

Aiman Mahmood is 14 years old and in Year 9 at Essa Academy.



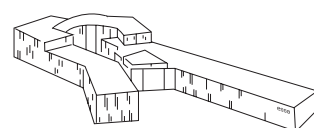
Aiman's dislike of **computer technology** has disappeared, and she is now showing **other schools** how they too can **benefit**

Rising to the challenge

In some ways it is surprising that Aiman chose Essa Academy over the other available schools in the area, given that she was the only one of her friends from primary school who did so. In addition, she admits to having been something of a technophobe, disliking most forms of computer and IT equipment which, at Essa, plays a very large part in presenting the curriculum. However, sensibly deciding to keep all her options open, she and her parents visited Essa as well as several other secondary schools and it was her initial impression which convinced her that Essa was the right place for her:

"Everyone was so bright and bubbly! It all felt very friendly and welcoming and I just loved everything I saw," she says. "Somehow I didn't get the same feeling about the other schools we looked at so even though I knew it would be a challenge for me I also knew it was what I wanted."

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A new awareness

Indeed, Aiman did find it difficult at first, struggling initially with the virtually paperless lessons and homework, and having to learn how to use her iPad. She also missed her friends and spent a lot of time in tears while she tried to come to terms with this completely different way of learning. "The first few weeks were hard but all the teachers were so kind and helpful it didn't take very long before I adjusted and really started to appreciate that this was a great way to work. I also loved the 'Pod' system, which made it easy to make friends with my classmates and get used to my new school. Part of the reason I am so happy at Essa now is because of the relationship between the staff and students, which is a close one and based on mutual respect."

Instant access

Aiman now describes her iPad as a 'digital pencil case', and something she would not wish to be without. "Wherever I am, I can be instantly in touch with my teachers if I have a question and I can email in my homework and get instant feedback if necessary. Everything I need is available at my fingertips and accessible to the teacher so I don't have to wait to get answers. It has made such a difference and now I am completely converted!"

Spreading the word

So much so, that Aiman is one of several students who have become ambassadors for Essa Academy, attending meetings, conferences and conventions around the country and abroad, demonstrating how the use of technology has revolutionised their learning. "It was a bit scary at first, standing up in front of strangers and explaining what we are doing at Essa," she says, "but it was great to see how intrigued other people are, and how interested in what we had to say. Taking part in events like this has definitely made me more confident and outgoing so that is an added bonus!"

Life skills for the future

Understandably, many of Aiman's friends from primary school are envious of the opportunities she has had through attending Essa Academy, opportunities she would quite probably have missed out on in other circumstances. "I can't speak for everyone, but from my point of view Essa teaches much more than academics; it makes students into confident and mature people who have the social skills which help so much in adult life. Everything I have done at Essa is available to all its students, not just a privileged few, so everyone has the same chance to make the most of what's on offer. If you are interested and willing, and prepared to make the effort, everything is there for you."

Making the most of opportunity

Aiman's mother, Musarrat, could not agree more. "I am very proud of my daughter and so pleased that she has been given so many wonderful opportunities at Essa. She has made the most of them and appreciates how lucky she is to be studying there. For myself, I find the teachers kind, approachable and helpful and they are always very reassuring if I ever have any concerns, but those are very few."



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