Barnes late at night). He always gave generously of his time and energy in this way – something I later learned he did for all of his pupils. He loved to write, especially poetry: in fact he published a book of his own poems in 1986, which celebrate music, teaching and his Catholic faith.

I often find myself quoting him in my own lessons now – after all, great teaching inspires teachers to inspire.

Jonathan Plowright is one of the UK's leading concert pianists, currently recording the complete Brahms solo piano works on BIS Records. He is head of keyboard at the University of Chichester, West Sussex.