25.8.2020

Bath

Dear Ann Mroz,

I start by writing to reintroduce myself to you. We met once in Bristol about 5 years ago as I was an invitee to a roundtable dinner event hosted by you and Sir David Carter. It was both an enjoyable and memorable evening. I was nearly one that would not remain positively influencing the face of education, such is the racism I have faced as a school leader.

I feel urged to write to you as a black educator, an ex headteacher of 6 different primary schools and currently a full-time school improvement advisor working for a local authority in Berkshire. I also write to you as a subscriber of TES, a magazine that is rightly a well-known driver and influencer in the world of education in the hope that I can further raise awareness and offer support for progressing the agenda of black educators.

In 2007, as an ambitious new school leader in London I attended my first, and sadly last, TES awards ceremony. As a guest of a friend who had inherited a TES award winning school, you can possibly imagine my alarm and disappointment at looking over the balcony and witnessing a sea of white faces. My race was not represented there amongst those destined for the podium. 13 years later little seems to have changed. As leaders of education we know that schools and the education industry are microcosms of society, yet the people at the TES Award ceremony over the last 14 years are not a reflection of the society that I have and do indeed live in.

As a school leader, awarded for my leadership by the DfE, Bristol Local Authority and SSAT, often working in schools in the most deprived areas of England, I know that supporting others to acknowledge that change is necessary should be carried out with love, not hate or fear. Preferring to raise awareness and offer solutions, I have had to remain modest and sometimes complicit in the racist acts that continue to breed across schools, alternatively risk being unfavourably labelled or unheard.

Most people who know me well, have been surprised that the industry has not worn me down; like the media industry did to Bristol Mayor, Marvin Rees. I came into the profession, to inspire people that looked like me or that had a history like mine, but I was being denied on a weekly basis. It took more than 100 job applications and 28 interviews nationwide before I heard the word yes for my most recent appointment. Yet as a teacher or lecturer, I heard the word yes at every single interview. It was as if I was being told by the world you are good enough to be a teacher, we just don’t believe or trust you or people like you as leaders of our schools or profession. Why did I believe that? As well as other avenues, including being unable to name three black influencing leaders of schools today, I looked to the TES Awards for testimony.

I can only help progress the agenda if the challenges are acknowledged, if the behaviours that have caused the system failure are acknowledged. This can cause pain. I will make it easy, I will not dismiss any interest. I am as keen as any to progress the agenda so that schools are a truer reflection of society. I do not know everything. I am imperfect, but I will embrace change, so that my grandchildren do not have to write letters like this or travel the roads I have and that we can easily name three influencing black school leaders.

My website is an insight into who I am and what my beliefs are and consider whether I can help in any way, raise awareness, give hope and make changes to the systems so that black people can share the podium fairly with those from other races in the future. I believe and understand that no BAME specific training scheme or quotas will change the colours on the podium anytime soon, representation is not enough, but perhaps raising our profiles, listening to our stories and better understanding that our perspectives are valuable is a good place to start.

Warm regards,

Paula Shore

Standards and Effectiveness Partner