Fair
Education
Alliance

REPORT CARD 2021

Working together to tackle inequality in educational outcomes

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And our members

Contents

Executive summary and how to navigate this report 4

Foreword from the CEOs 5

Introduction: The Fair Education Alliance, why we exist and the purpose of this report 6

Section I: Inequality in education outcomes 2021 8

Attainment at primary for literacy and numeracy 10

Attainment at GCSEs 11

Skills and social emotional competencies 13

Post-16 destinations 15

Access to university 16

Section II: How we can address inequality in education 17

Develop the whole child 20

Prepare young people for accessing employment, further education and training 21

Engage parents and communities 22

Support teachers and leaders serving disadvantaged communities 23

Section III: Recommendations for the Government to support the levelling up agenda 24

Section IV: Showcasing the Fair Education Alliance Scaling Impact Award Winners 26

Endnotes 32

Executive summary and how to navigate this report

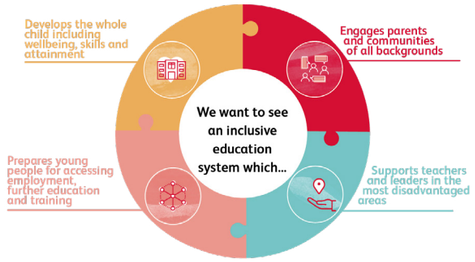
Key takeaways and messages

• Research and evidence from a wide range of reports from across Fair Education Alliance membership organisations and beyond shows inequality in education was already worsening pre-pandemic, and this has been exacerbated in the last year by the impacts of Covid. (See Section 1)

• The severity of the situation presents a moment of opportunity for us to act. We should not fall into narratives such as 'a lost generation' but instead seize our chance to address long standing issues in the system.

The Fair Education Alliance continues to advocate for a more inclusive education system which:

- Develops the whole child including wellbeing, skills and attainment (see page 20)
- Prepares young people for accessing employment further education and training (see page 21)
- Engages parents and communities (see page 22)
- Supports teachers and leaders serving disadvantaged communities (see page 23)



• This vision is already being driven by a wide range of Fair Education Alliance organisations from across businesses, charity, social enterprise and the third sector (outlined in Section 2). These efforts need to be supported, nurtured and grown.

• Alongside these cross society efforts Government support is also required to tackle inequality in education. Furthermore, we recommend that the changes to the education system we call for are at the heart of the current Governments "levelling up" agenda. Delivering this, in partnership with wider society, will enable the Government to achieve its outcomes.

• The Fair Education Alliance is not a research institute but instead collates and amplifies the recommendations of all our member organisations. Many of our member organisations have made recommendations for Government (see page 18) related to tackling inequality in education. In June we wrote this letter to the Prime Minister with a summary of asks around recovery spend from our membership.

• In this report we have chosen to echo the recommendations made in the recent Teach First Manifesto as it aligned with many of the wider Alliance's asks and our earlier letter. (See Section 3) We have built on Teach First's recommendations and interpreted them with our own language and framing. Links to their original report have been provided.

How to use this report:

This report is a synthesis of research and evidence on educational inequality plus a summary of some of the impactful work that is being done across Fair Education Alliance membership to address these issues. We have therefore designed it to be as interactive as possible. Throughout the report you will see the symbol to the right where you can click to find out more about the reports, organisations and initiatives that we reference. All interactive text is blue and underlined.

Whenever you see this symbol click to find out more.

Navigation guide:

This report is broken down into four main sections. Please find below an outline of what to expect from each.

Section I:	A synthesis of reports over the last year depicting the current 'state of the nation' in inequality of educational outcomes
Section II:	An overview of our vision for a fairer education system and spotlights on impactful work already underway to drive this
Section III:	Our recommendations for the Government to support the levelling up agenda
Section IV:	An overview of our Fair Education Alliance Scaling Impact Award winners driving change to tackle inequality in education

Foreword from the CEOs

Gina Cicerone and Sam Butters Co-CEOs Fair Education Alliance

Educational Inequality in 2021 - a time for action

The Fair Education Alliance represents 250 organisations - businesses, charities, education and youth institutions - who work together to make education fairer. Our annual Report Cards synthesise information from across the membership to capture a picture of how we are doing as a country on tackling inequality and collate a shared set of recommendations on what our membership believes needs to be done to address it.

Before the pandemic, the Report Cards (in 2019 and 2020 in partnership with the Education Policy Institute) showed that inequality in education was starting to worsen. Section 1 of this year's report outlines the picture in 2021 and how the pandemic has exacerbated inequality even further.

It is critical we do not lose ourselves in a negative narrative of 'a lost generation'. Instead the severity of this situaton should be seen as a golden moment of opportunity to address longstanding issues. Beyond the moral duty we have to ensure all children have the opportunity to succeed in life, we are storing up economic issues for the future. Acting now is an early intervention to mitigate costs and challenges later down the line.

Working in partnership between Government, business, education, the youth sector and charities

No single individual, organisation or even Government can address this alone. Our members are committed to working with Government to influence and enact the changes needed.

Achieving the Government's levelling up agenda

Our vision for what a fairer education system needs to look like (set out in Section 2) is being delivered in partnership with business, charities and the education and youth sectors. We show examples in Section 2 of how, together, our members are driving this. You can see further detail of the organisations we have worked with to start-up and scale in Section 4.

However, as we welcome the new Secretary of State for Education, Nadhim Zahawi MP and the Government focuses on levelling up, we also have policy recommendations to support delivery of outcomes. These are set out in Section 3.

In June we wrote this letter to the Prime Minister with asks around recovery spend. More recently, Teach First released a manifesto 'A fighting chance for every child' which specifically focused on tackling inequality in education and echoed many of the Alliance's earlier asks. We have therefore chosen to echo these asks. In this report we have built on Teach First's recommendations and interpreted them with our own language and framing. Links to their original report have been provided.

Youth engagement in driving change

This generation of young people are more engaged in the critical issues of society than ever before. The Fair Education Alliance believes that young people need to be empowered to play a leading role in efforts to make the education system fairer and we engage them as peers in everything we do. Section 1 of this years Fair Education Alliance annual report has been researched and prepared by Anisa Zaman during an internship with the Fair Education Alliance in summer 2021. Anisa is 19 years old and in her first year at LSE studying Geography. Anisa is, herself, the first in her family to go to University. Growing up and attending school in East London she has seen first hand the challenges of inequality in education and the importance of efforts by Government alongside charities, business and educationalists to make opportunities fairer.

Anisa Zaman, Report Card researcher

'I am an undergraduate student at the London School of Economics and am also the first in my family to attend university, let alone such a prestigious one.

I have seen first-hand the lack of opportunities for some young people in education, particularly extra-curricular opportunities and the chance to develop skills. This has a negative knock-on effect as it creates a point of difference between you and other more advantaged students, especially in a university setting. The opportunities I now have meant that I really wanted to make an impact and help reduce inequalities in education and working on this Report Card has allowed me to do just that.'

Introduction: The Fair Education Alliance, why we exist and the purpose of this report

The issue...

Even before the pandemic, inequality in outcomes in education between disadvantaged young people and their wealthier peers was severe and the situation was worsening.[1] Persistently disadvantaged children, (those who have been eligible for Free School Meals for more than 80% of their school life), were on average 22 months behind their more advantaged peers when leaving school. This translates into huge inequality in what children go on to do after school, with significant inequality in access to university and employment. This also means that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are currently less likely to achieve the same outcomes as their wealthier peers in life. However, the pandemic has only exacerbated existing inequalities.[2]

Beyond the moral duty we have to ensure all children have the opportunity to succeed in life, it is also of importance to society and Government in terms of future economic impact. Investing now to ensure that all children fulfill their potential will save costs later down the line in terms of unemployment and skills shortages, welfare costs and health and social care

Who we are

Hundreds of organisations and thousands of individuals from education, business, the third sector, policy and beyond share a vision for a fairer education system, and have been working for many years to try to make that happen. However, despite this, progress is far too slow.

The Fair Education Alliance is a coalition that brings organisations, people and their collective evidence, expertise, and experience together, to achieve more than we can do alone.

We coordinate collective action to drive change in the system, using our collective voice to improve policy and practice and run three awards programmes for initiatives to increase and scale their impact.

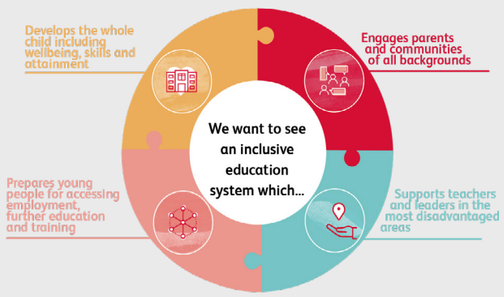
We frame our work around five shared Fair Education Impact goals

Vision: No child's success should be limited by their socio-economic background

Our Impact Goals:

- To narrow the gap in attainment at Primary in numeracy and literacy
- To narrow the gap in attainment at GCSE
- To ensure young people develop key skills and social emotional competencies
- To narrow the gap in the proportion of young people taking part in employment or Further Education after school
- To narrow the gap in access to University, including to the most selective institutions

We believe that to achieve these goals, we need changes and policy support from Government, and that this needs to be alongside efforts from educationalists, charities and business partners to create an inclusive education system which:



Purpose of this report

History of the Fair Education Alliance Report Card

Each year the Fair Education Alliance produces a 'Report Card' which sets out the latest data and evidence on educational inequality in England, and what still needs to be done to address it. In 2020 and 2019 we partnered with the Education Policy Institute on their annual report which focused primarily on the attainment gap between children from different socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicities, and demographics. Prior to this, we produced the report ourselves, drawing on data and evidence regarding the progress on each of the Fair Education Alliance's Impact Goals, with data from The Education Policy Institute, UCAS and other Fair Education Alliance members. All prior Report Cards can be found here.

Context of the Report Card in 2021

In the wake of the pandemic the context for this year's Report Card is unique due to:

- Changes to exam marking in 2020 and 2021 means that year on year comparisons of attainment gaps in exam results is not possible. As such, comparative analysis by Education Policy Institute and others has been done differently.
- There is an increasing demand to look at the inequalities in education as broader than just the academic attainment gaps.
- A wide range of organisations have conducted extensive research on different elements of educational inequality such as wellbeing, skills and lost learning. This has focussed on:

a) The situation: how young people have been impacted by lockdowns and the pandemic.

b) The recommendations: what needs to be done in terms of policy and action to address these issues.

However, a key challenge is that this information is spread across many different sources, reports, and organisations without a clear summary of themes or areas of consensus. As such, there is lack of a common shared collective message, recommendations, or collective evidence available for the sector to use.

This report is therefore designed as a synthesis of the evidence, experience, and expertise from across the Fair Education Alliance of the current situation and our recommendations. This is intended to be used in two ways:

- **Top-down policy change:** There is an important window for Government policy in autumn 2021 for taking action to address inequalities in education within the Comprehensive Spending Review and autumn Budget, which will determine spending priorities going forward. This report can be used a summary for our members and others to use to work with policymakers to influence that agenda and for policymakers themselves to use as a summary of the collective calls to action from experts across the sector.
- **Bottom-up action from educationalists, charities and businesses:** Recognising that those in education, business and the third sector must also take action, this report can be used to influence our own practice and philanthropic efforts. In Section 4 we showcase the latest action from our Scaling Impact Award Winners.

Approach

To produce this year's Fair Education Alliance Report Card, we conducted a literature review of evidence, research and reports produced between September 2020 and August 2021. A full list of reports synthesised can be found in the Bibliography.

Disadvantage

In general the Fair Education Alliance defines disadvantage in terms of socio-economic background. The metric usually used is children eligible for Free School Meals in comparison to those who are not, although we also consider ethnicity and other demographic data such as geography, English as an additional language and children in care. Reports we have drawn on in this document use a variety of criteria in their methodologies to define disadvantage. These are identified in the endnotes.

Section I. Inequality in education outcomes 2021

Section I. Inequality in education outcomes 2021

News > UK > UK Politics

Social mobility will become 'much harder' in Britain due to pandemic, government commissioner warns

Exclusive: Coronavirus crisis will exacerbate issues, experts say

Ashley Cowburn Political Correspondent | Saturday 31 October 2020 17:57 | comments

'Disappointing' progress on social mobility in England

10 June 2020 | Comments

England's social mobility 'cold spots' suppress earnings potential

Social mobility in decline in Britain, official survey finds

Social Mobility Commission finds stark regional differences in perceptions of life prospects

News > UK > UK Politics

UK's progress on social mobility 'disappointing' despite pledges by Boris Johnson and Theresa May, says watchdog

Experts warn of lack of progress by government despite successive prime ministers pledging to address inequality as a priority

May Bulman Social Affairs Correspondent | Wednesday 10 June 2020 17:01 | comments

The gap in 2021 at a glance

Impact goal 1 - Attainment at primary school in numeracy and literacy (Page 10)

- Disadvantaged students have been the most impacted by lost learning through lockdown and are less likely to be meeting age related expectations than their peers in literacy and numeracy. Younger children have seen the biggest drops in age related expectations of learning.

Impact goal 2 - Attainment at GCSE (Page 11-12)

- Year on year comparisons have been challenging due to different approaches of assessment during the pandemic, but significant gaps remain. The 2020 GCSE results day showed that the gap in results between disadvantaged students and their peers slightly narrowed compared to 2019. However, in 2021 the gap between the two groups increased again, with more advantaged students gaining a higher percentage of the top grades.

Impact goal 3 - Skills and social emotional competencies (Page 13-14)

- The pandemic has had a significantly negative affect on the personal wellbeing of disadvantaged students, exacerbating previous inequalities. Disadvantaged students have also been shown to have lower levels of scores against 'essential skills', something that can affect their future income and qualifications.

Impact goal 4 - Post-16 destinations (Page 15)

- Disadvantaged students continue to be less likely to have a sustained destination (employment, further education or training) than their wealthier peers. They also continued to gain less of the top grades compared to their non-disadvantaged peers on A-Level results day in 2021 and were negatively impacted by the decrease in apprenticeship starts in September 2020.

Impact goal 5 - Access to University (Page 16)

- Both the 2020 and 2021 A Level results days have shown that more disadvantaged students are gaining places at university than ever before. However, they are still less likely to get a university place compared to their non-disadvantaged peers.

Attainment at primary school for literacy and numeracy

Following the first national lockdown, primary school students have on average struggled to reach age related expectations.[3] Additionally, when comparing attainment levels before the pandemic and attainment levels after the first lockdown, disadvantaged students have seen the largest decrease in students working at age expected levels.[4]

By summer 2020, after the first lockdown, across all primary school year groups only 43 % of disadvantaged pupils had met age related expectations for reading compared to 63 % of non-disadvantaged groups. For writing it was 36 % as opposed to 55 %, and for maths 41 % as opposed to 61 %.[5] This is an issue that continued in the autumn term in 2020 when fewer disadvantaged children returned to working at expected levels despite being back at school compared to their non-disadvantaged peers.

The loss of learning for disadvantaged primary school students has undone between a third and two thirds of the progress made in the last decade in closing the disadvantage gap.[6]

There is also a geographical discrepancy when it comes to who is working at age related expectations and who is not. In areas with higher levels of deprivation, located in urban areas or in the North or the Midlands, students tended to be the least likely to be working at age related expectations.[7]

The younger year groups, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, have seen some of the biggest drops in age related expectations when it comes to learning.[8] Data shows that disadvantaged Year 1 pupils' attainment in maths dropped by more than 30 % points, almost 10 % more than non-disadvantaged children. There were also similar gaps for reading and writing.[9]

This trend also continued into autumn term 2020 when younger children recovered more slowly. The percentage of children in Key Stage 1 who were working at expected levels after the return to school was much smaller than for children in Key Stage 2. Year 6 was the most resilient year group, with a smaller drop in expectations and greater rates of recovery after the return to school. It is likely that this is because older children had already developed the foundations of their learning and tend to be more independent, so they were able to adapt more easily to home learning.[10]

Attainment at GCSE

Evidence shows that the attainment gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students at GCSE was widening even before the pandemic.[11]

Prior to the pandemic, disadvantaged pupils were on average 18 months behind their non-disadvantaged peers by the time they took their GCSEs. In 2019 the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers had stopped closing for the first time in a decade.[12]

Given the different systems for awarding GCSE grades in 2020 and 2021, it is somewhat unhelpful to compare them like for like. We have seen however, that the disadvantage gap narrowed slightly from 2019 to 2020 and then widened again in 2021. However, it is very difficult to know whether these changes were because of different mechanisms for awarding grades, the impact of lockdowns, other influences or a combination of all of these factors.

What we do know is that in 2021 huge inequalities in outcomes remained for black students, students eligible for free school meals and students experiencing high levels of deprivation.[13]

2020 GCSE results and the disadvantage gap

The 2020 GCSE results showed that 78 % of non-disadvantaged pupils achieved a grade 4 or above in English and maths, compared to 56 % of disadvantaged pupils. This was up from 2019 when 72 % of non-disadvantaged students passed compared to 46 % of disadvantaged students.[14] Consequently, almost half of disadvantaged young people left school without a Level 2 qualification (GCSE equivalent) in English and Maths compared to just 22 % of their more advantaged peers.[15] So, despite overall increases, significant inequality still remained.

The slight increase in attainment can also be seen in terms of Attainment 8 - the measurement of a student's average grade across eight subjects. The average grade achieved by disadvantaged pupils improved by 0.35 grades per subject compared to 0.34 grades for other pupils.[16] However, in both 2019 and 2020, non-disadvantaged students still had a higher Attainment 8 score on average, even if disadvantaged students saw some improvements in grades.

2021 GCSE results and the disadvantage gap

The 2021 GCSE results day showed that disadvantaged students in England have fallen further behind their more privileged peers.[17] There was also grade inflation for a second year in the row, with privileged students gaining more of the top grades.[18]

At GCSE level, the new grading system means that anything below a 4 (equivalent to a C grade) is a fail, whilst a 7 is equal to an A and the top grade 9 is equivalent to an A star.

Analysis by Ofqual found that 61 % of GCSE students from private schools in England were awarded a grade 7 or above this year, an increase from 46 % in 2019. In comparison to this only 28 % of students at state schools achieved a grade 7 or above.[19]

When looking at pupils who are eligible for free school meals, they fell 0.12 grades behind peers with the same prior attainment, between 2019 and 2021. The gap also widened at grade 7 and above, and at grade 4 and above, with the difference between Free School Meal eligible students and their peers increasing by 2.3 and 1.3 points respectively.[20]

There is also still a huge North South divide when it comes to GCSEs. Whilst 34 % of students in London received grade 7 or above, only 24.4 % of students in Yorkshire and the Humber did the same. Yorkshire and the Humber was also the region with the smallest improvement in students achieving a grade 7 or above from 2020 at 2.1 %.[21]

Skills and social emotional competencies

It is increasingly understood that inequalities in education outcomes are not limited to attainment. The Fair Education Alliance also looks at skills and social emotional outcomes. For this report we are looking at two key areas:

- **Wellbeing:**

We define wellbeing using the World Health Organisation definition: "*A state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.*" (WHO, 2015)

Prior inequalities have been exacerbated by the pandemic, with disadvantaged children and young people being more likely to have poor mental health as a result.[22] They were also more likely to continue having symptoms of poor mental health after the return to school in March 2021, despite the overall level of symptoms in children decreasing.[23]

- **Skills:**

We define skills using the Skills Builder Partnership framework of eight essential skills

A Skills Builder Partnership survey has found that disadvantaged students have lower skills and capabilities compared to their non-disadvantaged peers.[24] This causes issues as higher levels of skills and capabilities are associated with a higher salary and higher qualifications.[25] Essential skills can also assist the young people who have been disproportionately affected by job losses during the pandemic.

Wellbeing

The existing inequalities in wellbeing amongst children and young people

There are indications that children with special educational needs (SEND) or a disability, children with disadvantaged backgrounds, and some children from black and ethnic minority backgrounds tend to have lower personal wellbeing than others.[27] These are also the groups who experienced the worst mental health prior to the pandemic.[28] When looking at Black communities specifically, they face significant barriers to accessing mental health support that is appropriate to their needs. Black young people aged 16-24 experience the highest rates of self-harm yet are the least likely to receive support.[29]

How has the pandemic affected this?

Pre-existing inequalities in wellbeing have been exacerbated by the pandemic.[30] Additionally, a high proportion of low-income families have experienced a mental or physical health problem because of the pandemic, which has increased from 48 % between May and July to 56 % between September and November 2020.[31]

Throughout the pandemic, parents and carers from households with lower incomes reported that their children had more symptoms of behavioral, emotional, and attention related difficulties than parents and carers from households with higher incomes[32] Whilst children overall experienced a reduction in symptoms of mental health challenges as restrictions eased in March 2021, children with SEND and those from low-income households continued to show symptoms of mental health challenges.[33]

An issue that arises when analysing the impact of the pandemic on the wellbeing of disadvantaged children and young people is that the infrastructure for measuring their experiences is largely absent. This means that there is little or no research for analysis. Secondly, where ethnicity is included in data or research, studies rarely go beyond outdated and homogenised comparisons of 'white' and 'BAME'.

Skills

Disparities in skills

The Skills Builder Partnership defines essential skills as highly transferable skills that everyone needs to thrive, including teamwork, leadership, problem solving, and creativity.[34] However, they have also found that young people who are from advantaged backgrounds have higher levels of essential skills compared to their more disadvantaged peers.[35] The median score for pupils who received Free School Meals while at school in a survey conducted for Skills Builder, was 42 against a median score of 54 for their peers who were not eligible for Free School Meals. The skills score was calculated as a sum of each individual score for how well the participant was able to conduct each essential skill mentioned in the survey.

Whose skills abilities have been affected by the pandemic?

The pandemic itself has caused disruptions to the skills ability of different groups, including those with English as an additional language (EAL). The disturbance to learning has meant that over two thirds of teachers across primary and secondary schools reported a negative impact on the English language skills of pupils who have English as an additional language, and a lack of confidence in speaking.[36]

Children from the poorest fifth of households are four times as likely to face serious mental health difficulties by the time they are 11 as those from the wealthiest fifth.[31]

Post-16 destinations

When young people finish school at sixteen there are big differences between disadvantaged students and their peers in what they go on to do, where they go, and the grades that they achieve.

Disadvantaged students are more likely to get lower grades in both A-level and BTEC- equivalent qualifications[37] and are more likely to attend Further Education Colleges as opposed to Sixth Forms.[38] In the academic year of 2020/21, two key things stood out. Firstly, in September 2020, there was a drop in the number of disadvantaged under 19s taking up apprenticeships.[39]

Secondly, in terms of A-Levels, the attainment gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students remained strong on results day, with non-disadvantaged students gaining more of the highest grades and university places.[40]

Disadvantage gap in attainment Post-16

The average disadvantage gap for qualifications such as BTECs is not as large as it is for A-Levels. For qualifications such as Level 3 BTECs, the attainment gap is the equivalent of one quarter of an A-Level grade per qualification.[41] However, the average disadvantaged student is the equivalent of around three A-Level grades behind their non-disadvantaged peers when taking A-Levels. For students who have been disadvantaged over a long period of time, this gap increases to the equivalent of almost four A-Level grades.[42]

Difference in destinations

The latest Key Stage 4 destination data from 2018/19 (2020 data will not be published until October/November 2021) shows that on average disadvantaged pupils were less likely to have a sustained destination (89 %) than all other pupils (96 %).[43] It also shows that the most common destination for disadvantaged pupils was further education colleges (43 %), compared to a sixth form destination (42 %) for non-disadvantaged students.[44] Disadvantaged students were also more likely to be recorded as 'not recorded as a sustained destination' (NEET) compared to their non-disadvantaged peers.

Apprenticeships

When looking at apprenticeship starts in September 2020, we can see that overall, they were down by 6.9 % compared to starts in 2019.[45] Within this there has been a fall in the number of disadvantaged under-19s starting apprenticeships.

Between 2019 and 2020, there was a 30 % decrease in the most disadvantaged students starting an apprenticeship. In 2019, 15,180 under-19s in quintile 5, (the most deprived of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation) started an apprenticeship compared to 10,560 in 2020.[46] Their is also a regional difference in apprenticeship starts with the highest number of starts in the South East with 38,700 starts and the lowest number of starts in the North East with 13,500.[47]

A-Levels

Advance level qualifications, known as A-Levels, are subject-based qualifications typically taken at the end of compulsory education in England. These are usually assessed by a series of exams, however the pandemic prevented this in 2020 and 2021, and instead predicted grades were given to students by their teachers. Whilst the proportion of top grades in all schools increased by 6 percentage points (from 38 % to 44 %), in independent schools it increased by 9 percentage points (from 61 % to 70 %).[48]

Between 2019 and 2021 there has also been a widening of the attainment gap by 1.4 points for Black students, those on Free School Meals and those with a high level of deprivation.[49] Furthermore, there continues to be a regional inequality in results. In 2021, London saw 79.7 % of children get a grade C and above, while in Yorkshire and the Humber it was only 73.5 %.[50]

Access to University

It has long been the case that the higher the socio-economic background of a young person, the more likely they are to go to university, and for the university they go onto to be a high-ranking institution.[51]

Only 18% of disadvantaged students gained a place at university in 2020[52] and they were also 4% more likely to drop out than their more advantaged counterparts because of the impact of the pandemic on their studies.[53] Non-disadvantaged students were 4.23 times more likely to be accepted into university than disadvantaged students in 2020.[54]

However, there is positive news in this area. More disadvantaged students were accepted on to a university course in 2020[55] and 2021[56] than ever before. This means that although the gap still exists, it is narrowing.

Data on inequalities in access to university in 2020

In 2020 more disadvantaged students were attending university than ever before. In particular, more equal access to higher tariff providers, where participation from those from disadvantaged backgrounds has historically been low, has also reached a record level.[57]

In total,18.8 % of disadvantaged students that applied to university received a place on results day[58] with that figure later reaching 22.5 % by September.[59] This was in a year that saw 37.0 % of 18-year-olds enter higher education.[60]

The UCAS Multiple Equality Measure (MEM) equality gap also narrowed. Even though the most advantaged school pupils are still 4.23 times more likely to enter higher education than the most disadvantaged, this is a decrease from being 4.40 times more likely in 2019.[61]

The remaining gap is also more pronounced in some courses. For example, even though more disadvantaged students were accepted onto a medicine course in 2020, advantaged students still were 25 times more likely to receive a place.[62]

Importantly, despite the equality gap decreasing, it has been quite slow in recent years, with the Multiple Equality Measure equality gap narrowing by an average of 1.1 % year on year since 2015 versus 4.4 % from 2010 to 2015.[63]

Data on inequalities in access to university in 2021

A record 20.7 % of all UK 18-year-olds from the most disadvantaged backgrounds received an undergraduate place on results day in 2021, however 48.4 % of non-disadvantaged students were accepted on to a university place, showing the gap still persists.[64] Furthermore, even if more disadvantaged students gained places, UCAS argues that widening participation have started to stall over the last few years.[65]

Section II. How we can address inequality in education

Section II. How we can address inequality in education

As Section 1 shows, inequality in educational outcomes between disadvantaged students and other groups is pervasive through the education system and this has long been the case.

For decades many have advocated and continue to do so to change this. Yet, it is clear that one-off policies and initiatives are not enough. The pandemic has exacerbated this situation further and gives us all the necessary impetus and sense of urgency to do something about this.

We need:

Partnership working by Government, charities, businesses and educationalists

This change will require policy support from Government (which we outline in Section 3). However, alongside that, the Fair Education Alliance is a network of charities, businesses and educationalists who will continue to invest time and effort into making education fair. The Fair Education Alliance wants to work with Government to not only shape plans, but deliver them too.

To establish a long term plan for education

The Foundation for Education Development (FED) has recently been set up to call for a long-term plan for education. The Fair Education Alliance supports this. We need a comprehensive, long-term plan and commitment led by Government in partnership with civil society (educationalists, the third sector and business) to ensure that our education system is fair and that all young people can thrive.

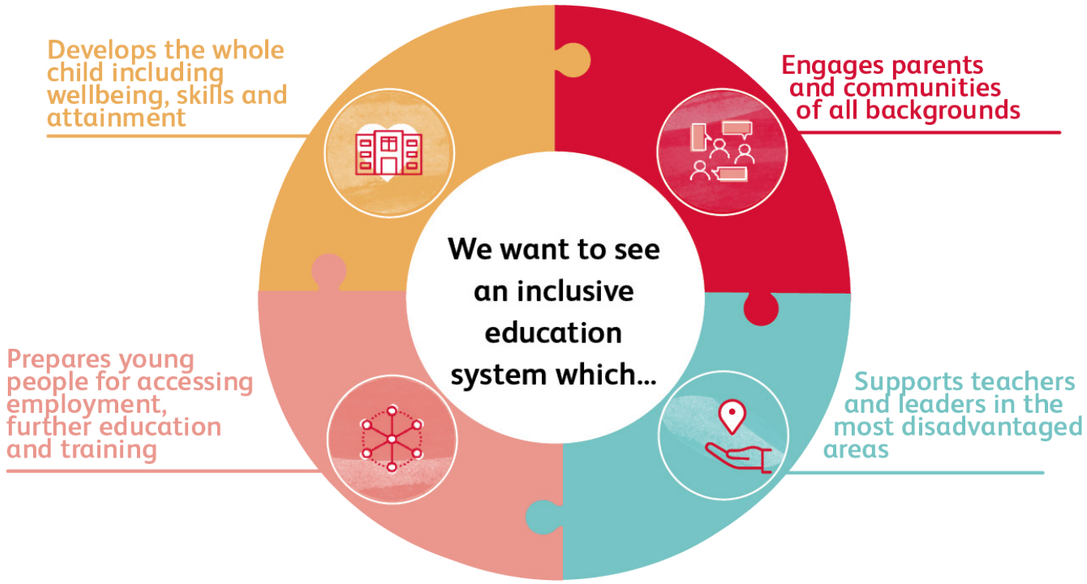
To synthesise individual plans and recommendations from organisations across the third sector, education and business to create a shared collective plan we can all work towards

Many of our member organisations have already released individual manifestos or calls to action directed at the Government, particularly in the lead up to the Comprehensive Spending Review. This report does not intend to replace these, or be a competing set of recommendations, but is instead a synthesis of these asks and provides a summary of the collective recommendations from across our membership.

In June we wrote this letter to the Prime Minister with asks around recovery spend. More recently, Teach First released a manifesto 'A fighting chance for every child' which specifically focused on tackling inequality in education and echoed many of the Alliance's earlier asks. We have therefore chosen to echo these asks here, using the same language as Teach First in order to avoid any duplication or confusion of our ask. We also support the recommendations made by other members of the Fair Education Alliance including ASCL's Blueprint for a Fairer Education System published this month and the Children's University's State of the Nation report published earlier this year.

Click on the images above to access the reports.

Drawing on their collective wealth of evidence and experience in working with disadvantaged children our 250 member organisations argue that to make education fairer we need to create an inclusive education system which does the following:



Develop the whole child 20

Prepare young people for accessing employment, further education and training 21

Engage parents and communities 22

Support teachers and leaders in the most disadvantaged areas 23

The following pages illustrate how our members are individually and collectively working towards this vision.

Develop the whole child

We want to see an inclusive education system which develops the whole child, including wellbeing, skills and attainment.

Why we need this:
There is a clear correlation between essential skills, wellbeing and learning readiness.[65] In order to create better prospects for students from all backgrounds we need an education system that supports the whole child. This includes building essential skills which support learning, and ensuring the wellbeing needs of children are met beyond the classroom.

Critically, for education to achieve this it is essential the system is inclusive to children from all backgrounds. Improvements in diversity and inclusion are key to ensuring that the needs of children from all backgrounds are being met.

What needs to happen:
1. There needs to be consistency of a culture across education which prioritises wellbeing and skills alongside academic attainment.

2. There needs to be an emphasis on diversity and inclusion in the education system including workforce, curriculum and culture.

3. There needs to be sufficient investment in 'wraparound' support for schools and colleges (e.g. to be delivered by business, third sector) to provide support for wellbeing and skills whilst educators focus on teaching.

Recommendations for Government
(See page 25 for more details)

- In the medium term, there needs to be a significant and sustained uplift to local Government funding for children's and young people's services so that teachers can focus on teaching, and wraparound support can be provided by organisations with the requisite expertise.

- We would like to see 'Curriculum Forums' used to facilitate a constructive national debate about inclusivity. These forums should be demographically and politically diverse, and comprised of teachers, young people, and other education specialists. The objective would be to find common ground on content, spread expertise and share resources.

A snapshot of what our members are doing across the third sector, business and education:

Wellbeing, diversity and inclusion
Our members are working together to create a consistent culture of wellbeing and inclusion for all children. In our working group on this issue, we share and amplify impactful initiatives including:
- The IntegratEd partnership: a partnership working to reduce preventable exclusions and improve education for children who have been excluded from school.
- #Beewell: a new programme, co-created with young people, starting in autumn 2021 which is surveying the wellbeing of pupils in secondary schools across Greater Manchester. Their coalition of partners has committed to act on the results and deliver positive change in all our communities.

1:1 and small group tuition
Many of our members deliver 1:1 and small group tuition specifically designed for children who wouldn't otherwise be able to afford it and who benefit from this extra time and support. This is often funded through the Pupil Premium or via the National Tutoring Programme. Some focus on specific demographics e.g. Get Further on 16-18-year-olds who have not passed GSCEs and Cape Mentors work with those at risk of exclusion.

The Skills Builder Partnership provides a universal framework for building essential skills at every stage of life.
It is being used by schools, colleges, employers and charities and is an opportunity for all children to develop skills in a systematic way alongside academic development.

See pages 26-31 for the complete overview of our Scaling Impact Award winners working on this issue.

Prepare young people for accessing employment, further education and training

We want to see an inclusive education system which supports all young people with the knowledge, skills and awareness they need for accessing employment, further education and training after school.

Why we need this:

Research has shown that young people are leaving school without the knowledge, skills or awareness they need to choose (and thrive) in the right next step for them. Consequently, employers are having to pick up where things have not worked in the education system.[66] This disproportionately effects young people from backgrounds without family connections, or those who are the first in their families to pursue different paths. Critically, there is currently no easy way for young people, parents and teachers to navigate information, advice and guidance around Post-16 and 18 destinations, particularly for those who do not pass Level one or Level 2 qualifications in Maths and English.

What needs to happen:

1. More needs to be done to ensure that all young people have knowledge about, and access to, opportunities such as further and higher educational routes. This needs to start earlier, i.e at Primary level.

2. Young people need support in building essential skills before they are able to start an apprenticeship or work.

Recommendations for Government
(See page 25 for more details)

- The Department for Education should publish a framework for effective careers learning in primary schools based on the Gatsby benchmarks. This should be paired with a new fund that trains and supports primary teachers in disadvantaged areas to implement the framework.

- The Department for Education should launch a fund to train a careers leader in every secondary school at mid to senior level by 2023. Schools in disadvantaged areas should receive full funding for this.

A snapshot of what our members are doing across the third sector, business and education:

Programmes to help students access the right destination for them and stay there

Many FEA members such as Causeway Education, Power 2, The Brilliant Club, The Access Project and many more support young people to navigate their options and reach the right destination. The Bridging Project, a 2020 FEA award winner also focuses on ensuring students have the support to stay at University.

Navigating the landscape

The Careers & Enterprise Company is the national body for careers education in England - they play a key role in delivering support to schools and colleges to deliver modern, 21st century careers education. Where options can be complex to navigate, they ensure students have real world learning, knowledge, inspiration and advice gained through multiple employer and workplace engagements, exposure to further and higher education, as well as through the curriculum and in one-to-one personal guidance.

See pages 26-31 for the complete overview of our Scaling Impact Award winners working on this issue.

Engage parents and communities

We want to see an inclusive education system which engages parents and communities, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Why we need this:
Evidence shows that when parents and the wider community is engaged in their child's education, they do better at school.[67] Yet, one of the biggest challenge's schools face is the lack of evidence around effective strategies schools can use to meaningfully engage parents in their children's learning. To improve outcomes for all children, more needs to be done to support parents, particularly in developing the early home learning environment.

The digital divide is also a key driver of inequalities in the home learning environment. Provision of technology to address this during lockdowns was hugely impactful and this needs to be built on and continued.

What needs to happen:
1. Increased teacher training. Fewer than 10 % of teachers say that they have received training on effective parental engagement. Yet, almost all teachers believe parental engagement has a positive impact on their school.[68]

2. Parental engagement in learning should be prioritised ahead of parental involvement in schooling.

3. There needs to be increased parental voice in the system.

4. There needs to be a focus specifically on parents facing disadvantage.

5. We need to continue to address the digital divide in the home learning environment.

Recommendations for Government
See page 25 for more details

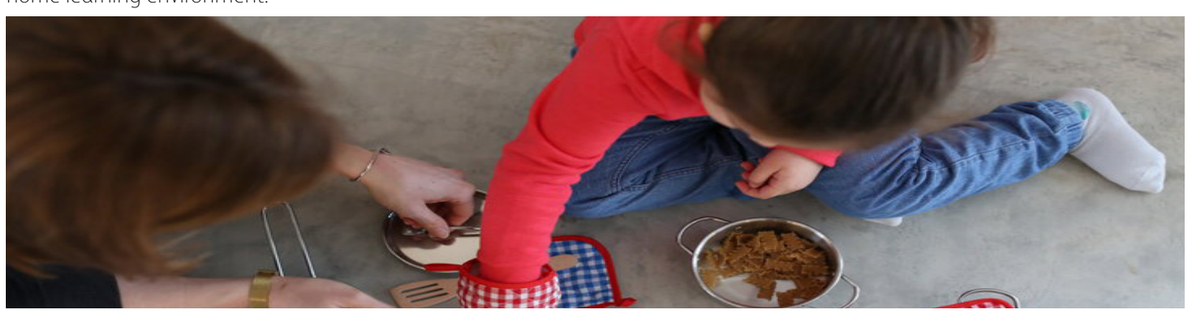
- The Department for Education should continue to invest in the provision of laptops, tablets and internet routers for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and provide supporting guidance.

N.B Of our priorities for change, parental engagement is, at present, arguably the least widely focused on in education policy, and hence why recommendations for Government only focus in Section 3 on the digital divide. Our collective action group, co-ordinated by Learning with Parents, is trying to change this. Alongside Learning with Parents we recently wrote to Government with our recommendations on this issue. See the letter here.

A snapshot of what our members are doing across the third sector, business and education:

Scaling support for initiatives supporting parents and home learning
Four of our Scaling Impact Awards winners focus directly on this issue - Boromi, Khulisa, Learning with Parents and School Home Support.

See pages 26-31 for the complete overview of our Scaling Impact Award winners working on this issue.



Support teachers and leaders in the most disadvantaged areas

We want to see an inclusive education system which supports teachers and leaders in the most disadvantaged areas.

Why we need this:
In England, one teacher leaves the profession for every one that joins. At the same time, schools in disadvantaged areas are finding it harder to attract and retain teachers. [69] To create an education system that benefits all children we need a continuous pipeline of diverse teachers and leaders at all levels. However, leadership development in education is not systematic or structured into a career pathway.[70]

What needs to happen:
1. We need to invest to allow space and time in the working week for continuous personal development, leadership development and wellbeing for the education workforce, particularly in areas of high disadvantage.

2. We need a renewed focus on diversifying the education workforce to ensure representation of the pupil populations that are served, particularly in areas of high disadvantage.

Recommendations for Government
(See page 25 for more details)

- The Government should pilot a reduction in teachers' timetables in 1 % of the most disadvantaged secondary schools in England – then scale the policy if it has a positive impact.

- Schools should be supported to implement fair and unbiased recruitment practices.

- The Department for Education should create and fund a development programme for aspiring leaders from underrepresented groups, drawing on the successes of schemes such as the Civil Service Positive Action Pathway.

A snapshot of what our members are doing across the third sector, business and education:

Ensuring a diverse and representative staff in schools

Building on work by member organisations such as Teach First and Ambition Institute in recruiting and supporting teachers and leaders serving disadvantaged communities, we are proud to be supporting Aspiring Heads through our Innovation Award - a new initiative to support more black leaders into headship.

Ensuring that teachers and leaders have the skills, understanding and time to support children from all backgrounds

We are also working with initiatives such as JAGS foundation, Class 13, Football Beyond Borders, Lighthouse, GriffinOT and New Ground Creations who, in different ways, are working with the education workforce, youth workers, and carers to equip them with the skills and understanding they need to address the specific needs of children from diverse

See pages 26-31 for the complete overview of our Scaling Impact Award winners working on this issue.

Section III. Recommendations and asks for the Government

Recommendations for the Government to support the levelling up agenda

This is not Government's task alone. Section 2 has shown work going on across the Fair Education Alliance membership to make education fairer. However, alongside this we have specific asks for the Government. In June we wrote this letter to the Prime Minister with asks around recovery spend. More recently, Teach First released a manifesto 'A fighting chance for every child' which echoed many of the Alliance's earlier asks. We have therefore chosen to echo these asks here, using the same language as Teach First in order to avoid duplication or confusion of our collective ask.

Asks for the Autumn budget and Comprehensive Spending Review:

1. The Government should significantly increase the funding that will be allocated to schools between 2022/23 and 2025/26 and channel it through increases to the Pupil Premium.

2. The government should boost the COVID-19 education recovery package and provide a short-term injection of ringfenced funding for schools who choose to employ specialist staff to support with pastoral care, additional needs, and family engagement.

Other recommendations:

Develops the whole child, including wellbeing, skills and attainment

3. In the medium term, there needs to be a significant and sustained uplift to local government funding for children's and young people's services so that teachers can focus on teaching, and wraparound support can be provided by organisations with the requisite expertise.

4. We would like to see 'Curriculum Forums' used to facilitate a constructive national debate about inclusivity. These forums should be demographically and politically diverse, and comprised of teachers, young people, and other education specialists. The objective would be to find common ground on content, spread expertise and share resources.

Prepares young people for accessing employment, further education and training

5. The Department for Education should publish a framework for effective careers learning in primary schools based on the Gatsby benchmarks. This should be paired with a new fund that trains and supports primary teachers in disadvantaged areas to implement the framework.

6. The Department for Education should launch a fund to train a careers leader in every secondary school at mid to senior level by 2023. Schools in disadvantaged areas should receive full funding for this.

7. Large employers should develop and offer more remote and 'blended' work experience opportunities and entry level jobs. Outreach programmes should also be targeted at disadvantaged schools to promote applications.

Engaging parents and communities

8. The Department for Education should continue to invest in the provision of laptops, tablets and internet routers for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and provide supporting guidance.

Supports teachers and leaders in the most disadvantaged areas

10. The government should pilot a reduction in teachers' timetables in 1 % of the most disadvantaged secondary schools in England – then scale the policy if it has a positive impact.

11. Schools should be supported to implement fair and unbiased recruitment practices.

12. The Department for Education should create and fund a development programme for aspiring leaders from underrepresented groups, drawing on the successes of schemes such as the Civil Service Positive Action Pathway.

Section IV. Showcasing the Fair Education Alliance Scaling Impact Award Winners

Section IV. Showcasing the Fair Education Alliance Scaling Impact Award Winners

The Fair Education Alliance believes that although government commitment on this agenda is essential, to make our education system fair change will need to come 'bottom up' as well as 'top down'. As such we support new and existing initiatives to scale their innovative and impactful work to help transform outcomes for disadvantaged young people.

Our Scaling Award supports seven organisations to deepen their impact and accelerate their growth to areas of greatest need.

Our Intrapreneurship Award supports five organisations to develop, test and embed an internal innovation tackling the root causes of educational inequality.

Our Innovation award supports five organisations to develop, test and scale their solution to make education fair.

Meet our 2020 Intrapreneurship Award Winners

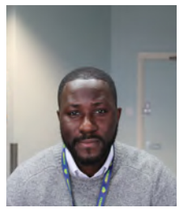
Develops the whole child, including wellbeing, skills and attainment

CoachBright's new programme brings their academic coaching approach to younger pupils through development of a key stage 2 tutoring programme that will target the critical transition between primary to secondary school.

Springwell Spalding Academy will provide a quality early years alternative provision space and curriculum for the increasing numbers of young children who have been excluded, or are at risk of exclusion.

Yes Future's new product promotes skills and wellbeing alongside acaademic attainment through a personal development workbook that helps young people to understand their strengths and how they can use them to be successful.

Prepares young people for accessing employment, further education and training



Power2's new programme uses an intensive, early intervention approach to develop employability skills through local work placements and 1:1 support for disadvantaged 14-16-year-olds who are considered 'the hardest to place' in work experience.

System change

The Centre for Education and Youth's new product is a set of research tools to leverage their sizeable archive of data, gathered over a decade of research with practitioners, policymakers and disadvantaged young people.

Click on any of the logos on this page to find out more about the organisation.

Meet our 2020 Scaling Award Winners

Develops the whole child, including wellbeing, skills and attainment

Action Tutoring uses high-quality volunteer tutors to support pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds to achieve (at least)national standards in the core subjects of English and maths in primary and secondary education.

Get Further works with colleges to identify students in need of extra help with GCSE English and maths, matching these students to top tutors, who deliver bespoke 'catch-up' tuition programme.

The Tutor Trust's Right Angle Project in collaboration with Talk, Listen, Change supports children in alternative provision and looked after children and their families through tuition and counselling.

System change

ImpactEd works with schools and other organisations to help them better understand, evaluate, and improve the impact they make on young people.

Engaging parents and communities

Boromi creates in-school play libraries to empower every parent to support and nurture their child's early development through powerful, purposeful play together at home, where it matters most.

School Home Support partners with schools to provide specialist practitioner support to disadvantaged children and families to maximise educational opportunities, improve life chances and wellbeing and address root causes to education barriers.

Learning with Parents leads parental engagement policy work and partner with schools to drive and monitor effective parental engagement and to support disadvantaged families through their Maths and English with parents programmes.

Click on any of the logos on this page to find out more about the organisation.

Section IV. Showcasing the Fair Education Alliance Scaling Impact Award Winners

Meet our 2020 Innovation Award Winners

Develops the whole child, including wellbeing, skills and attainment

AncestorsUnKnown provides primary and secondary schools with curriculum, workshops and community focused programming that introduces students to family history research and other untold histories.

Life Lessons is an online platform featuring a full curriculum of original video content focused on RSE (relationships and sex education) presented by relatable young people with an array of lived experiences. The videos are complemented by lesson plans and assessment tools to empower teachers to teach the subject effectively.

CAPE Mentors provides tuition and mentoring services to children at risk of exclusion and those permanently excluded without school placement. CAPE Mentors pairs these children with qualified teachers who provide the dual support of academic attainment and meaningful mentorship.

Supports teachers and leaders in the most disadvantaged areas

GriffinOT aims to provide affordable, high-quality online children's occupational therapy support for schools and families. The goal is to help teachers and families develop the skills needed to effectively support pupils having special education needs - through online resources

Prepares young people for accessing employment, further education and training

The Bridging Project works with disadvantaged young people to 'bridge' their transition to university - by matching them with trained leadership coaches who ensure they have the necessary support system and professional coaching to enable them to finish their university journey.

Click on any of the logos on this page to find out more about the organisation.

Meet our 2021 Intrapreneurship Award Winners

Engaging parents and communities

khulisa

Khulisa will develop a rolling 6-week parent support programme open to all parents and carers at Manchester Communications Academy and the wider Academy Trust.

Prepares young people for accessing employment, further education and training

CAUSEWAY EDUCATION

Causeway will transform their OSCAR platform (that helps students submit outstanding university applications) to support apprenticeship applications from under-represented groups.

Supports teachers and leaders in the most disadvantaged areas

JAGS Foundation

JAGS Foundation will develop trauma-informed training programmes for trainee primary and secondary school staff, school personnel and leadership teams across South London.

Lighthouse

Lighthouse will develop a high-quality training programme for residential care workers across the UK, to support children to process trauma and access education.

FBB FOOTBALL BEYOND BORDERS

Football Beyond Borders will develop a model of reflective group practice for teachers to support their peers to engage relationally with young people suffering trauma or Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES).

Click on any of the logos on this page to find out more about the organisation.

Meet our 2021 Innovation Award Winners

Develops the whole child, including wellbeing, skills and attainment

the re-engagement project

The Re-engagement Project helps in-school "behaviour" units support vulnerable children with social, emotional, and mental health needs alongside their families. Their aim is to work with the system around the child to identify and overcome barriers preventing children from thriving, thereby avoiding exclusions.

NGC NEW GROUND CREATIONS

New Ground Creations aims to reduce young people being involved with gangs and youth violence. They support 13-19 year-olds from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds who are disengaged from the classroom, on the edge of exclusion, or referred by youth offending teams or Pupil Referral units.

Upskill Me helps students from lower socio-economic backgrounds improve their employability through a gamified careers platform that encourages them to develop the durable skills that will support them in the future of work.

Supports teachers and leaders in the most disadvantaged areas

ASPIRINGHEADS

Currently only 1 % of headteachers in the UK are Black, compared to 96.5 % who are white. Aspiring Heads is looking to address this gap by providing training and coaching to Black educators to attain positions of senior leadership in the school system.

CLASS 13 UNLEARNING INEQUALITY

Class 13 takes a holistic approach to school transformation - working with teachers, school leaders and parent teacher associations to foster an anti-bias culture in schools, enabling all children irrespective of their race and gender to thrive.

Click on any of the logos on this page to find out more about the organisation.

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