

Why Russia's richest woman is backing Sadiq Khan

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The two unlikely bedfellows are looking to revolutionise London's primary schools. Olenka Hamilton finds out how.



Darcey Bussell, Joanne McCartney, Sadiq Khan and Yelena Baturina taking a selfie with pupils.

Self-made multi-billionaire businesswoman and philanthropist Yelena Baturina is supporting a new education project for primary school children in London in conjunction with the Mayor's Fund for London and the Greater London Authority.

Baturina, whose think tank BE OPEN is behind the collaboration, joined Mayor Sadiq Khan at City Hall yesterday to announce the launch of London Curriculum. The project aims to enrich children's learning experiences by allowing them to explore London's cultural and historical heritage, and pupils at 1,800 primary schools across all 33 London boroughs are expecting to reap the benefits.

London Curriculum's inaugural activities are themed around the capital's underground spaces, and children from 30 primary schools will pilot the project which will take them on tours of hidden rivers, dungeons, wartime bunkers and Roman Houses, and introduce them London Underground's art and poetry programmes.

'We have conducted similar events in Moscow, and in spirit they were very similar to the work of the Mayor's Fund. It seems natural for us to take part in the event with the Mayor's Fund as it shares the same ideas as BE OPEN,' said Baturina, who was praised by the Mayor at the event, which included a performance of Richard Frostik's *Saltwater* by the Mass Children's Choir and an appearance by Strictly star Darcey Bussell.

'Our history and culture is a truly global one, so what better way for primary school children to learn, than directly from London's museums, art galleries and other fascinating institutions. Huge thanks to Yelena Baturina and BE OPEN – their incredible support for the London Curriculum truly shows that London is open, as ever, to ideas from around the world,' said Khan.

Baturina, who in 2010 sold Inteco, the investment and construction company she founded in 1991, is Russia's richest woman and launched BE OPEN in 2012 to help recognise and unlock creative and artistic talent among children and young people. They organise exhibitions, talks and awards internationally.

'While I was working in business, we came across a lot of designers and creative people, and it was clear that it's often very difficult for the young to succeed. We discovered that accepted artists produce amazing art but do not allow young talent to develop. And this was when we decided to help young designers so that the objects they created could be visualised,' she said.

Baturina, who says she herself is from a 'simple working class family', was supporting creativity, education, sport and the arts even before BE OPEN was conceived. 'I think that any work that enables young people to fulfil themselves is very satisfying and projects into the future,' she said. While her involvement with the Mayor's Fund will continue, she is now working on compiling a world rating of design and creative institutions around the world.

'Our plans for BE OPEN are always forward looking and very ambitious. We have a rather clear plan for what we're going to do in the future,' she said.

