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News Release

East London school debaters get their day in top Commonwealth court

Students from Morpeth School, which is part of the Cambridge Heath Sixth Form partnership in East London, are celebrating Commonwealth Week (7-14 March) by honing their debating skills in a historic court room which usually hears some of the most important legal cases in the Commonwealth.

On Friday 14 March, members of the Bethnal Green school's Mooting Club will be hosted by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council (JCPC), which serves as the final court of appeal for many smaller Commonwealth countries and historically was the top appeal court for the whole of the British Empire.

This is the first time that the JCPC, which is co-located with the UK Supreme Court, will host this special educational day. The UK Supreme Court has been running educational days for schools, colleges and legal students since its opening in 2009.

The Year 12 and 13 students will be taking part in a legal debate, more traditionally known as a 'moot', based on a previous case heard the JCPC. Ten years ago the JCPC heard a case regarding the building of the controversial Chalillo dam in Belize, which was designed to create a permanent source of water to generate electricity all year round for the hydroelectric power stations on the Macal river.

A group of organisations opposed to the proposed dam took the Department of Environment in Belize to court alleging that the environmental impact assessment was inadequate and sought an injunction to restrain the works pending.

The students will take sides in the debate, and prepare their arguments to be heard by a panel of their peers – who will sit in the same seats used by the JCPC judges during actual appeals. The students will be mentored ahead of their court performance by some of the Supreme Court's Judicial Assistants, who work as legal researchers for the Justices.

Jenny Rowe, Chief Executive of the UK Supreme Court and the JCPC, said, “We are pleased to welcome Morpeth School students to find out more about the work of the JCPC and how it helps uphold and interpret the law of a number of Commonwealth countries. Since 2009, we have held approximately 50 moots giving around 1,000 young people and law students an opportunity to demonstrate their legal debating skills in the highest court in the land.”

Samina Zaman, a teacher at Morpeth School, said, “The students are really looking forward to taking part in this inaugural debate at the JCPC. Taking part in debates like this gives pupils a fantastic opportunity to develop their transferrable skills which they will be able to use throughout the rest of their lives with the added bonus of receiving training in debating from professional young lawyers and barristers in a prestigious setting.”

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