

Muslim speaker on post-Paris stigma

Multi-faith celebration day is hailed a success

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JUST days after attacks by Islamist terrorists supposedly in the name of her religion, a Muslim speaker challenged misconceptions about her faith with students in Bedhill.

On November 13 at least 129 people died in seven coordinated terrorist attacks in Paris.

Kausar Akhtar is an advisor at Surrey Faith Links after the Paris attacks stated that the inter-faith network, and during her planned visit at The Warwick School in Nobe.

Drive, she chose to address the stigma of Islam. The 31-year-old said: "The event was a great

opportunity for me to challenge the stereotypes about my religion. At first when I was there I didn't really think about what happened in Paris and it didn't feel any different to any other talk.

Misinterpreted

"But during the question and answer session there were a few students who asked isn't Islam about war and terrorism? It gave me the opportunity to talk about how terrorists completely misinterpreted the teachings of Islam."

While Islam is a pacifist religion, a statement from the terrorist group ISIS after the Paris attacks stated that the deaths were "in the name of Allah".

Ms Akhtar's talk was part of a multi-faith celebration day where religious figures from Christian, Bahai, Buddhist, Jewish, Sikh and Humanist backgrounds spoke out about the misconceptions about religion.



DIVERSITY: Elle Harris helps Matt Everitt try on a Sikh turban

Humanist Jennie Johnson, one of the speakers, said: "We all need to understand each other better and have the opportunity to realise that we have so much in common. We need to break down barriers and misunderstanding."

The event was organised by the school's head of religious education, Debs Burnett, as

part of a trial run by Surrey County Council's standing advisory council on religious education.

"It was a very successful day", Ms Burnett said. "The speakers agreed that the students had been attentive and had asked some challenging questions, especially in light of the traumatic events in Paris at the weekend. They also emphasised the importance of such days."

When the speakers had left, pupils from Year 8 and Year 10 spent the afternoon gaining a further understanding about religious artifacts and their significance for many faiths. Jamie Newton, a pupil at the school, said: "I thought the day was a success because the speakers were clear. Today helped me with my knowledge of religion."

Student Alex Barber added: "I thought it was a really good idea to have people come in and talk about what they believe. I have learnt new things."



SPEAKING OUT: Surrey Faith Links advisor Kausar Akhtar addresses the stigma of her faith

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