

ASPIRE

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TOP BUSINESSWOMEN RISE TO THE CHALLENGE TO HELP LONDON SCHOOLGIRLS SET HIGH-FLYING CAREER GOALS

Senior businesswomen from some of the UK's biggest companies have joined forces to help shape the destinies of 50 London schoolgirls as part of a pioneering leadership development initiative run by Aspire, the organisation for trailblazing women.

The 'Climb the Stairs to Greatness' event saw 26 female leaders from firms including Virgin Media, BT and Telefonica, rise to the challenge of inspiring the future careers of 11 and 12-year-old girls from the Oasis Academy South Bank, one of London's newest schools.

Participating businesswomen led small teams of pupils, empowering the girls to aim high when identifying their dream jobs and passing on tips from their own careers, including the importance of a strong work ethic coupled with a healthy work/life balance.

Carolyn Dawson, Aspire director of open programmes, said: "At Aspire, we believe it's vital to set career aspirations at an early age and there's nothing more motivating for young girls than hearing from a successful, female role model who has achieved her career goals.

"This is the first time we've run an event of this kind and we were overwhelmed by the number of senior women who wanted to put their skills to the test and make a difference at the same time."

Supported by their business mentors, each group also contributed to a multimedia career resource guide which could be rolled out to pupils at the academy and the workshop ended with all 50 girls presenting their work to teachers and parents.

"To help redress the current boardroom imbalance, we need more women leaders and events like these will help us create them," added Carolyn Dawson.

"Everyone who participated learned a great deal from the experience and the girls can now build on the knowledge, confidence and self-belief they gained throughout the day."

It's a view that is shared by the Oasis Academy South Bank's principal, Carly Mitchell, who said: "What an inspiring day for all our youngsters. We have a clear vision for all our young people to go on and secure a great career with prospects. The event helped us on that journey and took us another step closer. Our business volunteers inspired, encouraged and guided our girls into exploring what success will look like for them in the future."

Layla Whiting, quality manager at Pepsico International, who was one of the 26 leaders taking part, said: "I had the most amazing day. It was scary stepping into the unknown but, I am so glad that I did! The energy was contagious and I came away feeling both inspired and so much more confident in myself as a leader. It was an experience I won't forget."

Going forward, Aspire is planning to hold mentoring lunches at the academy three times a year, enabling the businesswomen who took part in the pioneering event to continue their work with the pupils. The organisation is also looking to run similar sessions elsewhere in the UK as part of its work to positively impact the lives of women and girls.

Two of the 26 business volunteers help shape the future careers of pupils at Oasis Academy South Bank



Layla Whiting, quality manager at Pepsico International



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