

Spotlight on Isaac Newton Academy

Isaac Newton Academy in London was the winner of the 2018 Secondary School of the Year Award at the Shine a Light Awards.

One of the main laws of learning at the Isaac Newton Academy is to support *all* students in acquiring excellent reading, writing and communication skills. Given that 62% of this Ilford academy's students have English as an additional language (EAL), their successes in this field to date are impressive, and last year saw them placed in the top 1% for Year 11 progress!

The academy has a dedicated team of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) staff, who monitor the development of beginner EAL students, helping their progress greatly, but it's Isaac Newton's use of the Harkness Method – an open, student-led approach to education that involves minimal intervention from teachers and staff – that particularly attracted the interest of the Shine a Light judges.

The Harkness Method encourages every student to contribute, and helps to develop key skills in speech, language and communication (SLC). To keep in line with best practice, the school works closely with Phillips Exeter Academy and Wellington College, both of which also use the Harkness Method.

At the same time, the school offers what it calls a "unique enrichment programme", involving students, staff, parents and external facilitators. As part of this, students with SLC needs can attend a weekly extra-curricular Social Club to build up their conversation skills.

Within school hours, students are encouraged to lead assemblies, to apply for leadership roles such as Prefect and Student Ambassador, and to take part in the London and Essex based public speaking competition, 'Jack Petchey's Speak Out Challenge'.

The Shine a Light judges felt that it was this "rich content", combined with the "practical evidence" of their work, that made the Isaac Newton Academy an obvious choice for *Secondary School of the Year 2018*.

In particular, Janet Cooper, Early Language and Communication Strategy Lead at Stoke-on-Trent City Council praised their whole-school approach to SLC, noting that it is "well integrated within other areas of the curriculum." Fellow judge Malcolm Reeve, Director of Firmament Education Ltd added: "the depth of their policies embedded in the life of the school is fantastic, Isaac Newton is a wonderful example of a secondary school supporting communication really well."

For further information about the 2018 Shine a Light Awards visit www.shinealightawards.co.uk and follow us on Twitter #awards_SAL