

News story: Support on wellbeing for teachers in schools and colleges

A new expert advisory group to look at how teachers and school leaders can be better supported to deal with the pressures of the job will be announced by Education Secretary Damian Hinds today (15 March).

Addressing more than 1,000 school and college leaders and teachers at the Association of School and College Leaders' (ASCL) annual conference in Birmingham, Mr Hinds will say that teachers always put the good of their pupils first but should not take their own wellbeing for granted.

Earlier this year, Mr Hinds launched the first ever integrated strategy to recruit and retain more teachers setting out a comprehensive plan to build the status of the profession and create more opportunities for teachers to progress in their career. It also included an ambition to transform the day-to-day experiences of teachers, and laid out plans to create a positive, supportive culture in schools.

The Advisory Group – which brings together head teachers and principals, teaching and college unions, professional bodies and mental health charity Mind whose CEO, Paul Farmer, co-authored an extensive review for the Prime Minister on mental health and employers – will work with the government to look at how to promote better wellbeing for teachers.

Today's announcement is the latest in a series of steps taken by Mr Hinds to address some of the concerns raised by the profession and create a great culture in schools. These include clamping down on excessive workload, simplifying the accountability system for schools and helping schools improve behaviour management in their classrooms.

Speaking to the conference, Damian Hinds will say:

Teaching is one of the noblest professions in the world – the chance to change lives and help young people build a future is what makes it a calling not a career. Teaching requires high levels of selflessness as teachers always put the good of their pupils first.

Like any really important job, teaching comes with its own challenges and, whilst rewarding, I don't need to tell you how stressful it can be. As a society there is a much greater level of understanding about mental health and wellbeing and it is something many of you raise with me when I visit your schools. Whilst those conversations are focused on supporting your students, I'm clear that your wellbeing is also something we need to prioritise.

As part of the recruitment and retention strategy we want to help you all provide supportive schools culture and as part of that today I'm announcing my plan to set up an advisory group on

wellbeing. The group will provide expert advice and work with us to look at how we as the Government and school leaders as the employers can promote wellbeing among our dedicated teaching staff.

Happy, motivated, well supported teachers are more likely to have happy and motivated pupils in their classrooms and that, ladies and gentlemen, is why we're all here.

Mr Hinds will also set out his ambition to help schools follow the lead of other professions that are stepping up efforts to champion wellbeing among their staff – including the NHS, which plans to provide better mental health and wellbeing support to frontline staff as well as employees.

Drawing on this, the expert group will listen to the concerns of teachers and school leaders before making recommendations to the Department for Education, local authorities and multi-academy trusts to raise awareness of the importance of wellbeing in schools and share good practice, advice and support.

The speech follows the publication of landmark new guidance – updated last month for the first time since 2000 – to introduce compulsory health education in schools so that all children are taught how to look after their mental wellbeing and recognise when classmates may be struggling, as part of the government's new relationships, sex and health education guidance.

General secretary of ASCL, Geoff Barton, welcomed the proposals:

Teaching is a fulfilling and demanding job, and we have perhaps been too ready in the past to regard the pressures which are part of teaching as something which goes with the territory.

We now have a much improved awareness of mental health and wellbeing across society, and schools are well aware of the importance of this issue for pupils and staff. The establishment of an expert group to look at how schools can be better supported in their work around mental health and wellbeing is a good idea and we look forward to its recommendations.

Paul Farmer, Chief Executive of Mind, the mental health charity, said:

Mental health problems at work are common in all workplaces, and although we have made great strides, mental health is still a taboo subject. The 'Thriving at Work' report led by Lord Dennis Stevenson and myself found in many workplaces, opportunities are being missed to prevent poor mental health, including the education sector.

Through our 'Whole School Approach' programme, teachers and school leaders have been telling us that they need more support for their mental health and wellbeing at work. That's why we welcome the

Education Secretary's commitment to support teachers and school leaders. Teaching staff do an incredibly important and demanding job, so employers need to support their staff so that they can come into work at their best.

The first, and arguably most important step, will be to start a conversation about mental health that empowers teachers, and make sure they have access to the right training and guidance to support themselves, their colleagues and their students.

The recruitment and retention strategy was developed with teachers, education unions and leading professional bodies to boost teacher numbers, support the 450,000 teachers already working in schools in England, and raise standards for pupils, by:

- Creating an Early Career Framework, the biggest teaching reform in a generation, backed by at least £130million a year in extra funding when fully rolled out. New teachers will receive a two-year package of training and support at the start of their career, including a reduced timetable to allow teachers to make the most of their training. Extra investment will also be pledged, through the £42million Teacher Development Premium, to roll-out the Early Career Framework
- Extra financial incentives to encourage talented teachers to stay in the classroom – Bursaries will be reformed to include retention-based payments for those who stay in the profession by staggering additional payments throughout the first years of their career.
- Simplifying the process of applying to become a teacher – introducing a new one-stop application system to make applications easier for would-be teachers and making it easier for more people to experience classroom teaching.
- Helping school leaders to reduce teachers' workload – helping school leaders strip away unnecessary tasks such as data entry; simplifying the accountability system to clarify when a school may be subject to intervention or offered support; and working with Ofsted to ensure staff workload is considered as part of a school's inspection judgement.
- Creating a more diverse range of options for career progression – helping schools to introduce flexible working practices through a new match-making service for teachers seeking a job-share and developing specialist qualifications and non-leadership career routes for teachers that want to stay in the classroom, with additional incentives to work in challenging schools.

Since becoming Education Secretary, Mr Hinds has made championing the profession one of his key priorities. Last year he provided schools with an additional £508million teachers' pay grant to provide a pay uplift for thousands of hard-working teachers.