

Wednesday, February 28, 2007



**B** EING a movie-and-Nandos kind of girl instead of a fine-wine-and-dine one, I have not encountered "The Velvet Rope" syndrome until very recently.

This syndrome that I speak of refers to the practice of excluding people at events/bars/clubs due to their status/importance or lack thereof.

As I writer (dahling), I have done a lot more air kissing and schmoozing over the past year than in all the twenty-three years that preceded it. Whilst we all have a need to feel special, the elitist approach taken by many event organizers leaves me feeling uncomfortable.

I understand that if an establishment wants to uphold a reputation, it cannot let all and sundry inside its doors but I have attended events where my personal guests (who were dressed better than me!) were not let into the "exclusive" area simply because they did not work in media. Those marked as important enough sat a few feet away, sipping complimentary drinks and generally acting too cool for school.

It all struck me as a little petty; if you are important, you get to consume your drinks in the special area whilst the masses are left to fester in the cesspit that is...erm, the other side of the rope.

It is a syndrome that affects a large group of Londoners.

There are websites devoted to getting people on THE guestlist whilst fashion magazines feature tips on how to "blag it". What is this obsession with exclusivity?

I personally have more fun in a crowd of real people than one full of people who need a gold band on their wrists to believe that they are important.

**Kia Abdullah is a 24-year-old author from Limehouse.**

Her first novel, *Life, Love and Assimilation*, was a huge success and she has already embarked on her second book, a crime thriller. Send your comments to [kia.abdullah@gmail.com](mailto:kia.abdullah@gmail.com)

# Docklands school proves state system does work

By **BEN WELCH**  
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**N** EARLY two months after former education secretary Ruth Kelly pulled her son out of a Docklands state school because she wanted "to do the right thing" for her autistic son, another one nearby has been commended for the quality of its teaching for children with special needs.

The Phoenix school in Bow, which caters for children with autism, has been granted 'special status' by the Government for the innovative way it sets about boosting children's ability

to communicate and interact.

Ms Kelly, *pictured right*, was heavily criticised for removing her son from a state school in her home bor-



ough of Tower Hamlets, and sending him to Bruern Abbey School in Chesterton, Oxfordshire, that caters for boys aged 7-13 with dyslexia, and costs £15,000 a year.

Amidst the controversy, Tower Hamlets, which has six state special needs schools plus a support centre, said it provided "a first class service for the borough's children" and is confident that its schools are "well resourced", providing "high quality education for all learners, including those with special needs."

And the recent success of the Phoenix School, for pupils aged 3-16, supports this claim. The school is one of only 15 special schools just given special status by the Department for Education and Science.

Among techniques used by the school are a water therapy area and fully equipped sensory studio.

Children are encouraged to take part in a wide range of school-based and outside activities – including music therapy, yoga, dance therapy, riding and swimming.

The special status will enable the school to build a new arts studio and develop its work-related curriculum –

intended to give students skills standing them in good stead when they leave school. This will include a cafe run for, and by, the students – and horticultural training.

The school will also be working closely with the local community to increase awareness of autism.

Commenting on Phoenix's new status, Tower Hamlets lead member for children's services, councillor Helal Abbas, said: "It is excellent news that the exciting work taking place at this school has been recognised in this way."

"Our special schools are among the best in the country – and I'd like to congratulate staff and students alike for the hard work they put in day-in and day-out."

He added "Receiving special status will enable Phoenix to build on the significant strides the school has made over recent years – and help the children fulfil their potential."

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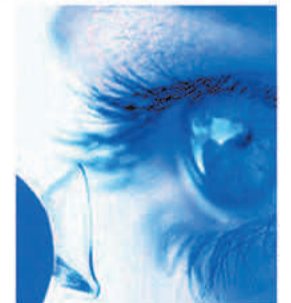
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