

Speech: Nick Gibb: school business professionals play a vital role

It is a pleasure to be back again at the National Association of School Business Management National Conference. Can I just start by wishing CEO Stephen Morales a speedy and full recovery from his accident at the weekend. As I said last year, school business professionals play a crucial role in schools, freeing teachers and headteachers to focus on delivering a knowledge-rich education and improving the life chances of pupils. Your expertise helps shape the strategic direction and governance of schools.

Which is why it is important to celebrate NASBM moving to Institute status. This is an important step for the status of your profession and for school leadership and governance as a whole. It is yet another milestone in the journey of school business professionals, as you become an integral part of the school system.

The role of the school business professional has never been more important. As part of a school's senior leadership team, many of you play a vital role in setting strategic direction. Having started my career as an accountant at what was then Peat, Marwick, Mitchell and Co. – before the firm merged and became KPMG – I know that an analytical approach to detail and prudent financial management should be the basis of any decision-making.

This understanding should be at the heart of all organisations, whether private or public sector. A forensic interrogation of the detail and a careful management of resources frees an organisation to operate more efficiently and more effectively. For schools, this means improving the use and deployment of resources and freeing teachers to focus on what is most important.

School business professionals play a vital role in strategic and financial management, which enables more teachers and headteachers time to be given over to teaching a high-quality, knowledge-rich curriculum. This allows for more money to be spent on evidence-informed CPD for teachers, to improve pedagogy and develop staff in preparation for future leadership responsibilities. And it provides greater opportunities for those essential intangibles that are so vital to providing a great education for all pupils, such as extra-curricular programmes and educational visits.

As the old saying goes: look after the pennies and the pounds will look after themselves. But I know your role goes much further than that. The strategic oversight and the financial expertise that you bring to schools gives teachers and headteachers something that is even more valuable than extra financial resource; a skilled school business professional gives teachers more time.

Research supports this, having produced strong evidence to suggest that a high quality, skilled school business professional can ease workload, saving

headteachers up to a third of their time. We want more schools to benefit from this, which is why we want to enhance entry routes and options for professional development.

We want to grow and support your workforce and we have supported NASBM to ensure there are quality apprenticeships available for school business professionals. This includes a route for school business directors through the level 6 Chartered Management Degree Apprenticeship.

And we are working to encourage known school business professional networks to expand, as well as supporting professionals to set up new networks. Our aspiration – over time – is that every school business professional should be able to join a network.

We want teachers and headteachers to understand how a strong school business professional can help improve their school and reduce workload.

Teachers dedicate their working lives to improving the life chances of the pupils they teach. It is the duty of government to free teachers from the bureaucracy that too often prevents them from using their time as productively as possible and as they would like.

Upon taking office in 2010, the government scrapped 20,000 pages of unnecessary regulation and guidance, freeing teachers to focus on teaching. We are working with Ofsted to bear down on time-consuming tasks that do little to improve pupil attainment. For example, the scourge of 'triple marking'.

But there is more that needs to be done. The past 7 years have seen significant change in the school system as our reforms bed in. Teachers and headteachers have responded well to the more rigorous national curriculum; the new GCSEs have been received well by the profession; and we are bringing stability to assessment in primary schools.

These reforms are raising standards:

- Thanks to the focus on phonics reforms, this year, 154,000 more pupils are on track to becoming fluent readers than in 2012
- The proportion of pupils fulfilling the science pillar of the EBacc has risen from 62% in 2010 to 91% this year
- And the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their more affluent peers shrunk by 9.3% at KS2 and 7% at KS4 between 2011 and 2016

We all owe our thanks to teachers and our admiration for what they have achieved. Since 2010, there has been a transformation of the school system, improving the life chances of pupils, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

But teachers deserve more than our thanks. Government should support teachers to make their workload more manageable and provide them with more time to focus on what is most important: raising academic standards for all.

School business professionals can and do play an important role in giving

teachers back their time. You are the key levers that enable the employees of every school to most productively use that time.

We want to see increased recognition of the value of school business professionals across the country. I look forward to working with the Institute of School Business Leadership (ISBL) to raise the status of school business professionals and develop the expertise of the hardworking professionals already driving improvements in our school system.

Teachers and headteachers – supported by school business professionals – now enjoy far greater control over the destiny of their own school. Academy freedoms accentuate the greater autonomy enjoyed by teachers, but the government has given greater powers to all teachers.

Greater powers now exist to deal with disruptive behaviour, which for too long blighted English education. Importantly, the government granted anonymity if teachers faced allegations from parents or pupils.

The scourge of the 'Ofsted teaching style' has been eliminated. No longer does Ofsted make judgements about the pedagogical approach used by schools. Teachers are trusted. Instead, they are judged on the ends they achieve.

Pedagogy is now a matter for teachers. It is a subject that is hotly contested in vibrant debates, which are increasingly being led by teachers: sharing platforms with academics at ResearchED; debating with intellectuals at the Institute of Ideas; and flooding the blogosphere with insightful critiques of received wisdom. This is the new normal in teaching.

Teachers have seized their profession and are shaping the future. The great explosion of ideas that has emerged in the past few years has changed teaching forever. Unshackled from the grips of conformity, teachers have begun to question the previously unquestionable.

Tom Bennett's tireless campaign to improve school behaviour means that poor behaviour can no longer be dismissed as a consequence of uninspiring lessons. The days when classroom management is seen as the sole responsibility of the classroom teacher might – finally – be numbered. As Tom Bennett makes clear in his report [Creating a Culture](#), managing pupil behaviour requires a whole-school ethos where classroom teachers are supported by senior staff.

High expectations pervades so much of what teachers are now demanding. Consider the contributions to ASCL and PTE's recent pamphlet 'The Question of Knowledge', which makes the powerful case for a knowledge-based curriculum.

Luke Sparkes and Jenny Thompson, architects of the success of Dixons Trinity Academy – a free school in Bradford that ranked in the top 10 schools nationally for progress achieved – described the ongoing, teacher-led quest to raise standards, writing, I quote:

A knowledge-based curriculum is about harnessing the power of cognitive science, identifying each marginal gain and acting upon it; having the humility to keep refining schemes of work, long term

plans and generating better assessments.

Government can take some credit for providing inspirational teachers with the freedom they needed, but the impetus comes from the profession seizing the opportunities that have become available.

Consider the books that teachers now recommend to each other. Writing for the Chartered College of Teaching earlier this month, Elizabeth Royde reviewed Daisy Christodoulou's masterful debunking of previous educational orthodoxy, '7 Myths About Education'. Her decision to conclude the review with a quote from the book was particularly powerful. Discussing the hyperbolic rhetoric of those opposed to teacher-led instruction, Daisy Christodoulou wrote the following:

It is a baffling overreaction: to move from a legitimate criticism of mindless rote-learning to the complete denial of any kind of teacher-led activity. The solution to mindless rote-learning is not less teacher instruction, it is different and better teacher instruction.

This quotation sums up the step-change there has been over the past few years. Teachers have claimed their voice. No longer will sound-bite criticisms be enough to dictate how teachers teach. Informed by a nuanced understanding of the evidence, teachers will no longer tolerate bland pronouncements from those who presume to be in a position of authority. Evidence is becoming the new currency in the marketplace of education ideas.

Debate – as it has done for the last few years – will continue to rage. The freedom seized by the profession means that all will have a voice, but ideas will be weighed and will be discarded if found wanting. The heterogeneity of debate has encouraged a hundred flowers to bloom.

Innovative academies and free schools – of varying and differing stripes – provide opportunities to test empirically different approaches to the curriculum and pedagogy. Twinned with the vibrant debate amongst teachers and academics, exemplary schools will serve to test ideas. The theoretical will become empirical, shaping debate and advancing our understanding.

Free from government intervention, the feedback loop needed for a self-improving school system is now taking shape.

The most successful innovative schools – such as Dixons Trinity Academy, which registered a Progress 8 score of 1.22 and an EBacc entry rate of 81% – are now beacons for others to copy. Dixons Trinity proudly stands as a living counter example that discredits the notion that outstanding education is somehow the preserve of the wealthy or those who live in the London. This school demonstrates unquestionably that all children – wherever they live in the country and whatever their family background – can achieve outstanding academic results.

These schools are a bitten thumb, if you like, to all who clamour for contextualising achievement and a consequent lowering of standards. They represent a teacher-led fight to show what it is possible to achieve.

But that is not to say that government cannot play a vital role in raising standards. The government overhauled the national curriculum, ensuring that children are taught the knowledge they need to thrive in an ever more globalised world. We have put an end to grade inflation and introduced more rigorous national assessments.

Thanks to the hard work of teachers and headteachers, the strategic support and expertise provided by school business professionals, and the reforms that we have brought in since 2010, there are now 1.8 million more children in schools rated good or outstanding than there were in 2010.

In July this year, to support schools to continue to drive up standards for pupils, we announced an additional £1.3 billion for schools and high needs across 2018-19 and 2019-20, in addition to the schools budget set at Spending Review in 2015. This means that funding per pupil for schools and high needs will, at a national level, be maintained in real terms for the next two years.

And following our announcement in September 2017, in September 2018, for the first time, under the national funding formula, school funding will be distributed based on the individual needs and characteristics of every school in the country. The new NFF will provide for an increase in funding in respect of every school, allocating a minimum of £4,800 for each secondary school pupil and £3,500 for every primary school pupil in 2019-20, nationwide.

Fixing our outdated, anachronistic and deeply unfair school funding system is another example of the good that government can do, creating a level playing field from which professionals can do what is best for their schools.

But, as you will all be aware, the challenge does not stop there. Of course, whilst the way schools are funded is important, it is also vital that schools themselves continue to get the best value from their resources, to improve pupil outcomes and promote social mobility. Alongside our substantial investment, we are committed to helping schools improve their efficiency in order to achieve this.

Incisive analysis of how school funding is spent can dramatically affect the success of a school in delivering for pupils. The expertise and strategic view that a school business professional can bring to financial decision making is beyond question, and we want more schools to benefit from this expertise.

School efficiency must start with – and be led by – schools.

Central to this is our approach to integrated curriculum and financial planning. Curricula should be inherently integrated with good financial planning. We know that this integration is pivotal to school efficiency.

We want to highlight and develop the support, guidance and tools that are already available to help you to maximise your schools' efficiency and long-term financial health.

Currently, we are helping schools to get the best value from their non-staff expenditure through the ambitious initiatives set out in the [Schools' Buying Strategy](#), which was published last January. In particular, we have made positive progress with the Buying Hubs and are on track to start delivering support to schools in the North West and South West pilot regions early in the New Year.

Further, we have helped schools to procure better value goods and services on areas all schools purchase thanks to our recommended deals. Schools can save on average 10% on their energy bills, or 40% on printers, photocopiers and scanners. We intend to expand these deals where it would help schools for us to do so.

And over the summer, we launched an updated and significantly improved benchmarking service for schools, based on feedback and user testing with school business professionals.

We will continue to build on this offer. When a school is at risk of falling into financial difficulty, it is right to intervene – directly with academies, or working with local authorities in the case of maintained schools. In these cases, we will deploy experienced efficiency experts to provide direct support to schools.

The government is on a mission to support schools to use their resources as efficiently and effectively as possible. We're looking forward to working with the Institute for School Business Leadership in this joint endeavour, which is why it is a pleasure to be here today to celebrate your move to institute status.

Thanks to your strategic oversight and governance, and the hard work of teachers and headteachers, the school system has gone from strength to strength since 2010. Thank you for everything you have done, and will do in the future, to improve standards in our schools and to drive social mobility.