

SIR,

Your article on education in developing countries (The \$1 a week school) argues that private schools are the best option for children from low-income families. In fact, even school fees considered 'low' have been shown to be a common deterrent to school attendance, as poor families simply cannot afford to pay them. In Ghana, for example, sending one child to the Omega chain of low-fee schools would claim 40% of the poorest household's income. Girls suffer most when fees are required, as parents having to prioritise usually send their sons and not their daughters.

It's true that many governments are falling behind on their responsibilities to provide decent public education: this is unacceptable. Instead of out-sourcing education to private schools of uncertain quality, governments that are serious about tackling poverty and inequality to grow their economies need to make sustained investments to build quality public education systems so all children can reap the life-changing benefits.

This means getting the basics right, such as ensuring there are enough qualified teachers and relevant learning materials and schools are safe and accessible. To hold governments accountable, transparent budgets, adequate oversight and active community involvement in school management are needed. Increased donor support, prioritised domestic spending and progressive tax reform can help to fund this.

Unless basic services like education and healthcare are free, millions of ordinary people lose out, compounding the worsening economic inequality that is preventing our poorest communities from lifting themselves out of poverty.

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