

## Message from the Chief Executive

*'When we're talking about diversity, it's not a box to check. It is a reality that should be deeply felt and held and valued by all of us'* Ava DuVernay.

I recently read a blog entitled 'Why we need to promote equality' written by Melanie Renowden, Deputy CEO of one of our partnership organisations Ambition School Leadership (ASL). It was an extremely thought-provoking and an interesting read, with one sentence particularly attracting my attention: *'I would hope that none of us are working on the assumption that a leader looks and acts a certain way, but I recognise that in our society stereotypes do prevail and inform our unconscious biases.'*

As with all good writing, Melanie's blog got me thinking. I am very interested in exploring the extent to which unconscious bias influences our recruitment and interactions with children, young people, their parents/carers and staff across our Trust.

One of the most interesting, but sadly not surprising, aspects of Melanie's blog is a video clip where 22 children were asked to draw a firefighter, surgeon and a fighter pilot. Of the 66 pictures drawn, only 5 were of women.

Take a moment to reflect, of 66 pictures only 5 were of women. A small sample I know, but I wonder what would happen in our academies if we asked a cross section of our children and young people the same question.....

Melanie goes on to state that in a recent survey by ASL, female teachers felt that they were disempowered by the system, and at times, some of the people they work with: *'One female teacher told us that a female leader working in her school had told her not to pursue leadership as she had recently married and would undoubtedly want to get pregnant soon.'*

I wish I could say I don't believe this would happen in England in 2018 but, unfortunately, I do. Here is the link if you are interested in finding out more.

<https://www.ambitionschoolleadership.org.uk/blog/introducing-under-construction/>

The fight for equality isn't just reserved for women. I recently had the pleasure of reading an interview with Daniel Gray, a teacher who was instrumental in setting up the LGBTed network <http://lgbted.uk/>

In his interview Daniel shares the story of how he discussed his sexuality, for the first time at work, in front of over 1000 students in an assembly to mark LGBT History month in February of this year. In Daniel's words: *'Most didn't bat an eyelid; there were no cheers, no drama or anything like that'.*

However, one student told Daniel: *'Oh my god Sir, your assembly has changed my life'.*

Daniel went on to recall his own experience at school:

*'The aim is to be the role models we needed when we were at school. I remember being at school during Section 28 and I remember how horrible it was to be bullied. I was told by my teachers it's just something that you have to deal with'.*

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/may/26/gay-trans-teachers-network-lgbted-section-28-anniversary>

Stonewall published some incredibly stark statistics in 2017 stating that almost half of LGBT pupils in Britain's schools have been bullied because of their sexuality; four in five young trans people have self-harmed and 45% have attempted suicide.

<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/news/stonewall-school-report-2017-anti-lgbt-bullying-down-lgbt-young-people-still-risk>

I continue to be very excited by the potential of our recent work with Stonewall; I am determined we will be the first MAT in the country to be accredited for our curriculum and recruitment processes.

It is GAT's ambition to have a workforce that's as diverse and varied as the children and young people we serve. We need to work together to ensure that we support and invest in each other to help everyone achieve their potential and aspirations regardless of gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, physical ability and economic background. A diverse workforce will help us create a stronger organisation, one which is better placed to serve our communities. However, I believe we have much work to do as a Trust and a profession in general.

DfE figures for 2016 show that of the 510,000 state funded teachers only 68,000 were drawn from an ethnic minority background. Just 13% of the workforce compared to 27% of pupils in state schools who come from a BME background. An extra 68,000 teachers from BME backgrounds would need to be recruited to accurately mirror England's school population.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-40568987>

One of my priorities across the Trust this year is to look more closely at equality and diversity. I am particularly keen to see an increase in female senior leaders across our organisation and male senior leaders in our primary academies. I also want to consider what we can do to increase the number of people from BME backgrounds entering the teaching profession.

That's why I want to focus my forthcoming CEO visits to academies on the issues of diversity and equality. I would like to talk to you and your teams about what you are doing in your academies to drive this forward and what you think we as a Trust should do to support you.

I am very interested to talk to our children and young people about stereotyping and equality, what their experiences are and what they think we can do to support them in the future. I am going to use the same exercise Melanie highlights in her blog as a starting point for my conversation with them.

My challenge for our organisation is to consider how we ensure diversity and equality of opportunity across the Trust. Let's be forward thinking, inventive, honest and straight forward. We need to be willing to change, to learn and grow.

Unfortunately, I believe that equality in the world won't come about by itself; we need to make it happen.

In the words of Nelson Mandela:

*'Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world'*

So, if you believe this to be true, we have the power as educators to change the world. Let's use it!

See you soon.

**Wayne**