

Innovative project will help pupils embark on a medical career

PUPILS as young as 11 are being targeted for medical careers thanks to a project aimed at raising career aspirations.

Set up by staff from St Matthew Academy in St Joseph's Vale, Blackheath, and NHS Lewisham, the scheme gives pupils in Year 7 and Year 8 practical information and advice a career in medicine. It is designed to inspire them from an early age so they can be helped throughout the rest of their school life, particularly when choosing their GCSE and A-level subjects.

Thirty students from nine schools in Lewisham including 10 from St Matthew Academy are set to take part in a series of workshops, demonstrations, hospital visits and GP surgery visits over five days, starting on Monday.

They will also get a chance to discuss ethical and medical issues with doctors and will spend a day with students and staff at King's College Medical School in Denmark Hill.

Any who show real potential and commitment during the course will be invited to join an ongoing programme of regular mentoring, tutorials, visits to King's and Lewisham Hospital, and work placements.

They will also get a chance to apply for King's extended medical degree programme after their A-levels.

Ben Smith, senior leader in science at St Matthew Academy said: "We have been talking to NHS Lewisham for four months about setting up this project.

"We know there are many exceedingly intelligent young people in Lewisham's schools, but without the family background, connections or expectation, they've got very little chance of getting into medical school.

"This programme is about finding students with potential and giving them those advantages.

"It will raise these pupils' aspirations and give them the boost they need to compete in a very tough academic environment."

Dr Daniel Ruta, NHS Lewisham's director of public health, added:

"If we can develop a stream of doctors who come from Lewisham they will be more likely to understand and empathise with the issues and problems of Lewisham patients."

● Do you think the project is a good idea? Email mercury@slp.co.uk