

Born fighter - Ruqsana Begum

Ruqsana Begum's story shows how schools can either amplify potential or unintentionally reinforce barriers. Growing up in a community where cultural expectations could have limited her ambitions, she became a world champion athlete, entrepreneur, and advocate for women's empowerment. Her experiences illustrate both the challenges and possibilities for young people whose opportunities depend on whether schools truly understand and respond to the realities they face.

A commitment to inclusion is not optional. It is central to the success and wellbeing of every child, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds. Yet for many pupils, families, and schools, the system can feel fragmented, under-resourced, and unclear.

Inclusion is central to ensuring every pupil can succeed academically, socially, culturally, and emotionally. The updated [Ofsted framework](#) now places inclusion more explicitly at the heart of inspection, highlighting the importance of practices that many schools were already striving to embed. This episode invites educators to reflect on how they make inclusion visible in daily practice and explores practical approaches that teachers, pastoral staff, and leaders can use to create classrooms and school cultures where every pupil is recognised, supported, and able to thrive.

Reflection questions

For teachers

- How do I ensure I am not making assumptions about a pupil's background, cultural expectations, or family pressures when planning lessons and setting expectations?
- In what ways do I create classroom spaces where pupils feel safe, valued, and able to pursue ambitious goals, regardless of home or cultural context?
- How do I identify pupils whose potential may be underestimated due to social, cultural, or economic factors, and support them to thrive?
- How do I adapt my teaching and feedback to recognise both academic and personal challenges faced by learners from diverse backgrounds?
- What practical steps can I take tomorrow to celebrate difference, empower underrepresented pupils, and ensure they feel included in learning opportunities?

For pastoral leaders

- How do I understand the realities and challenges faced by pupils from diverse ethnic, cultural, or socio-economic backgrounds, and translate that understanding into meaningful support?
- In what ways does pastoral support address both academic ambitions and social pressures, including those related to family expectations, traditions, or community norms?

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films for teachers and leaders

- How can I foster mentoring, peer support, or extracurricular programmes that empower pupils from underrepresented groups to explore new ambitions?
- How do I ensure pupils' voices are heard when designing support systems, so interventions feel relevant and inclusive rather than imposed?
- What structures or practices help reduce barriers to engagement, participation, and confidence for pupils who may feel culturally or socially marginalised?

For senior leaders

- How clearly is inclusion embedded in the school's vision, strategy, and daily practice, beyond policy statements?
- Are school systems and inspections-aligned processes sensitive to the diverse needs, pressures, and experiences of pupils, particularly those from minority or underrepresented backgrounds?
- How do we train and support staff to recognise cultural, social, and familial factors that may impact pupil engagement and achievement?
- In what ways do we evaluate inclusion initiatives to ensure they are making a tangible difference, not just fulfilling compliance requirements?
- How are we creating a culture where staff feel supported to address inequity and inclusion challenges thoughtfully, without adding unsustainable workload pressures?