

**Opportunity and Fairness Commission: Submission**  
**'Opportunity & Fairness Suggestion'**

Dear 'Commission',

Please find attached a completed questionnaire.

I do not represent any organised group, but I am a Carer of a young person with a disability and have also supported my two older (adult) children, both of whom had Educational Special Needs. Over the last 25 years, I have been School Governor of both mainstream and Special Schools, been an Education Appeals Panel Member and now offer support (as a volunteer) to people with a rare communication anxiety disorder known as 'Selective Mutism'.

I first 'developed' my attached 'idea' in the mid 1990's and in the intervening years that have passed, the consensus from the many educators and health professionals I have spoken to on the matter seems to be one of agreement.

What I propose here may appear radical at first glance, but over time, it is an idea that would pay for itself in the long term, in such ways as reducing crime rates and the associated costs of crime on taxpayers, making education far more effective, thereby enhancing skills and productivity to improve our local economy.

It seems to me that the key to big successes is to start small and expand (the Apple corporation might serve as the perfect example, perhaps?). No politician is likely to commit to a proposal that might exceed their term of office, unless there is sufficient and convincing evidence to support such a proposal. Thus, my hope is to start a spark which will light a fire of enthusiasm that will spread further.

What I would like to see in my local area is just ONE school adopting a rather 'revolutionary' policy - that of carefully screening every child, to identify any potential learning difficulties that might impair their academic progress and, thereafter, ensuring that any difficulties identified are fully and appropriately supported, not with piecemeal lip-service from over-stretched resources, but with enough funding to ensure that those children are NOT left abandoned to an educational scrap-heap!

It is that same academic scrap-heap that has continued to maintain social deprivation generation after generation and indeed, that has filled our prisons with these abandoned ex-pupils too (remembering that every child is innocent at birth and that we humans only react to circumstances during our developmental or 'formative' years).

Hence, it is my belief that, simply because the education system has so consistently failed to "holistically" identify and address children's specific learning needs, the problem of social deprivation is being maintained, along with all the accompanying drain on resources, such as healthcare, for example (e.g. obesity, drug & alcohol abuse, mental illness - all of which can be commonly attributed to low self-esteem due largely to a perceived 'school-failure'!)

Pupils do not 'fail' in school, but unfortunately, schools do regularly fail pupils, most often just failing to recognise the specific barrier that prevents a child from absorbing knowledge! That isn't about bad teaching or even bad management - it's about a simple lack of awareness! How many children have fallen victim to the unfairness of someone else's unwitting ignorance? My local community here in New Addington is probably chocked-full of people who can give horrific accounts of their disastrous school experiences and yet, very many of them will also have high IQ's without a single qualification to name! (& I can fit myself into that category, too!)

If just one school in Croydon could show evidence of how vital a difference identification and appropriate support can make to it's cohort's outcomes, that school would become a benchmark for other schools. Thereafter, if the policy were a proven success and adopted by other schools in Croydon, Croydon would become the flagship example for the rest of the UK!

I am just planting the seed of the idea here....yes, it's only a drop in the ocean, but without all of the drops, there would BE no ocean, so ultimately, perhaps if we all add our own little drops, a tiny puddle might one day become a tsunami of change? Here's hoping.

Sincerely,

***Debbie Russell***

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