

Speech: Education Secretary speaks to Leaders of diversity network

We often talk about diversity as a matter of fairness and non-discrimination, including to individuals. And that is indeed extremely important – a matter of equity and justice. And we believe it is, simply, right that we should reflect the make-up of our communities.

But for organisations, there is also intrinsic value in diversity of your workforce – including age, gender, disability, sexuality and ethnicity. If we look at three aspects: – Broaden the talent pool – Reflect and understand the customer base – Different perspectives and problem-solving These all support productivity.

Now, a lot of people do recognise that, but even in organisations where it is widely recognised, that doesn't mean diversity will come about automatically.

It can be impeded by the way we do things, how we present to the outside world, and by the, I think, pretty widespread human tendency to hide in our own image.

I'm sure you've all heard of the Myers-Briggs test. In a consulting company all but two people were INTP on Myers-Briggs. This may be good for that type of work, but maybe not so good for challenging that type of work.

More and more companies are changing what they do: – Where and how they advertise – The application process, with a list of requirements and questions asked – Name blind recruitment – Competency-based interviews; and – Being clear upfront about the potential to build in flexibilities.

I am delighted to join you today for your discussions about diversity in school leadership. It's an issue I'm passionate about promoting.

As Education Secretary, I am committed to creating a culture where teachers love their jobs and where children do their best. And we all know the huge difference a great teacher can make to a child's life.

The problem the UK faces is that we need more of them. Although we have almost the highest number of teachers ever, with pupil numbers in secondary schools rising, the demand for them is outstripping supply.

And although the number of teachers and heads from minority ethnic backgrounds is certainly going up, this is from a low base – it is lower for example than the NHS and we need to see more of them being represented in school leadership.

The number of ethnic minority teachers in nursery and primary schools rose from 9% to 11%, and from 13% to 17% in secondary schools between 2010 and 2017. There's a corresponding rise too in the numbers of those in headteacher positions (up from 5% to 7% in primaries and 7% to 9% in secondaries).

Welcome though those changes are, they still fall well short of the 19.5% that makes up the UK population and even further below the 32% of the school pupil population who come from ethnic minority groups.

We cannot begin to address teacher shortages if we are not recruiting from 100% of the best possible pool of applicants.

Last month I announced our new Recruitment and Retention Strategy. This has been a huge endeavour for my department. It aims to attract more people to the profession and make sure those who are already in it are happy and fulfilled and going to stay there.

I don't want, and could not afford, for people to think this isn't a viable prospect because of their background or ethnicity.

Let's say you're 14, you're not white and the school you go to has no black or minority teachers. What does that tell you? Or if you are the only teacher from an ethnic minority background in a school. How might that make you feel?

A study by Johns Hopkins University in the US has found that black students who had a teacher who "looks like them" were more likely to graduate from high school and go on to university than those who didn't.

While we cannot make direct comparisons between the UK and the US, we should take note.

My colleague Nadhim Zahawi hosted a roundtable last year on the different levels of achievement of ethnic groups in school.

The roundtable concluded that we need far more teachers from ethnic minorities in schools as role models for young students. Seeing teachers, and a headteacher in particular, who are from minorities can help motivate young people and encourage them to go for their goals.

It is a virtuous circle: more teachers from racial and ethnic minorities are positive role models, which in turn can drive academic achievement.

Last October we published a statement of intent, our commitment to increasing the diversity of the teaching workforce. We are pleased that groups from across the sector – unions like NAHT and ASCL and grassroots associations like BAMEed have already signed up to this and pledged the actions they will take to make it happen. Others are considering doing so, and I am pleased that Oasis will be the first Academies Trust to join.

We have reformed the suite of National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) to strengthen leadership in our schools. All providers of these gold-standard qualifications have to hit targets for recruitment of participants from ethnic minorities.

Over the past four years, the leadership equality and diversity fund has been supporting diversity projects at local level.

Last year we announced an additional investment of £2m in establishing new

school-led equality and diversity hubs covering all of the eight regional schools commissioner regions and building on the success of the previous equality and diversity fund. Because you know, if it's DfE policy, it's got a hub.

These hubs are supporting teachers from diverse backgrounds, including those from ethnic minorities, to progress in their career and into leadership.

As we look for the best examples of what works in providing an education system that delivers for everyone, London often comes up.

While the improvement in London schools – it's called the London effect – is likely to be due to an interaction of many factors, including the workforce, individual school practices and improvement initiatives, the city's rich ethnic mix is pretty widely acknowledged to be a major aspect of its success.

But we should not leave it all to teachers or school administrators to do. Last year I urged more people to become school governors. If I had to make sure that this would be heard by one group above any other, it would be those from ethnic minorities.

Governors and trustees are absolutely crucial to the life and direction of a school; they decide how funding is spent, they support and challenge leaders, guide what children learn and the values they live by. It is vital that what they say and do reflects their communities.

According to a National Governance Association survey, only 5% of governors and trustees come from an ethnic minority.

Schools need diverse governing boards which is why we support the NGA's campaign Everyone on Board, a push to get far greater board diversity.

Ladies and gentlemen, Britain has been a rich, multi-ethnic melting pot for many years. In our schools we need to draw on the full range of talent, and to reflect children's communities. When we learn from each other we become stronger and better. Our future success depends on it.

Thank you.