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You are in: [Home](#) \ [Teach home](#) \ [What's new?](#) \ [Monthly news](#) \ [Monthly news - Previous issues](#) \ [Monthly news: November 2005](#) \ [Winning ways](#)

Monthly news - Winning ways

Shuffling numbers as a trainee accountant, 23-year-old Richard Wallis decided there must be more to life than being stuck in an office. Fast forward 33 years and Richard is standing in a school assembly being presented with the Head Teacher of the Year award by Pride and Prejudice actress Brenda Blethyn.

Turning it around

"Teaching is the best job in the world," he declares, but his award is for more than just his passion. Richard has been Head of Sandwich Technology School in Kent for the past nine years. When he started nearly a decade ago the children had low self-esteem. "What we needed was a change of culture and a shift in thinking," says Richard who likes to put the emphasis on learning in every lesson. "I wanted to change the attitude from 'I can't do' to 'I can do'." Richard started the school turnaround by investing in state of the art ICT and expanding the number of sports and activities offered to include rugby, fencing and even trampolining. Richard encouraged his teachers to organise puzzle and drama clubs – stopping classes early on Wednesday so everyone could take part.

Globetrotting

The school forged links with France, Singapore, America and Australia. "One year we took our drama cast to Singapore and joined up with drama students there. It was fantastic," Richard recalls. Kids from Sandwich Technology School are now also very active in the community: they have created two mini geo-domes based on the Eden project, have built a cinema which both makes and shows films and regularly contribute to the local carnival by building floats and providing a band. There seems to be no stopping Richard Wallis but he's quick to point out that the school's success is down to his committed team. "I tell my teachers if they have a good idea then they should go for it and not just wait for me to okay it. They can always beg forgiveness later," he says. If you needed any proof that his system works then just take a look at his results: "Our GCSE grades are 66 per cent A*-C which is well above the national average."

Debbi Marco

