

Rebel poet in town to recite his works



■ Benjamin Zephaniah pictured at Lea Manor Recreation Centre on Friday

REBELLIOUS Rastafarian poet Benjamin Zephaniah was in town last week to share his words of wisdom with young and old alike.

The man who made it fashionable to reject an OBE spent last Friday afternoon at Lea Manor High School in Luton giving a performance of his poetry.

He then chatted with pupils about the issues his poems raised – topics such as social injustice, politics, animal rights and racial prejudice.

Lea Manor played host to teenagers from other schools including Lealands, Cardinal Newman and Stopsley.

Then, in the evening, Mr Zephaniah – who lived, briefly, in Luton as a young man – took to the stage at Lea Manor Recreation Centre.

Around 200 people turned up to see him recite his thought-provoking and often provocative poems, some of which were from his new book *Too Black Too Strong*.

He recited all his work from memory.

Speaking about his appearance in small-time Luton Mr Zephaniah said: "I quite like Luton and really don't have an issue with the size of the venue.

"If people want to listen to what I have to say, I don't mind where I say it.

"I also got a lot out of speaking to the kids at Lea Manor. Youngsters have open minds which is refreshing."

Both events were organised by Luton group Aswad Arts which pulled off quite a coup in booking 46-year-old Mr Zephaniah. Since hitting the headlines just before Christmas for going public on why he was turning down an OBE in the Queen's New Year honours list, a rash of celebrities followed suit.

Aswad Arts spokeswoman Rose Davis said: "We spoke to Benjamin's agent about a year ago and he agreed to come as he wasn't booked up.

"Now, you can't book him for love nor money for the next three years!"