

Mrs Victoria Dean - Secondary Education Award

Mrs Victoria Dean has shown tireless dedication and creativity in finding ways to integrate astronomy and space exploration into the classroom and wider school life. She ensures that students who may never otherwise engage with science in a heavily socio-economically deprived area have opportunities, feel included and inspired.

To provide greater opportunities for students, Victoria introduced GCSE Astronomy to students at KS3, 4 and 5 following the introduction of a thriving Astronomy Club. This remarkable achievement demonstrates her belief that no young person should be turned away if they are motivated to learn.

Victoria also provides opportunities beyond astronomy, providing students with the chance to participate in school-based research projects, including a project using data from the Spitzer space telescope. Her enthused students received the Institute for Research in Schools (IRIS) 'Best New School' award in 2024, and Victoria received the IRIS 'Outstanding Teacher' award in 2025.

Inspiring visits to Kielder Observatory established a working partnership with Kielder Observatory Astronomical Society team. This has resulted in opportunities for the students to undertake projects with the observatory, including an astrophotography program guided by university lecturers, and community events at the school fostering a love of astronomy within the wider community.

In her previous school, Victoria collaborated with alumni over three years to arrange a series of Astronomy and Space themed lectures and events designed to inform and engage, students, teachers, parents and the local community. These events included involvement of university lecturers, UK Space agency, Aldrin family foundation and local STEM companies. Through these activities she has reached thousands of students, parents and wider community members from backgrounds often underrepresented in science.

Victoria is an outstanding teacher and will go to extraordinary lengths to ensure her students gain the confidence to aspire beyond the limitations often placed upon them.