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Triumph of the nerds

By Paul Teed

pteed@london.newsquest.co.uk

A 15-year-old schoolgirl scooped the top prize in a public speaking competition with her talk about "nerds".

Poonam Gareja, a pupil at Brentford School for Girls, won over the audience and judges at Feltham Community College with her funny and animated speech.

She spoke about her role-models such as "nerd to the core" Bill Gates, as well as Barack Obama who "has read all the Harry Potter novels and collects Spider-Man comics".

It led to her winning the Hounslow final of the Jack Petchey Foundation's Speak Out challenge last Thursday.

She was presented with an iPod touch, and will now go through to the grand final on July 9 next year.



Proud of nerds: Poonam Gareja during her winning speech

Picture: Tony Preece

She said: "Being a winner is the best feeling ever. I am extremely proud of myself and have definitely represented the nerds of the world."

Councillor Barbara Harris, deputy mayor of Hounslow, presented Poonam with her prize.

She said: "I think youngsters do not get the praise they deserve, but tonight they did. I was

absolutely overwhelmed by the standard of speaking."

Isabel Trapp, from the Green School for Girls, was second with her talk about security guards and Amirah Kaba, from Heathland School, came in third with her talk on exams.

Other topics ranged from terrorism and war, to food, music, hip-hop and designer babies.

About 450 year 10 students from 12 Hounslow schools took part in the world's biggest youth speaking event.

It saw them all receiving a full day of training in public speaking and effective communication.

Up to 20,000 youngsters are expected to compete for more than £25,000 in prizes in the final.

The Jack Petchey Foundation gives grants to programmes and projects that benefit young people aged between 11 and 25.

Did you take part in the competition?

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