

## Audio file

[Episode 3 Keziah Featherstone.mp3](#)

## Transcript

00:00:01 Claire Neaves

Welcome to the Repair-Ed podcast where we reflect on education and reimagine equitable futures. I'm Claire Neaves, a researcher who worked in education in the city of Bristol in the Southwest of England for over 15 years. In each episode, I'll talk to educators and thinkers about current injustices in our schooling system and their ideas for creating fairer educational futures. This podcast forms part of Repair-Ed: a 5 year project, funded by UKRI to examine educational inequality in Bristol's primary schools.

00:00:34 Claire Neaves

Welcome to another episode of the Repair-Ed podcast. My guest today is Keziah Featherstone, executive headteacher, co-founder of Women Ed and co-chair of Headteachers Roundtable. She has extensive experience as a teacher and leader in Bristol and the West Midlands and has had the dubious pleasure of having been my head teacher when I worked as a Special Educational Needs Coordinator.

00:00:57 Claire Neaves

In today's episode, there are a number of phrases and acronyms that might not be immediately clear if you haven't worked in education. I'll explain these before we start, so feel free to skip forward a couple of minutes if you're familiar with the language used in schools.

00:01:11 Claire Neaves

Keziah mentions a 'bulge' coming through. This is how we describe an increase in the birth rate in a particular year or period of years, meaning that more school places will be needed.

00:01:20 Claire Neaves

EBacc percentage. This is the percentage of year 11 pupils who gain a set of GCSE qualifications called the English Baccalaureate: English, Maths, Science, a language and either history or geography.

Progress 8.

00:01:35 Claire Neaves

This is an accountability measure for schools, which shows the progress made by pupils between the end of primary school and the end of secondary school. The higher a pupil's Progress 8 score, the more progress they have made in comparison with pupils who started at a similar level. A school score above 0 means pupils in that school make better than average progress.

00:01:54 Claire Neaves

It's called Progress 8 because it is calculated using 8 qualifications in specific groups.

00:02:00 Claire Neaves

'Download day' is the day that schools get GCSE results - the day before they are given to pupils.

00:02:07 Claire Neaves

I mention Organised Abandonment. For more on this read Ruth Wilson Gilmore's work on the US prison system.

00:02:15 Claire Neaves

Edexcel and AQA English refer to two of the main exam boards.

Keziah talks about finding time within 1265. This is the 1265 hours per academic year that teachers can be directed for. Teachers work many more hours than this, but these are the ones which are directed by head teachers, so face to face with pupils, staff meetings, parents, evenings and so on.

00:02:40 Claire Neaves

ITT is initial teacher training.

URN stands for unique reference number which is the school code. All pupils have a UPN, a unique pupil number which identifies them as they go through their education.

SEND stands for special educational needs and disabilities and is often simply called 'send'.

00:03:01 Claire Neaves

Morning Keziah. Can you tell us a bit more about yourself?

00:03:05 Keziah Featherstone

Thank you ever so much, Claire. It's lovely to see you again.

00:03:09 Keziah Featherstone

Brilliant to see you flourish in all sorts of different ways so that's wonderful. About me: I am my mid 50s now, which is kind of scary, been in education for 30 years, which is even scarier. In that time I've seen some things improve, a lot of things not improve.

00:03:30 Keziah Featherstone

I've seen particularly for children from under-resourced backgrounds, things getting worse, particularly post-COVID. I think that, that has absolutely ravished them. I've seen, I suppose awareness grow.

00:03:50 Keziah Featherstone

Of underrepresented groups within education, but not an awful lot being done to improve that. And weirdly, I'd include women in that because we are the majority and yet we are still marginalised, particularly in leadership.

00:04:04 Keziah Featherstone

So I think last week I saw something that the gender pay gap in primary schools, particularly for head teachers had widened, which is absolutely astounding it it what the heck are we doing? We know that over 92% of our teachers in the country identify as white British. Again, what the heck are we doing?

00:04:25 Keziah Featherstone

It it just doesn't seem to be changing. Not very fast. I think there's a lot of people talking about it. Not. Not a lot of people trying to change it.

00:04:33 Claire Neaves

Absolutely. And and I think our project we're focusing on these conversations, so I guess that could be levelled at us. Lots of people talking about it, but what we're doing is trying to talk to a wider view of people, but also the people who really matter in this so a lot of our research is talking directly to peoples in school, people in schools and people in communities that disadvantage really affects, so our project Repair-Ed, focuses on

educational inequality in the city of Bristol and you obviously worked here in the city for quite a while. So what are your reflections around Bristol as a city?

00:05:20 Keziah Featherstone

I didn't enjoy it. I really couldn't settle to the city and obviously now no longer there. So it was a it was a four year experiment for us. It was intended to be permanent. I wanted to be closer to my family, who mum and dad are down in Somerset.

00:05:21

Hmm.

00:05:40 Keziah Featherstone

That was the intention, but the actual city itself is a weird one. I mean, I'd spent the first however many years of my career in the West Midlands, which does have, you know, it's a very multicultural city. It has pockets of huge deprivation, and then it has real affluence in some particular areas.

00:06:05 Keziah Featherstone

And really, culturally diverse, very, very different coming down to Bristol, first of all, my my gut feeling was it was really quite white and that is a comparison comparison to living in Birmingham and and then I suppose the social inequality was so fundamentally entrenched that it it was like educational apartheid. It was talking to the heads in one half of the city was completely different to the heads in the other half of the city and I I up until that point and and since since I've been back in the West Midlands, you find.

00:06:42 Keziah Featherstone

That a lot of people are sort of may not be in your school or in your trust or in your local authority, but generally speaking it's a collaborative spirit. Everyone's facing very similar challenges, demands there are accountability measures that compete us against each other and in some areas that I've worked.

00:07:02 Keziah Featherstone

Everyone's like, you know, oh, I see you're third in the table this week or I'm bottom again or whatever it is. In Bristol that that wasn't it. It was that was like the be all and the end all. Where are we all in this league table of success? And you know, it was the metaphorical stabbing in the back was appalling the way some of the not just the heads, I suppose the the staff as well.

00:07:29 Keziah Featherstone

And to some extent, sort of, the parents behaved it was...it was shocking. The the sort of the the competitive nature of it. And I just couldn't settle to it. It was it was.

00:07:44 Keziah Featherstone

It was deeply upsetting for me.

00:07:49 Keziah Featherstone

And I.

00:07:50 Keziah Featherstone

Properly invested emotionally and time and commitment as you know, my daughter attended the school.

00:07:59 Keziah Featherstone

All her mates came from the school, lived in the area that we were trying to work with.

Maybe they've all improved, but particularly the other side of the river, it was, you know, selecting their student intakes either through religion or through gender or through compliance or through all sorts of other different measures, because they wanted the 'high-quality' students and I hate that phrase, but it it was being bandied around at the time at the detriment of everybody else. They just didn't care. It was really unpleasant.

00:08:41 Keziah Featherstone

And that's my overriding feeling about it. You know, even sort of 7-8 years later, having left my overriding feeling, it was not a nice place to work. It did not... the city did not live up to its values. I didn't, you know, and it's got a particular perspective, you know.

00:09:01 Keziah Featherstone

It presents itself in a particular way, but certainly in terms of education, it absolutely never lived up to those values.

00:09:07 Claire Neaves

Yeah, that's really interesting. I was talking to someone from Brighton in one of our episodes and he talked about the reputation of Brighton as this, you know, liberal, inclusive city and yet when it comes down to it, people are just really invested in their own little pockets of the city and their own children. And I said that that really resonated with me thinking about Bristol.

00:09:33 Claire Neaves

And how - how loudly Bristol sort of proclaims to be a really diverse, inclusive city, and yet actually, when you get into things it's it's not there so much. And and the other thing that was ... came into my mind while you were talking is in our research we found lots of teachers, particularly young teachers are talking about issues that they're facing - really difficult issues, like having to buy resources themselves, having to feed children who don't have enough to eat, having to support with school uniform, etcetera, but something that they're saying, which I find really confusing, is that they're saying, "I don't think this'd happen in other schools."

00:10:20 Claire Neaves

And these are really widespread problems. So the the point that that you're saying about the the competition between schools, I think perhaps contributes to that.

00:10:32 Claire Neaves

Feeling of isolation by teachers if they're they're in a school that's sort of desperate to do the right thing for its own pupils and not seeing where it fits into that Bristol context. And of course, Bristol is so heavily academised, lots of independent schools. It's a really complex picture here, so it's really it's really difficult to get any sense of Bristol as a city working together, which I think is what you felt.

00:11:01 Keziah Featherstone

It's really fractured and not in a good way. I mean, I don't know you could be fractured in a in a in a good way, but it's.

00:11:11 Keziah Featherstone

It pits people against each other and I would and I would argue, particularly if you are struggling with student numbers and particularly when I was there, they kept talking about this bulge coming through. I don't know if it ever materialised, but certainly schools were struggling for numbers and if you're struggling for numbers, you want to be full.

00:11:30 Keziah Featherstone

You are also struggling against external accountability measures, which I think are horrendous. You know, you know, what is your Ebacc percentage? What is your progress 8?

00:11:42 Keziah Featherstone

It's like actually for a lot of the schools, this is not the curriculum that suits the children. You are straight jacketing them. And if you're a head teacher, that makes the decision that

I'm not gonna play the Ebacc game - this doesn't suit our children or not all of them anyway - you're penalised in terms of the accountability measures and and I remember the Bristol Post were just rabid to know what the results were so they could put us in a league table.

00:12:10 Keziah Featherstone

You know, it was it, you know, they were on the phone on download day. They wanted to know and, you know, you will remember sort of the summer before I joined the billboard fiasco.

00:12:22 Keziah Featherstone

Where one of the schools took out a billboard and put everybody's results, they were unvalidated results and they put theirs up that were like the best case scenario. If all the appeals came through and they had that up for two months while year 6 parents were making selections, I mean.

00:12:40 Keziah Featherstone

I tell people that and they don't believe me. I mean, I didn't believe that sitting at the roundabout the first September I'm there, going, what the heck is that? And I know that was one particular school, I but went to another school for a meeting.

00:12:52 Keziah Featherstone

They've done the same but with like posters on reception. So every parent that came in to have a tour of the school, they knew exactly what the ranking of the South Bristol schools were and it perpetuated this idea that that school is rubbish because the results are rubbish and therefore the kids are rubbish and I remember the CEO at the time doing some market research, paid a company quite a lot of money to go and get some perceptions of the school and the children from people that lived in the local area and we couldn't share it with the staff or the community. And actually we didn't share a lot of it with the governors because it was horrendous.

00:13:40 Keziah Featherstone

I'm thinking, do you know what? You live 3 streets away.

00:13:46 Keziah Featherstone

You know, these are our children and this is the way you're talking about them. And therefore, because of those children, you don't want to send your children there because somehow, somehow the perception you have of these young people is that it's contagious to your child.

00:14:05 Keziah Featherstone

It it it was, it was probably, I mean.

00:14:09 Keziah Featherstone

I mean, I had to leave the meeting when we got the feedback and I went and had a little cry and I don't really do crying and you know, it's not me, but I couldn't believe that human beings would talk about children that way. And of course, you know, some of the children were as young as five and that, you know, they were just being written off.

How can a city that is, you know, presents itself as you know, this, this wonderful cultural magnet and the Banksy and the artsy and the rivers and all that kind of stuff, essentially... And I and I don't know where sort of the slave trade builds into this, but it is that idea that we have the power and the wealth and you are scum and you are not human and that mindset to some extent might have changed from race to class, but I think it was probably always there and I think it's still there and there was just something really embedded in the collective unconscious of the city that has to stratify everything into the "I am here and the people I don't like and don't wanna mix with are almost subhuman and I can do with them and talk about them however I want."

00:15:27 Keziah Featherstone

And the outcome of that is the people that are in that demographic know that's how everybody else feels about them.

00:15:35 Keziah Featherstone

And you know, I suppose they kind of play up to it and they hunker down and they become quite isolated and they don't seek help and support, and they're really resentful of anybody who wants to come in and support them because you know, that feels as if you know, 'it's just perpetuating the views you have of us'. I don't know what you need to do to get out of it, but I it's it's not going to be a fast fix and and you know and I I was all in.

00:16:06 Claire Neaves

Yeah.

00:16:07 Keziah Featherstone

But those measures they were, they were just they, they got in the way and. I probably won't say anything that'll get myself in trouble.

00:16:18 Claire Neaves



Thank you for sharing that. I think really powerful reflections and absolutely reflecting what we're finding on the project when we when we talk to people about areas of the city like like Hartcliffe, like Filwood and and Knowle West, we really, really hear that sense that the rest of the city has this view without even having been there.

00:16:47 Claire Neaves

And I think it's absolutely right to pick up on, especially as our project is working in primary schools. These are young, really young children we're talking about and how can these young children have any sort of responsibility or, you know, how can you characterise children in that way and when you unpick the history of these areas, one of the things we're working with at the moment is seeing whether we can apply the abolitionist concept of Organised Abandonment to these areas where they have been deliberately and systematically underfunded for so many years, and that has a huge impact and one of our community knowledge holders in one of our areas, echoed exactly what you said about the estate, almost perpetuating the view that others have of them to keep others out. So you find these really, really tight knit communities, really close communities who really do support each other, but there's this - I like to call it this mythology of place around some of these places. I know when I applied for my job in Hartcliffe many, many years ago, people in other cities said to me "Oh, don't go to Hartcliffe."

00:18:09 Claire Neaves

And I said, "have you ever been?" They said "no, but..." and and we get that sense, you know, even in in Bristol which is geographically fairly small, isn't it? So you know there's there's no real excuse for having these views about places that you haven't been to in such a small city, but you're absolutely right that it's it's so different to how the city likes to view itself.

00:18:35 Keziah Featherstone

And and I think that place is important because I can't believe that the sort of the, the, the city planners didn't do it on purpose. You've got these, you know, this, this social housing belt.

00:18:48 Keziah Featherstone

And there's a massive dual carriageway ring road that separates it from the rest of the city.

00:18:55 Keziah Featherstone

You know it's it's literally like a fracture throughout, you know, and it's it. It holds them back. And then behind it, you just got hills, you know, it's it's and you've got some beautiful views there, I mean.

00:19:08 Claire Neaves

Absolutely.

00:19:08 Keziah Featherstone

In any other place, you'd be building beautiful properties there, and it's bonkers. And I did. You know, I, however long ago it was that I went down 10, 12 years or so, I did my due diligence. I talked and you know, I know I know people that are in politics in South Bristol.

00:19:24 Keziah Featherstone

Talked to some councillors, talked to sort of the the office manager for the local MP. I think he's still the office manager for the new MP down there and and I found out about this community.

00:19:42 Keziah Featherstone

And and it's small and and you know from my office window I could see the Clifton Suspension Bridge and I could see some of the houses that are up on the the hill there, that side and and you know we we would think you know we were thinking what if I lived over there if I lived in the posh bit of town and my kids were struggling close to the exam, what would I do? I get a tutor.

00:20:08 Keziah Featherstone

Well, tutors are quite expensive, so let's pay for year 11s to be tutored. So we phoned up some companies and and they're like, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. We can support you with that. We can do it at, you know, at scale. We're happy to come into school and do it. We're happy to go to their houses, you know, where are you?

00:20:27 Keziah Featherstone

And we told them where we were and they said no, we don't visit those postcodes.

00:20:34 Keziah Featherstone

And we ended up going through a few companies that just refused to come to the other side of the city.

00:20:40 Keziah Featherstone

And then we did get one and they were bloody rubbish.

00:20:43 Keziah Featherstone

They, you know, they didn't like our kids. They didn't believe...you know, the kids were saying ohh, but we're doing Edexcel English. And they're like, no, I'm going to teach you AQA because you must be wrong.

00:20:54 Keziah Featherstone

And it was just like everything stacked against them educationally, absolutely everything and they become quite isolated, and I suppose that is they don't have much exposure to different different people. They don't, you know, they don't under- don't necessarily have that direct experience dealing with people that have that come from different socioeconomic groups come from different political mindsets, come from different ethnic backgrounds.

00:21:22 Keziah Featherstone

I suppose that was a protective thing. I mean, you can say that it doesn't it it doesn't engender like a good positive worldview. And it perpetuates this, the situation they're in, but it's really protective.

00:21:38 Keziah Featherstone

You know you're you're not open to being ridiculed and and, and I suppose in the West Midlands, there are instances of that. But I think collectively everybody's shocked so sort of one of our 6<sup>th</sup> formers applied to go to the University of Birmingham.

00:21:57 Keziah Featherstone

Wanted to do medicine, had to go in for an interview. Was sitting in a waiting room with some other students and obviously they were talking and and because he's got a regional accent, it's it's not quite Brummy. It's a bit more Peaky Blinders, I guess.

00:22:14 Keziah Featherstone

And because when there years was said what school he went to, the other kids in the waiting room laughed at him. And he left.

00:22:21 Keziah Featherstone

Because he was, he was embarrassed. He didn't know what to do, and it took him a little while but the minute we found out we phoned up the university and they wanted his name,

the date, they rescheduled the interview. And then they disappled all the kids that had laughed at him.

00:22:34

Wow.

00:22:35 Keziah Featherstone

And that that was powerful. That was a message you do not ridicule somebody, because of their socioeconomic background, and if you do, you are not living the values of our university and we're not even going to contemplate you. I mean, I'm sure they got into somewhere else. That was all very glamorous, but.

00:22:53 Keziah Featherstone

You know that it was just absolutely not -and I think there would have been no head teacher in any of the circles that I work in that you know would not have been horrified about that. But actually the more challenging that community, the more that pretty much every school is in the same boat, everybody's facing the same problems and everyone's really collaborative.

00:23:13 Keziah Featherstone

And you know, sort of, you know, WhatsApp groups of all the heads going, you know? "Oh my God, this has happened. What do I do?" and supporting each other, not sticking results up on billboards.

00:23:25 Keziah Featherstone

And it's it's like nobody will share results with the local papers, just not going to do it. I'm not in competition with you?

00:23:33 Keziah Featherstone

Obviously when they come out validated, the papers will do it anyway, but by then no one really gives a toss and the parents will then forget it and and everyone thinks this is the way to judge schools. But it's not in so many areas.

00:23:47 Keziah Featherstone

The way parents judge schools, it's not by Ofsted results. It's not by banners outside. It's not by percentages.

00:23:53 Keziah Featherstone

It's by Facebook.

00:23:55 Keziah Featherstone

It's about what their friends and colleagues and what they see on Facebook about those schools and are they being recommended and actually that I think is far more powerful. And actually I was speaking to a researcher last week. He said, actually, we're talking to a lot of parents and they don't use Ofsted reports and I know the DfE keep saying "Ah, but this is why we're using them," and it's like no, they're not using them. They don't actually care that much every now and again they will.

00:24:22 Keziah Featherstone

But actually they just wanna know if their kids are gonna be happy there and they're going to do OK. And isn't that what we all want for our kids?

00:24:30 Claire Neaves

Yeah, absolutely. You've said so much there, which is...

00:24:34 Keziah Featherstone

Sorry, I did bang on a bit.

00:24:37 Claire Neaves

No, not at all. It's it's really interesting and you know you're you're actually sort of preempting my questions, you know, around what things are like in the West Midlands and how similar or different it is. And it's interesting to hear, I suppose, that there are some of the same challenges.

00:24:55 Claire Neaves

But far less competition and and that that story about the the pupil going to university that that took me back to a girl I taught in my very first class as a teacher, who was exceptionally bright and wanted to go on to 6<sup>th</sup> form.

00:25:19 Claire Neaves

But of course there wasn't a 6<sup>th</sup> form that she could go to in her area and and the 6<sup>th</sup> forms in the centre of Bristol, she said that she didn't want to go because if she went there, people would ask which school she went to and then people wouldn't want to be friends with her and and I bumped into her a few years down the line and she was she was working with a friend of mine, so she'd got herself a a good job, you know, in a in a good company.

00:25:56 Claire Neaves

But she she hadn't been to further education and higher education, which she absolutely had the capacity in terms of academics to do so.

00:26:11 Claire Neaves

And I think that perception of an area as somewhere where people don't go on to university, you know, don't mix in these circles, is so powerfully entrenched in these children, and it's like you said, it's going to take a long, long time to shift things.

00:26:35 Claire Neaves

I suppose one of the things I wanted to ask is in terms of of shifting those things so you know you're part of Women Ed and Headteachers Roundtable, so you're very connected to the wider educational community. What's being done around educational inequality?

00:27:00 Keziah Featherstone

Probably not enough or not enough fast enough to keep us happy, I think.

00:27:07 Keziah Featherstone

You know the new cabinet has opened this, you know, war on poverty sort of work group that you know, you're looking at combining health and education and housing and everything else in order to look at the sort of the policies that can sort of affect change, I think. I think even Labour have been shocked by how little money is there. There is absolutely no flex and I think all the plans that they were putting into place thinking, well, maybe, you know, maybe there's a little bit tucked away. It's not quite as rubbish as we thought it was. It wouldn't come to fruition. But I think that I mean my gut tells me the combined effects of COVID with leaving Europe and now particularly at a time when you know some of the other big countries are sort of not playing ball as much as perhaps we did economically. It's really difficult to find where the areas of growth are going to be. And I think supporting people, and education to make a real difference is expensive.

00:28:20 Keziah Featherstone

That there's no way around it. It is resource heavy, it's resource heavy in terms of people and what you do with them. I'm not saying you give people money, you know, you don't go out with cash and just pass it round. But actually you need smaller class sizes.

00:28:34 Keziah Featherstone

You need. You need more adults that are really well trained. You need minibuses to get them around because it's not just about cultural capital, it's about experiential capital

actually building up the experiences. We took some year sevens into Birmingham the other year and...

00:28:56 Keziah Featherstone

Some of them I mean obviously loads of them had never been on a train and some of them had never been into Birmingham, but they hadn't been on an escalator.

00:29:04 Keziah Featherstone

And they were scared.

00:29:06 Keziah Featherstone

And one of you know, one of the girls held onto, like, a complete stranger that was trying to get on the escalator behind her because she was so terrified. Like, we need to build these experiences in for children. The only way that we can build the time for that.

00:29:19 Keziah Featherstone

Because quite often we can find the money and resources for it if we look carefully enough. But what we have to do, we have to find the time. We can't find the time in 1265 and we particularly can't find the time in 1265 and however many weeks a year it is if everybody is trying to play the accountability measures game. You've just got to scrap Progress 8. You've just got to change that and about what successful schools look like and how they feel so that people, the unintended consequence of that entire game.

00:29:58 Keziah Featherstone

Is that no one wants the kids that are going to really struggle to get there. They don't wanna invite them in in year 7 and they certainly don't wanna keep them until year 11.

00:30:07 Keziah Featherstone

So you know, you've got all sorts of things like. "Oh, no, no, no. We don't have a special educational needs department. You need to go to that school down there," or "no. If if your kids a little bit of a class clown. And they're going to get into a lot of trouble and be in loads of detentions that over there." "No, no. The uniform is going to cost you £250 just to set up. And we, we've got logo socks." OK, so there's all sorts of things you can do.

00:30:29 Keziah Featherstone

And then as they go through their school careers like, well we, you know, we really don't think that you're going to be suitable for us. There's off-rolling, there's all sorts of things people are playing that game that exclude children who have the potential to do really well.

So let's just get rid of that. Let's find a different way to measure schools. You know, I don't like the idea of measuring and benchmarking because what you're doing is like, you're putting kids in a rank order.

00:30:52 Keziah Featherstone

That that, that's abhorrent, but as well as that, I think you need to make sure that schools that are really focused on inclusion are celebrated and there's loads of things that you can do around that.

00:31:07 Keziah Featherstone

You need to find as many roots in for as many people as possible that want to work in schools to work in schools. You know, the fact that you've got to have a degree to become a qualified teacher, you know, there are those, those people that didn't have the opportunity when they were at school to progress and do A levels.

00:31:25 Keziah Featherstone

And then going to university is expensive and quite a lot of times you hear about families that don't want to support.

00:31:31 Keziah Featherstone

So we need...we need to diversify the way that we get people into the classroom, redistribute the hours. Think about how we, you know, we reward people. Celebrate the schools that that do really, really well. There's just loads of things that we can do and and that we should be doing, you know, in some of these areas that are really sort of isolated, we have to encourage people from more diverse backgrounds to go and work there, and therefore they have to feel safe working there. They have to feel included, and that comes from the leaders and actually if the leaders are chasing another 0.2 on the Progress 8 score then they're not thinking about being inclusive. There's only so many things somebody can do.

00:32:18 Keziah Featherstone

And and I guess at the beginning we we talked about.

00:32:22 Keziah Featherstone

You know, we keep talking about this and not an awful lot of it changes, but I don't think there's as many people talking about it as we think there is. We exist in a sphere where this is, you know, 80% of our professional life. Like yesterday I went in, gave a talk to a trust women, women in leadership day.



00:32:46 Keziah Featherstone

And I shared like some some data about, you know, like the, the sort of the ethnic pipeline from IT through to headship. I talked about the gender pay gap, you know, stuff that's been out in the in the sort of the world for five years or so. You know that, you know and longer because Women-Ed's 10 years old this year; they've never seen it before.

00:33:07 Keziah Featherstone

They didn't know it was that bad, so actually, the more we talk about it.

00:33:13 Keziah Featherstone

They will then go and talk to other people and and we've just gotta get the numbers up. We gotta play a numbers game. We gotta get people talking about it and then doing something about it and there are things that we can do about it. So, so you know, let's bloody just get on and do it. And if it takes you and me repeating ourselves for 10, 20 years, then let's just do it, you know, what do we lose?

00:33:35 Claire Neaves

And we will, we will keep talking about these things. Let's talk a bit about that ITT to leadership pipeline that you mentioned. So because in my head when you talk about that I'm picturing the graph that shows that teachers from racially minoritized backgrounds are overrepresented at the application stage of initial teacher training.

00:34:02 Claire Neaves

They are sort of represented pretty well at the teacher training stage, and then as you go through increasing seniority so classroom teacher, middle leader, senior leader, headteacher.

00:34:16 Claire Neaves

It just goes down and down and the only group that's kind of staying representative or then becoming overrepresented is white people, so.

00:34:26 Claire Neaves

I mean you've you've taught in in Bristol and in the West Midlands, which are both really racially diverse areas. What impact does that lack of Black and brown leadership have on pupils?

00:34:39 Keziah Featherstone

Who's who's their role models? Who's their role models for being successful as leaders?

00:34:44 Keziah Featherstone

For making a way in the world of education and being successful, if there's no one that looks like you, that is either in the classroom or leading the school. But there have been perceptions that certain demographics shouldn't be working in particular areas, and we've I think you know people with privilege have probably perpetuated that. And and I'm not just talking about like that ethnic pipeline, you will see that, you know, women do that as well don't we? We're over represented in the the general workforce and not represented in in headship and leadership positions. It becomes harder for us. We see that with people from under, under resourced backgrounds. So so the class - class should be a protected characteristic. You see that with disability. All of these things where the traditional privileged people...

00:35:36 Keziah Featherstone

That that make some of the decisions, they're just not making it easy. And I think there's a difference between fitting in and belonging. I'm happiest where I feel I belong, not just fit in. I genuinely belong. And I think there are too many institutions and it's backed up by the evidence, too many institutions.

00:35:54 Keziah Featherstone

That don't make people feel as if they belong there, and I suppose that ties to the imposter syndrome that we we we talk about gender with it a lot. But I think imposter syndrome apparently affects all sorts of different people with different protected characteristics. Well, it's it's not. It's not a real thing. It's not a syndrome. It's not an illness.

00:36:14 Keziah Featherstone

What it is is being in the room where you don't feel welcome, so you feel like the impostor because everybody else is making you feel different, which is why, you know, if if you're a woman and you walk into a room and everybody else there of of.

00:36:30 Keziah Featherstone

Your level is a a man.

00:36:32 Keziah Featherstone

You know, then you do feel like an imposter because they're looking at you. I mean, they may not be thinking that you don't belong there, but you feel they must think I don't belong there. And it's exactly the same for the global majority that go on to initial teacher training very quickly, they feel like the impostor, like the person that doesn't belong there.

00:36:52 Keziah Featherstone

And therefore they they drop out or.

00:36:54 Keziah Featherstone

They don't progress.

00:36:56 Keziah Featherstone

And sometimes that is really latent and unconscious, and sometimes it is really, really deliberate.

00:37:04 Keziah Featherstone

And it is institutionalised racism or Islamophobia or sexism or homophobia and it it's still, it's still perpetuates in too many of our schools and too many of our institutions. And the only way really to properly change it. And it's not going to happen overnight is you have to change the demographic of the trustees or the local governing body because they appoint the head teacher.

00:37:31 Keziah Featherstone

The head teacher appoints everybody else, so if you've got a board that's mostly white, mostly, I mean, you know, it's a voluntary position, so they tend to be, you know, people that maybe have retired or they're sort of they're they're sort of, you know, they're they're not working parents. Something like they've got some time to kill or they're, you know, they're really interested in it.

00:37:51 Keziah Featherstone

But they tend to appoint people that look like them.

00:37:54 Keziah Featherstone

They judge them by their standards, so it's about how they speak or about their accent, or about their idio- like the the words that they choose. Do they fit in?

00:38:07 Keziah Featherstone

Do they? You know, they're choosing someone that fits in, even if that person has to sort of, you know, look a little bit uncomfortable. Are they going to think and behave like us? And if you can change what trustee boards and LGB's.

00:38:25 Keziah Featherstone

Look like you're changing how they think, how they behave. They're appointing different people.

00:38:31 Keziah Featherstone

And that won't happen overnight, but there's not enough focus on it.

00:38:36 Keziah Featherstone

And the more I sort of go through this, I just keep thinking about it. You know, there there are trusts where nearly everyone appointed is almost looks exactly, it looks like a cardboard cutout of a rugby player.

00:38:50 Keziah Featherstone

And that's because the CEO is a 60-year-old ex-rugby player and all the heads look like him and I suspect at interview they made some rugby jokes, you know it. It's it's. It's about cloning, isn't it? It's about what we expect leaders to be like and how we expect them to behave and how we expect them to talk and we relate to people that are most like us. Unless you're happy being really uncomfortable.

00:39:16 Keziah Featherstone

And taking a risk and I think you know.

00:39:21 Keziah Featherstone

We take risks.

00:39:23 Keziah Featherstone

And sometimes they pay off and sometimes they don't. But you know, you still got to do it.

00:39:24 Claire Neaves

Yeah.

00:39:29 Claire Neaves

Thinking about institutions, you know we we talk a lot about things like institutional racism and other forms of institutional inequality, but I guess what you've brought me back to is institutions are run by people and we need to get the right people running those institutions.

00:39:56 Claire Neaves

Because they're not. Those institutions aren't actors in and of themselves. They're they're made-up of people.

00:40:04 Claire Neaves

So that's a really, really important point to think about. It's easy for me as as someone who's been in a lot of schools to see, but maybe just to point out to our listeners that a lot of those things, that those feelings of discomfort of not belonging, of feeling like the way in which you're measured doesn't work for you.

00:40:22 Claire Neaves

That all filters down to children as well. So when we're talking about, you know, working class children or Black and brown children, that is all. You know, they're they're going to school in a system which perhaps isn't designed with them in mind. And and that really has an impact. So.

00:40:44 Claire Neaves

I think we'll we'll move on to our last question now, which is the same for all guests on our podcast. What would a just education system look like to you?

00:40:54 Keziah Featherstone

It's something that relentlessly supports the development of each individual child to be the very best they can be and, and I I genuinely think you could probably measure it as well, because I think if you take every kid's got a URN haven't they? You know, that translates into a National Insurance number. It could be the same thing couldn't it, you know? I mean, I don't like the idea of barcoding kids when they're born, but there is a way of tracking kids from the start to where they end up. How are children doing at 25?

00:41:41 Keziah Featherstone

And we talk about that in SEND a lot, don't we? In terms of preparedness for adulthood and, you know, the the sort of the, the sort of up to 25 for, for children with special educational needs, adults with educational needs. But for every young person, what are they doing at 25?

00:41:59 Keziah Featherstone

Because they can have the best GCSE and A-Level results in the world, they could have gone to university, crashed out and now they're living in their mum's bedsit playing Xbox all day.

00:42:09 Keziah Featherstone

And another child may have ended up with fairly rubbish GCSE's gone and got an apprenticeship, but but now it looks like he's on their way to owning the business that they are working in.

00:42:21 Keziah Featherstone

You know how how do we measure success? And it, I think happiness and contribution to society and engagement with the world around you at 25 gives you a really good idea about how the school prepared you for life. And we all say we're preparing kids for life, but we stop thinking about them at 16 or 18 or 11.

00:42:43 Keziah Featherstone

And if someone wanted to hold me accountable for how the children I've worked with are doing at 25 I'm fine with that. I'm just a part of their journey.

00:42:54 Keziah Featherstone

But I want to really ensure that what they get with me is the very best and highest quality that they deserve. I don't know if that answers it really.

00:43:04 Claire Neaves

Oh, I think it does. It's a. It's a really nice reminder that education, you know, and schooling has a really big impact on people's lives, but it's really important to remember that it's it's not the done deal, you know there are there are those like you said, who weren't particularly successful at school, who go on to be hugely successful and vice versa. And I think you know you picked up earlier on in this talk about the really narrow accountability measures that schools in this country are under and you know if we're. If we're judging success by those, then we're taking a snapshot.

00:43:48 Claire Neaves

And actually, you know people's lives take varied courses and... Yeah. Education's so important. But there are, there are wider things as well. And what's come through so much today is how much you've mentioned people feeling represented and people feeling comfortable.

00:44:09 Claire Neaves

And so I think that's something else that I'd pick out of your answer. You know, a just education system is one where all children and you know, in fact, all staff feel comfortable and feel like they belong and and I think that's probably a really nice place to end the conversation. So thank you so much for speaking to me today.

00:44:29 Keziah Featherstone

Now, thank you for inviting me. It's a privilege as ever, to see you and to chat about things that really matter.

00:44:37 Claire Neaves

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