

Aamna is 19 and was previously Head Girl at Essa Academy.

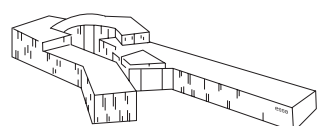
# Aamna's **incredible journey** through Essa Academy has given her **more chances in life** than she could ever have expected

## The right answer to an unspoken question

Aamna was a student at the school during and following its transition period into Academy status and she explains why, despite initial scepticism from her peers and their families, she believes the change was the best thing that could have happened:

"I was one of many people who questioned the need for change but it soon became clear, even to me at 14 years of age, that the new measures and resources which Essa Academy put into place were hugely beneficial in many ways. I feel that I am exceptionally fortunate that I have been one of those to benefit in more ways than I could have imagined."

**essa**  
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'All Will Succeed'



## Mutual respect

Aamna had always been closely involved with extra-curricular school life, such as with the School Council and various charity initiatives, but when she became a member of the new Academy Senate she felt she had finally found a voice. "It became clear that we were being taken seriously as young people with something to offer and with valid opinions, and we found that the student/teacher barriers were being broken down. The new teaching staff members, as well as the existing ones, embraced the fact that the students' views were important and that respecting us as intelligent people was just as valuable as any other aspect of the school curriculum."

## Trusting the adults of the future

One example of this attitude is in the way that members of the Academy Senate were given the chance to interview potential teaching staff. "That was an incredible experience and one I will never forget," says Aamna. "To be trusted to that extent felt fantastic and it was a real learning curve. I believe that we were able to ask questions that even experienced teachers might not have felt able to or which might not have occurred to them but which reflected our point of view as students. I'm absolutely sure that we voted for the right candidates!"

## Giving and gaining through charity

It is the quality of the teaching staff which Aamna greatly appreciates, not just for the fact that exam grades have soared in recent years but also for their ethos. "My teachers at Essa have been massively inspirational and taught me that I can achieve anything I want but also that I should give something back in return – as many of them have done themselves. That is what has given me the impetus to go out and work for charity as much as I can. I and most of my peers on the Academy Senate have helped to raise a lot of money for many different local and international causes. It has been a pleasure to do so." Aamna was a recipient of the Princess Diana Award for her charity work, both through Essa and through other projects.

## A new future for every child

Aamna has seen many other instances of Essa's innovative and effective approach to modern education, and which illustrate the Academy's mission of 'All Will Succeed.' "I have seen teachers turn around the life of a disruptive student by giving him faith in his abilities and making him into a highly respected representative of the academy. I have seen how they inspire every student to achieve academically and in all aspects of their lives, and I have seen how much difference they can make to young people who may not have had many other opportunities. It might sound a bit cheesy but it is true – Essa Academy teaches you to not simply accept an inevitable future but how to dream and realise a new one."



## Beyond belief

Many of Essa's students talk about the 'opportunity and experience' it has offered them, things they would not have expected from a secondary education, and Aamna would be the first to endorse this view. "Innovations such as the introduction of interactive technology to support learning; I personally had often used IT resources for research but when it was rolled out at Essa it gave me so much more. We were encouraged to look on our iPads as something to be used as we wished, and that made everyone feel it to be a personal asset rather than a 'school tool' – so everyone looked after them and used them effectively. Experiences like the Debating Team taught us how to champion our opinions, present a coherent case – and win against teams we had thought vastly superior! At Essa we are taught to believe in ourselves and that we are worth believing in."

## Standing up to be counted

Aamna has been awarded a place at Edinburgh University to study Speech and Language Therapy but she will be taking two weeks out of her first semester to travel to America. The charity work she has done together with the public speaking experience she has gained persuaded UCAS to ask her to visit universities across the USA to talk about the value, rewards and responsibilities of education.

"Essa Academy has played a huge part in making me who I am," says Aamna. "I am a living example of how a person who was terrified of speaking in public can stand up and represent to others the best of what our country has to offer. I have had an incredible journey through Essa Academy and I will always thank the people there who have made it all possible."

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