

ASCL launch blueprint for a fairer Britain

ASCL have today launched their report, *A Great Education for Every Child: The ASCL blueprint for a fairer education system*. The school and college leader's union proposes the overhaul of schools admissions to prioritise disadvantaged pupils. It is among a series of measures which also includes reforms to SATs, GCSEs and the national curriculum.

The proposals are aimed at closing the long-standing gap in the attainment of children from disadvantaged backgrounds compared to their peers. It is estimated that this gap will take over 500 years to close at the current rate and that this bleak picture has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The blueprint suggests a review of school admissions to consider the potential benefits of requiring schools to prioritise in their oversubscription criteria places for children who are eligible for the pupil premium. There is already a similar requirement for children in care.

The proposal is designed to address the fact that popular schools rated as outstanding or good by Ofsted are often oversubscribed and located in middle-class areas which can make places at these schools hard to access for pupils from disadvantaged communities.

Geoff Barton, General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said: "Middle-class parents have the buying power to afford homes in areas near popular schools that are rated as good or outstanding. We may not necessarily agree with the way that Ofsted ratings work but this is the reality.

"There are, of course, many excellent schools in disadvantaged areas too, but the economics of property ownership mean that disadvantaged families don't have the same access as middle-class parents to certain schools. This is an entrenched injustice which reinforces an unhealthy division between affluent and disadvantaged areas and children."

This is a controversial view, for it would create the same number of injustices as it would help the disadvantaged, for every pupil from a disadvantaged home that was prioritised for a place would deny a place to someone else who would have qualified for one because they lived closer to the school. They would have to walk, cycle or be driven past their nearest school, possibly forced to go some distance to another school in another community leaving all their friends from primary school behind.

Demitri Coryton, editor of *Education Journal*, who attended the press launch yesterday, likened the policy to that of bussing, which proved incredibly unpopular in the USA when it was introduced in some areas there to try and get racial equality. The same argument was deployed then, until public opinion led to its collapse.

ASCL suggests that anyone with a pupil premium would qualify, but that can be a lot of children in some areas. To limit the impact, ASCL has suggested that either the numbers could be capped, or a sub-set of pupil premium pupils, for example those in persistent poverty, could be used. ASCL admitted that much work still needed to be done on the detail, but wanted to start a conversation about dealing with difficult issues like closing the attainment gap.

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