

'If you can't see Mars then you'll never dream of going there'

A Regent's Park school hosted a debate on Wednesday to discuss how the education sector can widen access to the country's elite universities.

Francis Holland School put on the event at St Cyprian's Church where panel members – including leading academics and diversity campaigners – explored issues around ambition, skills and empowerment, and in particular the barriers faced by black and minority ethnic students.

The debate on February 26, chaired by journalist Dame Esther Rantzen DBE, was put on in partnership with All Saints Catholic College, King Solomon Academy and The St Marylebone CE School.

Charles Fillingham, Francis Holland School headmaster, said:

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"I thought it was fascinating and it gave you a chance to consider that schools can make a real difference - private and state schools, all working together.

"We all want the best for the children, and just every now and then you think there's a real chance to do good in the world, whether that's less advantaged children or children from different ethnic backgrounds.

"That's what today was about. I was quite inspired and I'm challenged by what the panellists said."

Professor Graham Virgo QC, University of Cambridge pro-vice chancellor, said greater work is



One of the panels at St Cyprian's Church.

Picture: FRANCIS HOLLAND SCHOOL

needed to reach out to under-represented communities, adding: "It's talking to students, it's going out into communities, engaging with students and listening.

"We can do so much saying 'oh yes you ought to be doing this or that', but it's about listening to them as to what they want and what their concerns are, and responding to that."

SEO London chief exec Andrew Fairbairn said of widening access to higher education: "It's understanding what opportunities are available - if you can't see Mars you'll never dream of going there.

"Number two, it's the belief that you can get there - the sense that if I get in that spaceship I'm actually going to get to Mars and

not blow up halfway along.

"Number three, it's skills and lastly, it's that determination to succeed."

He added: "If the country could rally around those four things - tell people what's available, give them a sense they can access it, give them the tools to survive, and instil a sense of resilience and grit, you're going a long way."

Reunion



Sir Chris Bonington (front row, third from right) was the guest of honour. Picture: KARL NATHAN HILL

Famous faces including mountaineer Sir Chris Bonington, Lord Daniel Finkelstein and comedian Hugh Dennis reunited and reminisced at their old school to celebrate 40 years since their sixth form studies.

University College School Hampstead hosted its Old Gowers' annual dinner with an audience of 180 people

on February 27 to mark its "Class of 1980".

Sir Chris was the guest of honour on an evening to toast 40 years since the Queen reopened the school's Great Hall in 1980, after it was gutted by fire two years earlier.

The Queen recently wrote to the Class of 1980 to pass on her best wishes.

Old Gower Alan Jacobs said: "Whilst life had taken us in

many different directions - academia, media, entertainment, medicine, law, banking, business - we were essentially the same group of lads, just a little gentler with the passing of time.

"A rousing rendition of the school song brought a fantastic evening to a close and we are all looking forward to celebrating the half-century in 10 years' time."

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