

Education Secretary's speech at the RISE inclusion conference

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Education Secretary's key note speech at the South East RISE inclusion conference.

Today I want to start by telling you about a child with an inspiring story.

His name is Joshua - and he's a happy boy from Brighton.

At age five Joshua was diagnosed with Autism.

In his own words, it's a part of him, but not what defines him.

Now his first experience of school wasn't great.

The school wasn't set up to meet his needs - and so he could only manage 10 minutes in the classroom a day.

Too noisy.

Too many people.

He had to leave the school because it just wasn't working for him - his education was suffering and he wasn't achieving all he could.

That's when he started at West Blatchington Primary, part of The Pioneer Academy trust - and his path in life changed.

Joshua benefitted straight away from the school's on site SEND unit.

He learned how to manage his feelings and build friendships - so that soon he was ready to join his classmates in the mainstream class.

He went from barely coming in to being in school all day, every day.

Joshua achieved and he thrived - in school and out. He became a Beaver, then a Cub, then a Scout. He's made lots of friends.

And now he's sharing his story with children across the south east and raising awareness of autism - giving assemblies in 14 different schools.

He even gave the keynote speech at the Croydon Inclusion Conference and at the Brighton and Hove Inclusion Conference too.

Joshua proudly tells people that he 'smashed' his SATs and is now doing well at a mainstream secondary school.

He shows what can happen when we get it right for children with SEND.

For his primary school's celebration of 30 years of their SEND unit, Joshua wrote a message of

thanks:

“West Blatch changed my life and for that I’m eternally grateful.”

That’s what we do this for.

You’ll have your own stories of success... the children in your schools who you were able to support and who did well.

That feeling of having made a difference, there’s nothing like it.

The young people like Joshua, living better lives because you were there for them at a crucial time.

Thank you, for everything you do for the children of this country.

But you’ll know that the system just isn’t set up to meet the needs of most children like Joshua.

I’ve spent the last year speaking to teachers about this.

And they tell me that the stories of success are despite, not because of, the system we have.

Leaders tell me that the system doesn’t deliver success as standard for children with SEND... it usually only comes when your heroic staff go above and beyond.

I’ve spoken to parents and carers too. Mams and dads are fed up...

not of you and your staff...

they know how hard you work, they see your dedication...

rather they are fed up of the faceless, soulless system that governs what their child gets and how...

support that is not delivered freely but must be fought at every step of the way...

support that responds in the first instance not to need but to paperwork.

I know it’s a system that frustrates you just as much.

You’ll know that parents have had enough of seeing their child underachieve...

not through a lack of effort...

not through a lack of talent...

not through a lack of hard work from staff.

But because children with SEND suffer from a system of late support, inconsistent support...

support that only exists far away, so that at weekends and during the holidays they have no friends to play with back home.

Where is the connection to community in that?

Where is the sense that all children belong in our society... when the system sends so many of them away?

Children with SEND are being failed because the system we have inherited is not set up for them to succeed in their local school.

Not yet anyway.

But it will be.

I know that for too long, so much has been asked of you – by government, by parents and by society.

At times you have become a fourth emergency service, stepping up when wider services fail.

And I want to thank you and your staff for that, for going above and beyond, again and again.

You do it because you care, because you can't and won't just look the other way.

But you shouldn't have to fill all these gaps...

and I'm determined that you won't be doing it alone.

Under this government we are rebuilding childhood and family services.

Our Best Start Family Hubs give parents all the support they need for their child's early years – and now including support for SEND.

We've delivered the 30-hours a week of government-funded childcare and begun to turn around the children's social care system.

We're expanding free school meals, rolling out free breakfast clubs, ending the two-child limit... fighting the disgrace of child poverty.

And by 2030, I am deeply proud that this government will have lifted more than half a million children out of relative poverty... and that we will see the largest ever reduction in child poverty in a single parliament.

I know change won't come in full overnight, of course...

but over time you'll see fewer children arriving for their first day of school in nappies...

you'll spend less time supporting children to catch up thanks to early intervention in crucial areas like language...

and you'll no longer be under pressure to run a foodbank as well as a school.

This is about providing the right support at the right time, so that when children reach your classroom, they are ready and raring to go.

Two weeks ago, building on those strong foundations, I launched this government's schools white paper, setting a new vision for education in this country...

A future in which children grow up together, go to their local school together, achieve and thrive together.

A future of high standards and inclusion.

A future in which all children with SEND get the rights they deserve...

the right to be included in their local schools...

the right to enjoy exactly the same high standards and expectations that we have for other children.

And, colleagues, we get there through inclusive mainstream.

More children educated at a great local school...

with their friends, close to their family, a core part of their local community.

And to those who say that inclusion in our schools will come at the cost of high standards...

I say: you are wrong. The evidence proves it.

My department has looked at English and maths GCSE results for children with SEND.

And those children do better in mainstream schools than specialist schools.

Don't just take our word for it.

Research from the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education shows that children with SEND in mainstream schools have a better chance of getting a job when they leave.

Inclusive mainstream can offer children with SEND the precious opportunity to go on to live a rich and fulfilling adult life.

And research also shows that, when they learn alongside their peers...

children both with and without SEND tend to do better, both academically and socially.

Because inclusion and high standards...

it's not one or the other, it's both.

These are the changes in our schools that I want to work hand-in-hand with you to deliver.

A new system of support as standard, layered to meet different needs.

Universal for all.

And where needs are greater, targeted support through Individual Support Plans.

Then specialist provision for children who need it.

I ask you to work with us and with your families to run this new system.

Establish an inclusion base for children with more complex needs.

Draw up an inclusion strategy, show how you're going to make inclusion a defining strength of your school.

Join together with local schools in groups to pool ideas and resources, spreading what works... because the only way we succeed is together, partners in our shared moral mission to make

education work for every child.

The spirit of collaboration – parents and teachers and support staff, schools and other schools, local services coming together alongside Government.

You will be at the centre of this generational change for our children and our country.

Your talent. Your dedication. Your expertise.

And to see these changes through, I'm backing you...

the Chancellor is backing you...

with £1.6 billion for an inclusive mainstream fund so you can build inclusion into school life...

£3.7 billion to develop inclusion bases, improve accessibility and create new special school places...

£200 million to train your staff to deliver for children with SEND.

The new Experts at Hand service – in time, a bank of professional support for children...

occupational therapists, educational psychologists, speech and language therapists...

freed up to support students, not fill out forms...

ready to go when need arises, not only after a battle is fought.

And our RISE service is here to support you.

Our RISE inclusive mainstream offer has already been delivering webinars and setting up national networks for support bases.

And we'll work to grow our offer of support, to guide you through these new reforms, especially by sharing and spreading good practice.

You are not alone in this. It's a shared endeavour.

Schools will sit at the centre of a system of support that stretches through childhood and beyond.

And I will give you the resources you need to make your schools places of inclusion and excellence for all.

But I won't leave this to chance.

Inclusion is no longer a nice-to-have.

It's an essential marker of school performance, and Ofsted have changed their inspections to recognise it.

For the first time, inclusion has its own dedicated judgement when Ofsted inspect nurseries, schools and colleges.

We'll highlight what works and multiply it so that all children can benefit.

But this isn't the end of the conversation. We've launched a consultation – and I urge you all to get in

touch and tell us what you think... have your say on how these reforms should be designed and delivered in practice.

We're asking everyone with a stake to make their voices heard, in service of all the children in our schools.

Those children deserve a school system that moves to meet their needs, a system that knows inclusion is a strength, not a weakness.

Because the best schools are not those that shut themselves away, offering excellence only to a narrow band of children.

The best schools open themselves up to their communities, they offer excellence to all, and they are stronger for it.

I want to work with you to spread that into every school in the country, so that every child can benefit... so that Joshua's experience is no longer the exception, but the norm.

Before us we have a once-in-a-generation chance for change.

So let's come together now - members of our shared moral mission - and build a school system that works for each and every child.

Thank you.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/education-secretarys-speech-at-the-rise-inclusion-conference>