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In the footsteps of the great man?

14 January 2024



The great orator **Sir Winston Churchill** was born in **Blenheim Palace** in 1874. 150 years later **Epsom**'s own **Blenheim High School** became a nursery for the next generation of orators. Twenty-one students from four local schools took part in **Youth Speaks**: A Debate Competition on Thursday 11th January 2024 evening at the Longmead Road school. Many adults run shy of public speaking, so to see and hear students speaking with such confidence and assurance was wonderful.

This local heat of the national competition was once again organised jointly by the Rotary Clubs of Banstead, Epsom and Sutton Nonsuch. Teams from The Beacon School, St Philomena's and Wilsons School took part in the Intermediate section (11 – 13 years old) with teams from Blenheim High School and Wilsons in the Senior (14 to 17) section. Each team consists of a Chairperson, a Proposer and an Opposer.

The team from The Beacon School got the Intermediate competition underway debating that 'footballers' income should be taxed at a higher rate'. St Philomena's discussed whether 'social media makes us less social', an important topic that affects many of us today. The team from Wilsons gave us a lively discussion on 'climate change being the most pressing issue facing us'. In her summary, chair of judges Ros Rokison said that the team were outstanding and they were adjudged the winners of the Intermediate competition.

In the senior section both teams provided the large audience, which included Epsom and Ewell Mayor Cllr **Robert Geleit** (Labour Court Ward), with lively debates. The proposal that 'the extra-curriculum is more important than the standard curriculum' was debated by an excellent team from Blenheim High School. The proposer of this motion was particularly persuasive.

Then the proposal 'this house believes extremism is inevitable' was debated by a team from Wilsons. Although they exceeded the time limit of fifteen minutes, all three students were outstanding for content and delivery and they won the senior competition.

The three Rotary clubs thanked the excellent judges Ros Rokison and Ken Rokison. Ros gave each of the twenty-one students useful constructive feedback.

Public speaking is a hard skill to master, but such a useful skill to acquire and Rotary is proud to have given these young people this opportunity.

John Chamberlain.

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