

'The Power of Education'

In November I took a big and uncertain step in becoming the new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Minerva Learning Trust. A step which I am incredibly proud and excited to take, but one which also fills with an enormous sense of fear and responsibility.

The first half term flew by in an instant. It was a whirlwind of reviewing strategy, meeting new people, building new teams, managing change and learning to lead in a very different way. It was exhausting, but also highly exhilarating. Finally, the Christmas break came which provided me with much needed time to rest and reflect. Time to reflect upon the last few weeks, but most importantly time to reflect upon the future of our organisation and to re-visit my own beliefs about education – *why did I come to work in the education sector in the first place?* My answer to this is three-fold....

- 1. I believe in the power of education to transform lives**
- 2. I believe in the power of education to enable all young people to succeed**
- 3. I believe in the power of education to create a better and more inclusive society**

I grew up in a really tough community in Rotherham in the wake of the Miners' strike. Life was hard. This wasn't a community where education was deemed to be important, it was a community where people were just about getting by. But, three people had a huge impact on my early life and changed my perspective on education; my parents and my secondary school PE teacher.

My parents were amazing. They made huge sacrifices to buy me books and feed my love of reading. They bought me my first set of Encyclopaedia Britannica at the age of thirteen even though they couldn't really afford it (which I still have and cherish to this day, despite its content being superseded by the internet and Twitter!). They took me for violin and music reading lessons, although it soon became clear that this was definitely not my forte! They encouraged my love of, and talent for, sport and took me all over the country to compete in hockey, netball and athletics. They opened my mind to a world of opportunities, something I am eternally grateful for.

Sadly, that is not the experience for a lot of young people. Fortunately though, every child in the UK does have the opportunity to go to school.

I loved my time at school and I absolutely believe it transformed my life. I went to a great school but I was also fortunate enough to have a fantastic PE teacher – also called Miss Matthews (funnily enough!). She was the one teacher believed in me, mentored me, inspired me and supported me through the tough times. She was the one who told me that it didn't matter where I came from but that I should dream big and work hard to achieve it. She was the one who opened my eyes to University and the reason that I became the first person in my immediate family to gain a University degree. I will never be able to thank her enough.

The Power of Education should never be underestimated – it is the most empowering force in the world. It creates knowledge, builds confidence, provides opportunities and breaks down barriers. For the most

vulnerable, it is the key that opens door to a world of opportunity that would otherwise be locked. It provides young people with the skills, knowledge and qualifications they need to be the leaders of tomorrow. Most importantly though, it instils great values and beliefs so that they can contribute positively to society.

Great schools not only change lives, they change communities and society as a whole. Great schools cannot achieve this without great teachers and great staff.! During my first few weeks as CEO it has been a pleasure to meet so many dedicated and talented staff and to start to get to know some of our amazing and talented students. Writing this blog has made me realise one very important thing – we have got a brilliant team and the potential of our Trust is endless. Collectively, we have a very special opportunity to use the 'Power of Education' to transform the lives of thousands of young people. Think about that for a minute.... *what other profession is lucky enough to be able to say that?*

#'If we don't, who will?'

Thanks for reading....

Bev Matthews