

Memo to an incoming Prime Minister

Personal journeys begin at school

The gap between the best public schools and the below average state school is still too large. Money does buy advantage. The best state schools show this need not be so. Money does not always buy success. The crucial ingredients of a great school are the attitudes of teachers and pupils and an ethos of can do and self advancement, more than they are a more expensive sports field or smarter and more modern school rooms.

I went to a state primary and won a free place at a Direct Grant school. When I go into one of the great public schools to talk I am usually impressed by the adult approach of the older pupils to any lecture and exchanges we have. They are often keen to find out how I got the jobs and opportunities I had. They will respond to a complex lecture on economics or politics with informed questions and see the exchanges as worthwhile in their own right.

We need to create the same can do and will get on approach in all state schools that have to compete with these institutions. Pupils need stretching. They need to hear there is nothing stopping them achieving good things, but they also need to be told the people who are the most successful are often the ones that work hardest. In sport the more you practice the luckier you get. In academic life the more books you read and the more viewpoints you consider the better you are likely to perform. If you want to write well read well.