

All's Fair

HOW MUCH YOUR PARENTS EARN STILL LARGELY DICTATES HOW WELL YOU DO AT SCHOOL – BRETT WIGDORTZ EXPLAINS WHY THAT'S NOT GOOD ENOUGH, WHAT HE INTENDS TO DO ABOUT IT, AND HOW YOU CAN HELP...

There is a lot about education in the UK that gets me excited. What lies behind it all is a belief that is increasingly uniting this country. It is a belief which

Teach First was founded on and thousands of parents and teachers believe in – that every child can and should succeed at school and in life, regardless of where they are born.

This did not seem so true a decade ago. I do not believe that the causes, consequences and solutions to the attainment gap were being debated by our community in the same way that they are today.

Twelve years ago I was working on the plan for what would become Teach First. I will always remember one London school I visited where the headteacher's aspiration for his pupils was simply to keep them out of trouble until they were 16. At the time we could not find a single school in inner London serving a low income community where results were above national average.

Thankfully, a lot has changed. There have been fewer greater developments in education than the extraordinary rise of the capital's schools. Ten years ago no one would have predicted that children from disadvantaged backgrounds in London

would outperform those in other parts of the country. However, London schools have moved from being the lowest performing in England, to being the highest performing, and now have the highest percentage of schools rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted.

These great achievements are, sadly, not echoed across the UK. Too many young people from low-income communities are the victims of an education divide. Last year, GCSE figures revealed that only 38 per cent of poorer pupils achieved five good GCSEs including English and maths compared to 64 per cent of their wealthier peers. This is unfair, unsustainable and unnecessary.

Even in London we must not become complacent. Pupils on free school meals in Lewisham, for example, perform significantly lower than those same pupils in wealthier boroughs, with 39.9 per cent achieving 5 good GCSEs compared to the 79 per cent of free school meal pupils in, for example, Kensington and Chelsea.

Concurrently, new and unique challenges are still emerging which demand an urgent rethink about how we address the changing face of educational inequality. Indeed, it is now coastal areas and market towns that are seen to be bearing the greatest burden of

educational inequality.

In order to ensure all children get the fair chances that they deserve in life, urgent solutions are needed. This is why so many of us working in the education, charity and business communities have launched the Fair Education Alliance, an alliance of more than 25 leading organisations which will be working together towards ending the injustice that in 2014, how much your parents earn still largely dictates how well you do at school.

Children's charities such as Save the Children and Barnardo's, business membership organisations such as Business in the Community and the Confederation of British Industries, and education organisations such as my charity Teach First and the National Association of Headteachers have agreed to work together to end the persistent and unnecessary educational achievement gap between young people from our poorest communities and their wealthier peers.

Over the last twelve years, I am incredibly proud of the contribution our teachers and their colleagues have made in classrooms up and down the country, allowing me to see the power of education and its ability to change lives. However, all of this has also further



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Brett Wigdortz OBE, CEO (@Wigdortz) has led Teach First as its CEO since the charity was launched in July 2002. Teach First is currently the 4th most prestigious graduate recruiter in the United Kingdom and is working to close the achievement gap between children from low-income backgrounds and their wealthier peers.



reinforced that the issues underpinning educational inequality are vast and require the efforts and expertise of more than just one organisation. It is imperative that all of us work together to understand what can really change the lives of children inside and outside the classroom in order to commit to long-term action. Through the Fair Education Alliance, I believe that we have an exceptional opportunity to make progress down this path.

To support the future of this work, to call for action where needed and develop tangible means of far-reaching activity, our first step has been to unveil the Fair Education Impact Goals, five goals created after consultation with over 1,700 teachers and hundreds of school leaders, charities workers and world leading educational experts. These goals follow the educational journey of a young person.



★ IMPACT GOALS

IMPACT GOAL ONE: Narrow the gap in literacy and numeracy at primary school

Pupils in primary schools with wealthy intakes significantly outperform schools with poor ones in Maths and English leaving exams. Our goal is to close 90% of this gap. Since 2011 the gap between these two groups of schools has closed by just 9%; progress is being made but there is a lot more work to do.

Schools with poor intakes in Inner London are the most successful. If all schools nationally did as well as them the gap would have been reduced by 65%. Schools with poor intakes in Yorkshire and the South-East are the weakest performers.

IMPACT GOAL TWO: Narrow the gap in GCSE attainment at secondary school

As in primary, secondary schools pupils with wealthy intakes significantly outperform schools with poor ones in GCSEs exams. Our goal is to close 44% of this gap. Since 2011 the gap between these two groups of schools has closed by 10.5% – so we are currently on track to meet this goal.

Schools with poor intakes in Inner London are, again, the most successful. If all schools nationally did as well as them the gap would have been reduced by 58% – comfortably exceeding our goal. The weakest schools with poor intakes are in Yorkshire, the South East and the South West. Those in Yorkshire have actually seen the gap widen in the past two years.

IMPACT GOAL THREE: Ensure young people develop key strengths, including resilience and wellbeing, to support high aspirations.

While exam results are crucial to the life chances of pupils they are not the only thing that matter. This goal is about ensuring young people develop non-academic skills necessary to succeed in life. The alliance will be using a pupil survey called “I Know My Class” to measure students’ engagement with subjects. This is the first year we have used this survey and over 20,000 pupils have completed it so far – giving us a benchmark for future years. Other measures will be developed with FEA partners.

IMPACT GOAL FOUR: Narrow the gap in the proportion of young people taking part in further education or employment-based training after finishing their GCSEs.

Young people who attend schools with poorer intakes are less likely to progress into further education or training after completing their GCSEs. In 2013, 90% of pupils attending

schools with wealthy intakes went on to a sustained education or training destination compared to 83% at schools with poorer intakes. Our goal is that 90% from schools with poorer intakes go on to sustained destinations.

In London 87.5% pupils from schools with poorer intakes already go on to sustained destinations. If this were to be true in all parts of the country we would already be over halfway towards meeting the goal.

IMPACT GOAL FIVE: Narrow the gap in university graduation, including from the 25 per cent most selective universities

We aim to narrow the gap in graduation rates for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds so that every year at least 5,000 more graduate including 1,600 from the most selective universities. We will measure this using a new dataset that will be released by the Government later year. It will allow us to track pupils from schools with poorer intakes right the way through application to university and graduation.

Existing widening participation data published by BIS shows that the number of young people eligible for free school meals entering university has been increasing – from 13% in 2006 to 20% in 2011. But the numbers of young people not on free school meals has also been increasing so the gap between the groups has been stable.

There is a substantial regional difference in the number of young people on free school meals attending university. For instance in 2011, 51% of those from Westminster went on to higher education compared to a shocking 9% in Barnsley.

The government is currently in a process of qualification reform. The Fair Education Alliance will adapt specific Impact Goals in line with reforms.

Education needs to be a unifying issue, not a divisive one. I believe we need agreement and consensus between all parties on such a major and systematic challenge. A great education can unlock a better future. However, for this to happen, a collaborative approach across society is crucial. I do believe the Fair Education Alliance marks a great step towards the hard work needed to realise a fairer education for all children across Great Britain.

To find out more about the Fair Education Alliance contact fea@teachfirst.org.uk, or sign up for email updates at www.teachfirst.org.uk/FEA