



Trust schools are forging links with Chinese universities, and financier Arpad Basson (right), founder of Ark Schools, with actress Uma Thurman.



Photographer: Gary Rogers

Academies woo international finance

They can now accept overseas investment and are attracting foreign students to come here

By Jonathan Milne

TRUST SCHOOLS and academies are establishing formal links with overseas partners and foreign investors as far away as China. Despite being in the state sector, their structures allow them to accept support from American millionaires or the expanding Chinese education market. Martin Finegold, an American hedge fund entrepreneur, is sponsoring two academies in Basildon, Essex. The 50-year-old has a house in England and his children are educated here.

Jennifer Moses and Ron Beller,

high-flying investment bankers whose society wedding featured in the *New York Times*, are sponsoring the ARK Schools. King Solomon Academy in Westminster.

ARK Schools was founded by philanthropist Arpad "Arke" Basson, 44, a Swiss-French financier who is dating Hollywood actress Uma Thurman and has two children with model Elle Macpherson.

Like Mr Finegold, Ms Moses and Mr Beller made their money with Goldman Sachs in New York and are involved with ARK Schools, the education charity that is setting up five academies around London. Ms

Moses and her husband also have children in the English school system. "It's giving something back to the community," Ms Moses said.

"If you are at all passionate about social mobility, then education is the absolutely key."

Although statistics backed up the perception that Americans are more philanthropic than Britons, she said it was because state spending was lower. "The failure of the school system — here and arguably in the US — to help poor children perform is a major problem," said Ms Moses.

"The academies programme offers more chances for poor children to achieve where their parents can't move to a different neighbourhood and a better school and don't know how to play the system."

South Wolds Community School

in Nottingham is to be the first trust school to invite an international partner to its trust body.

It is forming a partnership with Nottingham University and its new subsidiary university in Shanghai, allowing the Chinese Ningbo University to send pupils to the school to hone their English-language skills before they attend university.

Alan Smithers, professor of education at the University of Buckingham, said that academy sponsors and trust school partners from overseas might find it more difficult to inject expertise into the schools.

"But if it's just a matter of extra money for schools, then there's no difference between British money and overseas money," he said.

At South Wolds, the Chinese students will spend two years studying

toward A-levels or the International Baccalaureate. The first six Chinese students arrive this year.

Simon Dennis, the headteacher, said the university would join the British Geological Survey and Skillsforce, a British company, as a trust partner. The school will begin offering Mandarin as a language option this year, and staff exchanges with Ningbo University. Ningbo will also market the South Wolds school in China.

Mr Dennis said a positive relationship with Japanese electronics firm Canon had ended. This time he wanted the security of a formal partnership in the trust structure.

"Ningbo won't walk away," he said. "It's not about the money. There's no money involved. It's about the sharing of ideas."