

National Union of Teachers campaign – ‘Stop Privatisation of Education’ – October 2015

Thank you for your email as part of the National Union of Teachers campaign “Stop Privatisation of Education”. I share your concerns that the poorest and most vulnerable should have the opportunity to go to school and achieve good learning outcomes.

In this Government’s manifesto we committed to tackling global poverty and to improve lives. We committed to supporting 11million children to obtain a decent education over the next five years, and DFID is working to implement this commitment. Our recent Annual Report (2014-15), shows that through UK Aid, the UK delivered its previous commitment to support over 11million children to go to school by 2015. We are training 190,000 teachers, and supporting a further one million of the poorest and most marginalised girls to learn through the Girls’ Education Challenge. Globally, 121 million children are out of school - many of them girls – and Sustainable Development Goal 4 is seeking to put this right. As one of the top bilateral donors to basic education, the UK is leading the world to ensure children have their right to an education. This is a challenging task and success will require a joint effort from all parts of the international education community.

Supporting access to education for the poorest through the private sector is just one of the ways the UK is helping to ensure more of the world’s poorest children are in school and learning. It is right that we work with a range of partners including governments, NGOs and the private sector. It is not the case that the UK is promoting the privatisation of education in developing countries, nor that it is in breach of human rights obligations. Our collaboration with the low cost private sector enables hundreds of thousands of children previously out of school to get a chance to learn and improve their life chances.

Low fee private education is a fact of life for many people in the developing world, especially in urban environments. For example, in Lagos there are 18,000 private schools and only 1,600 state schools. In such contexts the private sector is essential for poor children to have the right to education. In Kenya, DFID works with 399 low-fee private schools in the slums of Nairobi and Mombasa where there are no state schools at all. The aim of the programme is to pay school fees for the very poorest and raise school standards. We are currently paying school fees for around 22,000 children.

DFID is leading the international community when it comes to education and directly investing over £70million in research into ‘*what works*’ to improve education systems, including analysis of different school types within each system. We will disseminate findings so that governments can make smarter decisions about their resource allocations and more children benefit from access to high-quality education.

It is in the UK’s interest that children in developing countries achieve their potential. Healthier and better educated young people can contribute to their own and their nation’s prosperity. More prosperous and stable societies, and countries with thriving economies, are more able to graduate from aid.

The best outcomes for children and young people come from co-operation and partnership between all contributors. I am committed to do all I can to ensure many more children have the opportunity of a good quality education and the best possible start in life.

GRANT SHAPPS