**All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility meeting on parental engagement as a tool for social mobility**

**Thursday 27 April 2023**

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Social Mobility was pleased to host a meeting on parental engagement as a tool for social mobility, featuring the following speakers:

* Anne-Marie Canning, Chief Executive, The Brilliant Club
* Sam Phripp, Head of Policy, ParentKind
* Becky Young, Growing Minds Manager, Peeple

Chair of the APPG David Johnston MP introduced the session and was joined by Co-Chair Baroness Tyler of Enfield.

**INTRODUCTORY SPEECHES**

*Becky Young*

Becky spoke about the importance of the early years for children’s development, with 90% of brain development taking place before age 5. She highlighted the work of the Peep Learning Together Programme in making a positive difference to children’s early literacy development and closing the attainment gap for pupils eligible for the early years pupil premium. Becky continued by highlighting the importance of supporting families from the beginning, as community approaches increase engagement and can support with current issues relating to mental health and the cost of living. She outlined the work of Peeple’s Growing Minds project in this context, with the universal offer demonstrating the importance of relationships, high-quality interactions, and the home-learning environment.

*Sam Phripp*

Sam introduced the work of ParentKind, its role in supporting Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), what these organisations can do and the challenges they face. Sam emphasised that parents want to be involved in their children’s education, but common barriers include being time-poor and a lack of money to fund additional educational activities. He suggested some policy priorities for promoting parental engagement in school, such as targeting funding where it is needed most, with a focus on poverty-proofing the school day, as too many young people don’t have the basics for learning at home. Embedding parental participation in innovative approaches such as Oak National Academy and the National Tutoring Programme have the potential to promote inclusion. Sam ended by highlighting ParentKind’s ambition for a PTA in every school, as a way to open the door to better parental engagement and parent councils, which could boost social mobility.

*Anne-Marie Canning*

Anne-Marie spoke about Parent Power, creating parent and carer communities across the UK, supported by universities. She highlighted that 97% of all new parents want their baby to attend university and the question was how to harness these networks of “powerful mums” through community organisation. Anne-Marie emphasised that parents are able to identify the barriers to engagement with higher education and have agency in addressing these issues, such as organising buses to university Open Days. Parent Power now has nine chapters across the UK and they demonstrate the different challenges, priorities and solutions facing parents that need community-led approaches. Anne-Marie suggested that previous attitudes to parental engagement have been about mandating rather than engaging parents, and that this power imbalance needs to be addressed. Peer networks are valuable but appear to fall away as children go through secondary school. Programmes such as Parent Power aim to maintain these types of networks.

**Q&A**

Following the speakers’ presentations, David Johnston MP opened the meeting up to questions.

Questions were first asked by the Co-Chairs of the group, who asked about the role of government in promoting parental engagement. Becky said that they should champion the organisations already doing the work and that a discussion was needed on the merits and shortcomings of the government’s Family Hubs scheme. Sam highlighted best practice in Scotland, where a legal requirement to have parent councils empowers parents, with Anne-Marie suggesting a ‘Parent Promise’ from government would be a good starting point.

The Co-Chairs also asked how we can reach those who would most benefit from programmes aimed at boosting parental engagement. Anne-Marie emphasised the effectiveness of a community organisation model, with 1:1 engagement. Political and public discourse should forefront the lived experience of parents from low-income households, with Sam suggesting that ‘hard-to-reach’ is more a case of ‘hardly reached’, and that institutions need to go to parents.

Questions then opened up to the audience, who asked about ensuring representation and bringing youth voices to parental engagement. Anne-Marie spoke about examples of intersectionality in Parent Power, as well as young people holding the leader of Lambeth Council to account through question time. Further questions explored the benefits of high-quality childcare and an enhanced childcare offer.

Discussion turned to the methods use to ‘recruit’ parents to programmes aimed at increasing parental engagement, as well as the need to adopt a holistic, unified approach to boosting parental engagement, instead of the ‘silo’ thinking that is a problem across policymaking. Speakers agreed that a ‘life-cycle’ approach following children through their education would be a positive development.

The final audience questions focused on the importance of a local offer and what role schools would play in this, as many are increasingly burdened with work and seen as a social service for solving multiple societal issues. Attendees also asked about the importance of reading, with Becky suggesting that reading to your child is one of the most important things parents can do. Speakers also explored what role other public institutions, such as public libraries, could have in promoting parental engagement in children’s education.

David Johnston MP then thanked the panellists and guests for attending and closed the meeting.