

Head surprised again at being on the shortlist

Pipped at post for prestigious accolade

by Imogen Blake

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A headteacher shortlisted for a prestigious teaching prize said she was so surprised to be selected that she almost dropped her canape at the lavish awards ceremony.

Francis Holland School head Vivienne Durham was one of four runners-up for Best Head of a Public School at society magazine *Tatler's* annual Schools Awards ceremony, held at The Dorchester hotel earlier this month.

It is not the first time the Belsize Park resident has been shortlisted for a *Tatler* gong, after she was runner-up for Best Headmistress of a Public School in 2007, only three years into her headship at the independent all-girls secondary in Ivor Place, Regent's Park.

Despite the previous nomination, Mrs Durham spoke of her surprise at being shortlisted once

again. I couldn't believe it," she said. "I couldn't believe it in 2007 and when I heard it was me again this year, I almost dropped my canape.

"Frankly, there are hundreds of brilliant heads, but it was lovely."

Stimulating

The 51-year-old, who is married to former University College School headteacher Kenneth Durham, has been at the helm of Francis Holland for 10 years, having been deputy headteacher at the independent South Hampstead High School, Maresfield Gardens, for seven years previously.

She has "no idea" why she was again in the running for the national award, but thought the secret of her success was down to her "brilliant staff".

"As a head, you're only as good as your staff," she said.

"They are all great enthus



■ Headteacher Vivienne Durham with pupils

for their subjects and above all, they enjoy teaching. They provide creative, good, intelligent teaching, which stimulates our young minds.

"They have a very demanding job and they put a lot into it. That is why the school thrives. It is the recipe for a good school."

The academically-selective school – which charges £5,270 per term – has just celebrated impressive A-level results with a third of students getting at least three A grades and nearly 60 per cent achieving A* or A in their exams.

There was cause for cheer on GCSE results day too, with more than 90 per cent of students achieving A*, A and B grades in the last six.

Mrs Durham is dedicated to the academic rigour and happiness of her school, saying it is essential to the quality of studying.

She said: "Exam pressure can have a prosaic, flat effect and I want to keep education exciting and stimulating. These are clever girls and I want them to enjoy it as well as achieve in their exams.

"You have to do your best for every single student in every single lesson."

She said the most rewarding aspect of her job was seeing students thrive. "You are launching them into their adult lives and getting them into the university they want to go to. It's a fulfilling job."

Zoom out