

Education and Local Services

Sarah Wollaston Conservative, Totnes

Although we all recognise the need to address deprivation, does my right hon. Friend also recognise the need to address the historical injustices for underfunded areas? Will she confirm that she will increase the age-weighted pupil unit block in the funding formula and help to reduce the costs that some schools are facing through the apprenticeship levy?

Justine Greening Minister for Women and Equalities, The Secretary of State for Education

As I said, we are committed to introducing fair funding. It is right that we hold all schools to the same standards and the same accountability framework, and it makes sense that we should ensure that children with comparable needs are funded comparably wherever in the country they are. I will set out shortly the details of how we will do that following the consultation.

I will finish my speech. [Hon. Members: "Hooray!"] In many respects I was just getting started, but I am sure the rest can wait for future debates. The Government have done sterling work in narrowing the gender pay gap and advocating having more women on boards, but those efforts cannot slacken and need to be stepped up. We will bring forward new approaches to supporting women in the workplace. The 30-hour childcare offer will help families with the cost of childcare, and our returnship pilots will explore new ways of supporting mothers—it is overwhelmingly mothers—to get back into work. We know from some of the work that is already under way how powerful they can be. Of course, inequality is not confined to gender, and the Government will bring a renewed focus to the ethnicity gap in our workplaces.

The Government have an ambitious agenda for this Parliament: creating world-class technical education, ensuring that there is a good school place for every single child, wherever they are growing up, and tackling inequality in educational opportunity in all its forms. To achieve those goals, we will be resolute in our pursuit of high standards. We are building on a firm foundation, although there is more to do and more to deliver. Our young people deserve nothing less. This nation contains a wealth of talent just waiting to be unlocked, which will create opportunity and success for individuals and a strong and prosperous country that can take on, and succeed in, any challenge.

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