

## Speech

# Sir Michael Wilshaw at Business and Education Summit

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Her Majesty's Chief Inspector Sir Michael Wilshaw discussed governance and apprenticeships at the British Chambers of Commerce.



Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for inviting me to address you today.

It is a pleasure to be here to talk about an issue that is always close to my heart – how can we encourage better engagement between schools and business? This has been a busy time for Ofsted. Last week I published my [Annual Report on the state of education and skills in England](#). The findings are very relevant to your debate today.

It's the job of every Chief Inspector, in any Annual Report, to address 2 fundamental questions. Firstly, is our English

education system improving? And, if so, is this improvement likely to raise our standing, internationally?

Inspection evidence over the last year demonstrates that improvement is only partial. England's primary schools continue to do better, but secondary schools still remain a problem in large parts of our country. As a consequence, the answer to the second question must be that our national system is still some way from being world class. I'm sure this is a major concern for all of you in this room.

In the run up to Christmas, I don't want to sound totally devoid of festive cheer so let me acknowledge the improvements we have seen.

To give some context, I have been in education for nearly half a century and can well remember the miserable standards that predominated the seventies, eighties and much of the nineties. Greater autonomy and greater accountability – including Ofsted – have enormously improved our schools. Children are getting a better deal than ever before. Nearly 1.4 million more children are attending good and outstanding schools than they were even 5 years ago. Sadly, most of this improvement is due to primary school not secondary.

Primary schools are getting the basics right. Literacy and numeracy are much improved at this level. There has been a steady rise in performance at the end of primary stage – the results this year are the highest on record. And although much work still needs to be done, primary schools have succeeded in narrowing the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their better-off peers.

Yes, we have a better education system now than was the case 20 years ago. The problem is that as we have improved, so have our international competitors. If we are to retain and grow our competitive advantage as a nation, we need to do a lot better. In particular, we need to see the same rate of improvement in our secondary schools as we have seen at primary level.

As things stand, too many secondary schools, particularly in the

North and Midlands, are failing to equip young people with the skills and knowledge that they, the world of business and the country as a whole need. What's worse is that the great work that is being done in our primary schools is being wasted in too many of our secondary schools.

Let me illustrate for you what this actually means. Education charity the Sutton Trust, has identified that over a third of 'highly able' boys eligible for free school meals in England who scored in the top 10% at the end of primary fail to achieve a good set of GCSEs 5 years later. The situation for bright girls from disadvantaged backgrounds is not much better. Some 7,000 disadvantaged children are achieving top performance at primary but failing to achieve top results at GCSE every year. So if you look at a place like Redcar, an area of high deprivation and unemployment, primary schools are doing better than the national average but secondaries perform miserably.

Overall, too many children are leaving school without the necessary GCSE results, lacking the basic standards in literacy and numeracy and with a far from ideal attitude towards the world of work.

After all, low standards at secondary schools aren't just a matter of whether young people are getting the right qualifications. Poor results often reflect a culture of poor behaviour. And a child that hasn't been taught to behave at school isn't likely to fit in at work. A child that hasn't learned to concentrate at school isn't going to focus at work. A child that hasn't been taught to respect their teachers and classmates isn't going to easily respect their colleagues.

So what can be done? More to the point, what can you do? Well, you can start by joining a governing board of a local secondary school or college.

## **Governance**

The role that governance plays in ensuring that every child receives the best possible education is often overlooked. But it

has never been more important. So, I welcome the campaign by the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) for there to be a business governor in every school.

The huge changes to our increasingly autonomous education system over the past 5 years, including the rapid growth of academies and free schools, have placed more power into the hands of governing boards than ever before.

Governors and trustees are there to set the school's vision, ethos and strategic direction. They are also expected to hold the headteacher to account for the performance of teachers and pupils, and to ensure that public money is being well spent. I've argued for a long time that governance should be much more professional and business-like and, in some instances, paid.

Who better to be on these bodies than people like you? Perceptive people. Curious people. People with business acumen, tenacity and the ability to challenge and support the headteacher and senior leadership. People who can dig underneath the performance data to ask the right questions. In short, people who are prepared to say this isn't good enough. I presume those in this room are successful people who know how to run a business. You will be the assertive types who are able to deliver the necessary challenge.

How many of you in the room are or have been governors, or failing that, are encouraging your staff to serve on governing bodies? Please, get involved. Believe me, you will find it rewarding and don't be put off by the plethora of educational jargon that pervades our system.

I've talked about Clive Bourne. Clive represented a long and rich legacy, going back hundreds of years, of business getting involved in, and even running, education. They often do this at times of greatest need for the country.

More recently, we have seen the commitment of larger businesses to the sponsoring of academies, such as the Harris Foundation and the UBS Bridge Academy, also in Hackney, where pupils get maths lessons from equity traders.

Now sponsoring a school may seem like a tall order for a single enterprise, but why not form consortia?

Indeed I understand that this is beginning to happen in some parts of the country. So credit to chamber members from West & North Yorkshire who are helping to set up the UTC Leeds. And from the North East Chamber, where Hitachi Rail Europe, Gestamp Tallent and Sunderland University are setting up UTC South Durham with a focus on advanced manufacturing and engineering. Both are due to open next September.

This is exactly the sort of forward thinking the country needs. The more of you that get together with shared aims and ambitions for education, the more chance there is of making a difference. You can start working with educators to sponsor schools in your area. Make an approach to your local academy chain. See what you can contribute.

By becoming directly involved, you can help shape the curriculum and the direction of the school. You can ensure pupils are getting the necessary work experience to prepare them for the world of work and you can help instil the ethos and attitude in children to prepare them for the rigours and responsibilities of working life. And let me be clear: I entirely support your call for the reintroduction of a duty to provide work experience for pupils under 16.

These are exciting times in our education system. There has never been a better time to get involved. With the free school and sponsored academies programme, the opportunities for business to engage directly with education are unprecedented. Seize them.

## **Apprenticeships**

There is another major area where business must get involved in education: apprenticeships. Our recent report on this subject painted a bleak picture of poor quality training, delivering low-level skills with too many apprenticeships based in the wrong sectors.

We found too many examples of apprenticeships unworthy of the name. An apprenticeship isn't endless tea-making, shelf-stacking or envelope-stuffing. It is not an induction course or a 6 week in-house training scheme. Worryingly, we even found examples of people who had been put on apprenticeships without even knowing it. Often government funding was being used to subsidise poor quality, ill-targeted provision.

We must learn lessons from our European counterparts. Take Switzerland and Germany. In those countries, the role of business in developing apprenticeships is ingrained. Visiting Switzerland last year, I was struck by how well apprenticeships work and how highly regarded they are.

Two-thirds of young Swiss who leave compulsory education at 15 embark on a vocational programme which incorporates an apprenticeship. In Germany, it is a similar figure. In this country, only a quarter of all apprenticeship starts are in the 16 to 18 age group, although there are currently 7 applicants for every apprenticeship. Only 5% of youngsters age 16-18 start an apprenticeship. These are miserable statistics.

The training programme in these other countries is defined by employers and updated annually to reflect changing labour market requirements. If there is a surfeit of plumbers one year, the number being trained is reduced and applicants encouraged into other sectors.

In England we are moving in the right direction, with the government's ambitious drive for increased numbers of apprenticeships. But we need to ensure that their quality improves and that they are targeted on those areas of industry and business where we have skill shortages.

You may not all necessarily agree but I believe the passporting of training funding and the new business levy is a step in the right direction. It should work to focus minds, encourage business to think carefully about their needs and take ownership of what is delivered. You as employers have got to take ownership. As I have said elsewhere, there needs to be a recognised structure to

deliver apprenticeships at a local level. Why aren't chambers of commerce working with CBI groups to organise and identify the needs of a region?

If the great majority of employers are SMEs, employing fewer than 20 people, how can they fully engage if they don't know where to turn? How can they navigate the paper work and identify the appropriate training providers to access apprentices? A joined-up approach is needed not only to help SMEs with the process but to establish where the skills gaps are and to ensure we get the best fit of apprentices into vacancies. If this isn't done, the ambitious apprenticeship programme will come to a grinding halt.

So this is my challenge to you: get organised. Don't just wait for others to put structures in place and then bemoan the lack of progress made. Use your networks and knowledge to find solutions.

If we don't fix the apprenticeship system, we will continue to have major problems in recruitment. Local firms won't be able to fill vacancies without looking outside their local area or even overseas, and local youngsters won't be able to find work because they don't have the right skills and don't know how to access the right training.

So there are the challenges. Get involved. Ofsted is doing its bit to challenge the system to do better. You need to do your bit by getting more involved and becoming active participants in schools, colleges and vocational training.

You will benefit, your company will benefit, the economy of the country will benefit, but most importantly of all young people will benefit.

Thank you.

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