

SOUTHEND COLLEGE WILL SET THE STANDARD, FORMER MINISTER SAYS



■ Striking – Futures Community College's new upper college building

Pictures: AL UNDERWOOD BA37869_002

Futures model to be copied nationwide

By JOHN GEOGHEGAN
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THE man behind a groundbreaking new school in Southend has been asked by the Government to help set up similar vocational centres across the country.

Neil Bates, chief executive of the organisation which runs Futures Community College, has been asked to help revive vocational education for younger pupils nationwide.

Lord Baker – a former Tory Education Secretary in the Thatcher government, when he was Ken Baker – invited Mr Bates at the opening of the new £19.2million upper college building, in Southchurch Boulevard.

The peer was a guest along with current education minister Lord Hill of Oareford.

Futures College offers 11 to 19-year-old pupils a combination of academic and job-related learning. The new building is for students aged 14-plus and is the first school in the country to offer full apprenticeships.

“The youngsters who come here all feel inspired. It lifts their spirits and improves their self-esteem. This is a revolution in English education. I think it will sweep the country



■ Impressed – former Tory minister Lord Baker and guests including Southend mayor Ann Holland watch pupils at work in the college's hair salon

Lord Baker said: “This is a fantastic and stunning building. It's clearly the best educational building in Southend and probably the best in Essex.

“The youngsters who come here all feel inspired. It lifts their spirits and improves their self-esteem. This is a revolution in English education. I think it will sweep the country.”

“In two or three years, this will be the most popular college in Southend.”

He went on to reveal he had asked Mr Bates to help create many more such schools, adding: “He's going to be our flag-waver.”

Lord Baker paid tribute to Mr Bates's determination in pursuing the project, likening his tenacity to that of Sir Winston Churchill.

Mr Bates and the Tory peer both sit on the board of the Edge Foundation, a body which promotes vocational training.

Lord Baker said he hoped Futures would succeed in its aims of gaining academy status and working with the University of Essex.

The new building has its own apprenticeship centre, a hair and beauty salon and facilities for practical engineering, construction, IT and fashion classes.

Alongside vocational studies, pupils attend courses in academic subjects such as English, maths and science.

Lord Hill added: “We are at the beginning of something new here.”

“I'm extremely keen to be kept in close touch with how things develop.

“This is potentially the beginning of something very profound that will sweep across the country. Futures College is a pioneer.”



■ National role – chief executive Neil Bates

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