A photograph of a young man, Michael Knight, and an older woman, his grandmother, standing outdoors. Michael is on the right, wearing a green and white striped polo shirt, with his arm around his grandmother's shoulder. His grandmother is on the left, wearing glasses, a pink top, and a white and black patterned cardigan. They are both smiling at the camera. The background shows green foliage and a wooden fence.

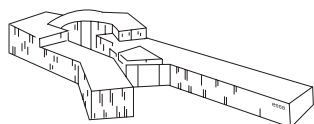
Michael Knight, now employed as a chef, has just achieved 'Student of the Year, for the Catering Department at the College he studied at. He is a previous Head Boy of Essa Academy.

## Michael believes in Essa Academy because Essa Academy believed in him

### A new start

Michael Knight is a previous Head Boy of Essa Academy, where he studied for five years before taking up his current college course. In fact, he was at Essa for slightly less than five years, joining halfway through Year 7 because of a move from another part of the country. "It wasn't easy coming in to the school later than everyone else as they had all formed their friendship groups by the time I started. However, my teachers understood the situation and made sure I had 'buddies' to show me round and help me fit in which made things much easier, and I now count those buddies amongst the good circle of friends I made while I was at Essa."

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## Making a difference

This is an example of what Michael describes as the friendly and caring approach of the teachers at Essa Academy. "There is no obvious hierarchy and everyone gets on very well – teachers, directors and students alike – and for a shy young boy like I used to be that made all the difference. I don't recognise the boy I used to be and there is no doubt in my mind that I am as strong and confident as I am now because of what Essa did for me."

## The tools for success

Michael believes that the balance the school maintains between promoting independence and providing a support network when necessary is the key to his own success, and that of many of his fellow students. "We were all encouraged to take responsibility for our learning but there was always someone to turn to for help and advice if we needed it," he says. "The attitude was 'here are the tools, now go and use them', and that made me believe in my abilities. That is a huge advantage for anyone to be given – faith in oneself, and it certainly worked for me."

## There for the taking

The role of Head Boy is something Michael is happy to have undertaken and one which further underpinned his confidence. "I was probably nominated partly because I work pretty hard and have always tried to involve myself in school activities. I enjoyed being a member of the School Council and being a prefect, as well as representing the school at various functions and events. I liked the fact that the opportunities were there if you wish to take them."

## Embracing the future

Lesley was naturally extremely proud of Michael's achievement and has a lot of praise for the school in general. "He received a lot of support when he joined half way through the year, and even though it was a very different place and environment to that which he had been used to it was never an issue in any way and it didn't take very long for him to feel at home there. I was impressed with how the school sought input from us as parents, too, such as when we were invited to meet representatives from Apple to discuss the introduction of learning-based technology. Although the value of books and handwriting should never be underestimated, IT is the future and should be embraced and exploited. I was so convinced by what we saw that I now have my own iPad – not something I would have expected!"

## Smoothing the way

Until he was about 15, Michael had been considering taking Business Studies at college but, when he eventually decided to take a completely different direction, was pleased to find that his teachers were happy to support him completely. "I thought about Business Studies because it was something I was good at but when it came down to it I felt I should concentrate on doing something I really loved, so I applied for a course in Catering instead. My teachers fully accepted this



and were very helpful in their advice, helping me to research possibilities and providing me with the means to find out as much as possible in preparation for applications. They were fantastic and made the whole process very easy and smooth."

## More than a school

To Michael, Essa Academy is more than a school; rather, it is the place which he fully believes has helped him recognise his own talents and support towards what is likely to be a great career. "Essa encouraged me to be ambitious and to do everything possible to realise those ambitions. For that I am very grateful indeed to everyone there."

**Essa Academy, Lever Edge Lane, Bolton,  
United Kingdom, BL3 3HH.**

**t: +44(0)1204 333222 e: [info@essaacademy.org](mailto:info@essaacademy.org)**

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