

**Transcript of interview on BBC Radio London between  
Vanessa Feltz (VF) and Julian Ward (JW)**

**VF:** Congratulations are in order as I will be talking to Julian Ward, Associate Head of St. Michael's Catholic Grammar School in North Finchley, named as the top performing EBacc School, so well done to them and will be talking to him straight after this.

**VF:** Congratulations, well done. St. Michael's Catholic Grammar School, the top performing EBacc School. Well done.

**JW:** Thank you.

**VF:** Can you explain why it is that you have had such resounding success when all about you are being told this morning that they have slid right down these league tables.

**JW:** Well, yes. First of all can I just say that each school is special in the circumstances that it operates. Every school is different. I don't think it is fair that the league table attempts to try and treat all schools as if they are the same. I think that is partly the problem we have in this country that we have this assumption all schools can do exactly the same, same outcomes but in fact without recognising the differences that there are between all these schools. To answer your question about my school if I were to put my finger on why we have done so well it amounts to four things. First of all we have got a good intake because we are a selective school so that make us, as I say, very different to most schools, secondly we are a Faith School and there are very few selective Grammar Schools that are faith schools, thirdly we have got a strong focus and perhaps this is an issue which schools can have under their control which is that we have a strong focus on the quality of teaching and learning so ...

**VF:** Hang on one second I am sorry to interrupt you, what do you mean ,how can a school not have a strong focus on the quality of teaching and learning. What else are they focusing on, the wallpaper? What else is there?

**JW:** I don't think it is quite as extreme as what you say. I think that teaching now is quite a science and there has been a lot of research and a lot of feedback from schools as to what works and what does not.

**VF:** Well in that case may I just ask you about what my former guest (Chris Harrison, President of the National Association of Head Teachers) on this subject was talking about and he said that the great problem is if a child has not mastered reading by the age of 7 then by the age of 11 inevitably this child is floundering and way behind and, therefore, of course, when it come to the GCSEs this is not going to be a child who excels in any way. You say that you are focused, and you must be, because your results are so extraordinary on the quality of teaching and learning and that there is a science associated with it that you have paid more attention to than maybe than some other schools have. Is there a science associated with teaching children to read and if so what is it?

**JW:** As a Secondary School and as a selective school all of our students have got very good reading skills, so I cannot really say that the strategies that we have used in our school focus on trying to improve the reading skills of pupils because they already have sophisticated reading skills.

**VF:** Can you give us an example of something that you have focused on? How and why you have done it and the result that has achieved?

**JW:** Well, again, in our School which has got highly motivated students simply because they are going to find an academic curriculum easier to digest then it is easier for us to be able to adopt certain types of tactics.

**VF:** For example...

**JW:** One of them, for instance, is that we have a very heavy emphasis on pupils working together so that we can, if you like, have a less regimented classroom environment so pupils apart from obviously learning from the formal classroom situation in terms of our formal classroom set up we build in to our provision that pupils should be able to talk to each other about their work prior to them engaging in a written piece of work or in terms of answering questions in class. Now that is easier to achieve in the sort of School that we are. In a School where you have got pupils that cannot as readily and perhaps because of poor reading skills cope with highly academic curriculum, that is going to be a much more difficult task to deliver in the class room, so that is all that I am saying it is one thing to recognise that there are strategies that work but in different circumstances those same strategies are going to be more difficult to implement.

**VF:** So, most Heads don't have the luxury of being selective. They don't have the added ingredient of being a Faith School. They don't have the same kind of focus on the quality of teaching and learning.

**JW:** I did not say they did not have. I said it might be harder.

**VF:** It might be harder.

**JW:** Yes.

**VF:** So what can happen to make sure that you don't get league tables like the ones today which say that 107 schools have badly let the pupils down.

**JW:** Well it has got to be that the measurement has to be right in the first place, so that our league tables at the moment don't take into account where I started from which is the wrong assumption that all schools are the same. Now if you then recognise that there are schools in different circumstances I think what we need is two things, more accountability. All schools need to be accountable but the accountability needs to be fair to the circumstances they are in. I would say that the league tables are very good at making selective schools accountable so I would only want my school to be compared to other selective schools but even in that small group there are only 164 Selective schools in the country. There is a vast difference to the intake in some Grammar Schools. In my own case we have highly able students and it is very competitive to get into this Grammar School and that is obviously going to make a much bigger difference than in other areas where there are more Grammar Schools and therefore the intake would be slightly more average than our own.

**VF:** So it is not comparing like with like. Really it is a pretty horrible system. An inequitable system and one that presents a distorted view and your glory is slightly diminished by the fact that you don't quite compare with the other schools in the same league tables, so your saying really that it is not detailed enough it is far too general.

**JW:** I am saying we are suffering from.... There are two things that I was going to say, the first thing is that we are trying to use a simple measure to measure lots of schools in different circumstances and the second element is that we have never got to grips in this country with what are main competitors are doing which is that we confuse in this country the concept of fairness with equity and I think that we need to move away in our schools and you would expect this from someone in selective education but I think if we look at countries like Germany and we stand back and say look at the outcomes in Germany. They have a whole different approach to education. Their concept of fairness is that everybody follows a curriculum which is suitable for their particular interest. In this country we are trying to push everyone in going to Oxford and Cambridge. No wonder we are failing because not everyone can go to University. Industry demands a lack of Apprenticeships and skilled tradesmen. Germany does not because they have technical schools. We have never really got to grips with designing or agreeing some sort of consensus about what education should be in this country. We aspire to everybody following an academic curriculum and that is clearly not working for quite a large part of our school population.

**VF:** Julian, thank you very much indeed and congratulations. Julian Ward, Associate Head of St Michael's Catholic Grammar School in North Finchley named as the top performing EBacc School.