

Speech: Damian Hinds' speech at the 2019 NAHT conference

Thanks for welcoming me back. It's terrific to be here, to feel so much ability crammed under one roof. Expertise. Experience. Passion.

I see these qualities again and again when I visit schools up and down the country. Getting out and about and into classrooms is one of the best bits of my job – because I get to speak to so many teachers, leaders and children. I get a chance to see the fantastic teaching and learning that is your every day.

This morning I made my 92nd school visit, and I have had the chance to meet hundreds of headteachers.

And I find one common trait, time after time, in every school I visit and every leader I speak to. Ambition.

Not a selfish, inward ambition – believe me, I've met a lot of politicians, so I know how to spot that! Rather, an outward ambition. An altruistic ambition. An ambition that everyone, no matter who they are, can reach their potential.

Today, I want to tell you that your ambition is my ambition.

World-class schools. Giving every child the best possible start in life. Led by brilliant, motivated teachers and leaders, who are empowered to do what they do best – to teach.

To get there, we will have to continue to tackle the pressures that I know schools are facing. I have been open in acknowledging these. And I'm also committed to working with you to relieve them.

Let me start with funding.

I have heard you loud and clear on this. I know finances are challenging for many schools, that you have had to make, and do have to make hard decisions about resources.

We are approaching a comprehensive Spending Review. There are always competing demands on public funds, but I will be setting out the case, the very strong case, for education. The case for investment in education is a special one, because so much else depends on what you do – so much for our economy and our society.

There is one area of funding that I want to directly address now – the support that we give for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

You and your staff provide high quality support to children with special

educational needs and disabilities, every single day.

This isn't some distraction from teaching. This is teaching. Helping vulnerable children learn is at the centre of the moral purpose that brought you into the profession.

I've visited some fantastic mainstream schools and colleges and of course special schools too, and I've seen this work for myself.

Each time I have been struck by the dedication of the school and the staff working with these children, tailoring their approach to meet the needs of pupils with a diverse range of additional challenges. Whether this is flexible timetabling, one-to-one support or coaching – the commitment is unwavering and the ambition for these children uncompromised.

So thank you, and in particular thank you to those SENCOs who provide so much valued expertise to other staff and families and to the headteachers who have created environments that enable these pupils to flourish.

I know there are challenges – as your report last year made clear. And I know the challenges are increasing.

The number of school-aged children with a statement or an Education, Health and Care plan rose by more than 13,000 between 2017 and 2018 and we've seen a steady increase in those children being educated outside of mainstream schools.

And we know that more specialist provision is more expensive and that we have a capacity issue in the number of places at special school available.

Supporting these children in mainstream schools where possible and where it is right for that child, is the right thing to do, as is increasing the amount of personalised support available in all settings to help them achieve great outcomes. But it is creating budgetary pressures.

It is because of the pressures on Local Authorities' High Needs budgets that last December I announced an extra £250 million of high needs funding. I also announced that we'll invest just over £30 million to train more than 200 new educational psychologists a year, from next year, to help you and your teams access the right specialists. And we have allocated additional High Needs capital as well.

That means that this year we have invested over £6 billion in education for children with complex SEND.

But I'm under no illusion – this may not be enough. This is a growing, complex issue, and I want to work with you to solve it. Part of that is of course about funding. And it's also about changing needs.

When I've spoken to teachers recently, they've told me that it's not just the volume of support that has gone up. It's also that the needs that vulnerable young people have – and the support that they require – is changing. This too is increasing pressures.

So I need your front-line expertise – to properly understand what is driving these pressures, where the funding system is working, and where it is not.

That's why today I'm announcing a call for evidence, to gather your views and make sure everyone can input. I know schools and teachers can't do this alone, which is why I'm encouraging others who have a crucial role supporting these vulnerable children, including local authorities and health services, to join the conversation too.

This evidence is important. We need a system that works for these young people. And we should be unequivocal – that our ambition for them is exactly the same as our ambition for every other child. That they achieve their full potential.

Of course, funding challenges aren't restricted to high needs. The right level of support for all schools, and for every pupil, is also vitally important. And here too, as well as securing the right overall settlement, I want to make sure that money is flowing through the system in the right way – that individual schools' needs are being properly understood, and that we avoid creating perverse incentives.

The national funding formula has taken a big step forward in addressing some anomalies in funding between different areas and we need to complete the job on this.

But I also want to consider whether we can look more closely at how funding can accurately reflect the way costs operate in reality for individual schools. Of course some costs go up and down in direct proportion to pupil numbers, while others do not.

If I've learned one thing it's that when we talk to one another, when we collaborate, it's then that we begin to see real progress in tackling the pressures schools face.

One of the best examples of this I can think of, and one this profession can be very proud of is the Recruitment and Retention Strategy.

This has been a huge endeavour and has involved teaching unions, leaders and teachers, all coming together to work out how we boost the profession and develop a more supportive culture in schools. I particularly want to thank NAHT for their constructive engagement on the strategy.

We all want the teaching profession to be one that attracts the best people and offers them a satisfying, sustainable career.

And yet too many teachers are leaving the profession. I know many of you will cover for gaps in your teams; that you have lost teachers, talented and valued members of the team.

A key feature of the strategy is the new Early Career Framework, perhaps the most significant reform of the profession since teaching became a graduate-only profession.

It will provide much more structured support for teachers at the start of their career, when they are most at risk of dropping out. By the time the new framework is fully in place we will fund additional support and training for new teachers up to at least £130 million every year.

But of course the strategy isn't just about new teachers – it also commits to supporting teachers throughout their careers. I want all those who are called to this vocation to enjoy the same kind of clear career pathways as other leading professionals, like doctors or lawyers.

To do this we will offer more coherent pathways for all teachers, from reformed ITT content to the development of specialist NPQs that support those teachers who don't necessarily want to go into leadership but who still want to develop, to specialise and to progress.

There are other barriers to recruitment and retention. Last year I told you I had an urgent task – to look at how we can work together to address these barriers – and top of the list is workload.

We know that teachers, and school leaders, work far longer hours than they should and this is one of the main reasons people give for leaving the profession or not moving into leadership roles.

But we also know there is no silver bullet and that workload and the pressure you can sometimes feel can come from different sources – it can come from specific requirements generated within schools and from government. But it can also come indirectly from the accountability system.

Primary school standardised testing in different forms is common around the world. Here in England, it can help inform parents, and it helps inform Ofsted.

And clearly the progress that pupils make at secondary school, and the qualifications they achieve there, are really important to their futures.

But I am clear that data alone do not and cannot give the full rounded picture of a school.

I know that today the fear of the consequences of a single set of bad results can manifest itself in unintended consequences, excessive pressures on headteachers and leaders. Last year I promised we would consult with you on this and how we could make the system better.

And today I am confirming that – after a very strong response to our recent consultation on identifying schools for support – that the 'floor' and 'coasting' standards will be dropped.

This is in line with one of the key recommendations from NAHT's commission on accountability. It means you don't have to worry that one set of results could set off a number of unwelcome consequences.

From September this year we will no longer publish these standards, nor use them for any purpose. Instead, we will use a single, transparent trigger for

an offer of support – ‘Ofsted requires improvement’ – to make sure it is totally clear when leaders will be offered support.

And while leaders of “RI” schools will always retain responsibility for their own improvement, we will be proactive in offering support to leadership teams who do want it.

So, from next academic year, all “RI” schools not currently benefitting from this year’s package will be offered funded support from an expert leader to give them bespoke guidance.

A more intensive package of assistance will be available for schools with two consecutive “requires improvement” judgements, to help them improve in a sustainable way. But again, I want to stress – it’s an offer, not an enforced intervention.

I also want to consider what more we could do to address workload issues for school leaders in particular, and will continue to work with you in the coming months to understand the pressures you face on a daily basis, and come up with a plan to reduce these.

Tackling workload is one of the ways we can build a supportive culture in schools and I know from our Workload Reduction Toolkit that headteachers and principals are already doing some fantastic, proactive work in this area – schools like Kensington Primary School in Newham, who have focused on the work-life balance of their staff as part of their whole school ethos and culture. We have published a video about their approach as part of the workload toolkit.

The tools have been collectively downloaded more than 135,000 times since they first came out and I would urge any of you who have not yet had a look at it to do so.

Last summer when we asked school leaders whether they had begun to take action on evaluating and reducing unnecessary staff workload, 96% said that they had, which is tremendous progress.

I’ve already talked to you about some of the particular needs of children with SEND. Health and wellbeing is of course vital for all children. Schools have a particularly important role to play in this respect.

I want all children to leave school prepared for life in a modern, diverse Britain. Part of the way to make sure they are is to learn about respect for each other and that no one is more important than anyone else, right from the earliest age. You’re never too young to learn compassion and kindness.

We have just made the biggest change to health education in 20 years. From 2020 all primary schools will be required to teach children about relationships as well as health – secondary schools will have to teach sex education too – so that all children have the knowledge they need to be healthy and safe, and to manage their lives and relationships in a positive way. I want to thank the NAHT for all of their engagement on these reforms.

I know many of us feel strongly about some of these issues and people hold different views, as they are absolutely entitled to do, but that does not mean we can shy away from them. It is all the more important to keep talking to one another to find a way forward.

But, and I want to be perfectly clear about this, I back you to do your jobs, to make the right professional choices in the best interests of all your pupils and your teachers. And I expect you to be able to do this free from intimidation by others. I am pleased that my department is working with the NAHT to explore what some of the ongoing problems are and how we can solve them.

And I welcome NAHT's continued help as we put in place the right, sustained support for schools to build high-quality teaching of relationships and health education. We have allocated £6 million to that end this year, and future years will be considered as part of the spending review.

Another area that continues to cause alarm is social media. I know this is something you will be debating over the weekend.

For this generation growing up, technology and new media, including social media, change just about everything.

The internet is a fantastic resource and an integral part of everyday life for many people. Living in a more connected world opens up fantastic opportunities, to share ideas and collaborate. It's hard to imagine life without it.

However, we know that the internet can also be used to intimidate and bully. This is not acceptable and can have serious consequences for victims of online abuse.

The changes we've made to the RSE and health curriculum mean that as well as relationships education, young people will learn about safe and acceptable behaviour online and an awareness of how online actions can affect others, particularly how to protect themselves from possibly harmful content.

This backs up what is already taught in the computing curriculum at all key stages, and covers e-safety and the different and escalating risks that can arise.

We are also taking steps to put in place a new system of accountability and oversight for tech companies through the Online Harms White Paper.

But while attention is mainly focused on protecting young people from possible online danger, they are by no means the only victims. The internet is not selective and I know that teachers and leaders can be vulnerable too.

We will be updating our guidance for heads and school staff accordingly on how to protect themselves from cyberbullying and abuse and what to do if it does take place.

Teachers and leaders should not be subjected to online abuse simply for doing

their jobs and I'm 100% behind making sure the entire school workforce can go about their business free from fear or intimidation.

The pressures that schools are facing – that you are facing – are real. Pressures that can erode and distract from the passionate pursuit of excellent teaching. And I am committed to making more progress to tackle these.

But the past 12 months have taught me an important lesson.

That we can summon concrete, positive change, if we work together. The Recruitment and Retention Strategy is showing this right now. We worked together to identify the problems – and to craft the solutions. And I want to recognise your important role in that and other work.

So now, I want to bring together that same sense of collaboration and constructive challenge to other areas, including those we've touched on today.

I am optimistic. I can't help feeling more optimistic every time I visit another fantastic school.

And I can't help being reminded of what I said at the beginning of this speech. That your ambition is my ambition. And that together we can realise that ambition, for every young person.