

Inspired to excel

Businesswomen encourage girls to dream big

By **Trudy Simpson**

A SCHOOLGIRL has been inspired to dream big after meeting nine black businesswomen who are at the top of their fields.

Rebecca Iheanacho told *The Voice*: "I felt inspired. Most of them started out like me. I

have my insecurities and it inspired me to know that I could amount to someone like them in the future."

Rebecca, 14, who wants to be an indie rock musician and singer, was one of 120 students at St Matthew Academy in south London who got the

chance to meet, hear the success stories of and ask the panel of nine black businesswomen questions about their lives and businesses.

The women included Foluke Akinlose MBE, *Precious* magazine and awards founder, Claudine Reid MBE, owner of PJ's Community Service, Eryca Freemantle, international makeup artist, Natasha Faith, CEO of luxury jewellery brand La Diosa, ITV presenter Charlene White, Jessica Huie, CEO of Colorblind Cards, and Afua Adom of *Pride* magazine.

HOPE

Rebecca added: "It just gave me more hope and faith and strength in pursuing what I want to become, because the businesswomen spoke about their lives... how they had been bullied or were in a car accident, or how they fought the teachers who did not believe they would amount to anything."



ENTERPRISING: St Matthew schoolgirls with black businesswomen

The nine women were among 100 businesswomen being honoured at St Matthew Academy to mark International Women's Day on March 8, at an event called Enterprising Women of the Future.

"The idea of the 100 women was that it was the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day. We invited 100 girls who are of the future and 100 businesswomen. The aim

was then to hear them speak and to have them interact at the end," said Martin Nirsimloo, St Matthew's vice principal.

During the event, Akinlose also gave the Precious Award 2011 to St Matthew's most enterprising girl, Nicollete Raymundo.

Akinlose also launched Precious Girls, a national competition that aims to engage young women and

girls in enterprise alongside raising money for charity.

"As well as inspiring the 120 girls that were at the event, the night also showcased the range of terrific London-based women of colour who are doing great things in business and leadership," Akinlose said.

Faith added: "I was so proud to be amongst such a wonderful panel and energetic girls of the future."



MADE UP: St Matthew students Natalya (left) and Rebecca stand with Eryca Freemantle



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