

An Open Letter to the Secretary of State for Education

16/07/2024

Dear Bridget Phillipson,

We are writing, firstly, to extend our appreciation for your efforts in reaching out to the education profession during your first week in office. Transforming education in our country is undeniably a monumental task. The challenges are immense, yet the possibilities for a brighter future for both the workforce and our children are within reach.

This letter is written by two passionate educators, a school leader and a teacher, united by a mission to shine a light on what is possible.

For clarity, we present three crucial points: the elimination of the pervasive fear within the system, the necessity of retaining and nurturing talented leaders and teachers, and the imperative for a future-fit curriculum.

Removing the Fear

Our education system has been undermined by a culture of fear, causing many leaders and teachers to compromise their values. Simple yet impactful changes to reduce the fear factor for every layer of the workforce has the potential to completely transform our schools. Eliminating the one-word judgement will significantly alleviate pressure, but this alone is insufficient to unshackle education. Leaders must be equipped to cultivate environments of psychological safety, where change is managed confidently. Stability in this context is not about rigid conformity but about leaders having autonomy and agency to skilfully navigate change and build trust within their teams.

Recruitment, Retention & Growing Talent

Whilst the recruitment of new teachers is undeniably important, we need to highlight the critical issues of retention and fostering talent at every level of the workforce. The best educators are curious, creative and innovative, and committed to solving complex issues. Fostering a culture that retains and nurtures such talent is essential, alongside the recruitment of new practitioners.

A Future-Fit Curriculum

Our current curriculum is outdated and fails to address the critical issues of our time. Great education often comes from those willing to take brave, radical steps, but this should not be the exception. Our children need to be adaptable, equipped with the skills to face challenges and maintain their wellbeing. They must learn to communicate effectively in a broad sense, beyond the narrow confines of reading and writing. Engaging and experiential learning leads to excellent outcomes and should not be seen as incompatible with high academic achievement. The goal is to achieve both, and it is undoubtedly possible.

We acknowledge the change fatigue prevalent in schools. However, with exponential change upon us regardless, we must navigate it with hope, confidence, and bravery to realise the potential of the next generation. While you face immense pressure to deliver quick fixes, we also urge a focus on long-term, incremental adjustments. We trust that your plans will balance immediate successes with a visionary, long-term strategy. Thank you for considering our insights. We remain hopeful and confident in the potential for transformative change in our education system.

Yours sincerely,

Tamara Zapple Rolfs
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