

NICKY MORGAN EDUCATION SECRETARY - EDUCATION 2015



It's now been almost 9 months since I took on the job of Education Secretary and if I've taken one thing away from my time so far, and I very much hope this is just the beginning of my time as Education Secretary, it's the fact that everyone has an opinion on education.

Parents, grandparents, teachers, heads, pupils, governors, families - seemingly the entirety of Twitter - and one thing is also clear, there's often very little agreement between them!

I have to say, I admire the lengths that my Argentinian counterpart has gone too this week to call off teacher strikes, by giving every teacher his mobile phone number and inviting them to call him directly with questions, comments or complaints. I know that Brian welcomed his move, but for those of you who may be getting ideas, let me tell you now, I'm all for learning from the best - but this may be the one international initiative I may not be adopting that quickly.

But in all seriousness, I think you'd be hard pressed to find another policy area where so many different people and groups have an

opinion about what should be done and how it should be achieved.

Partly this is because, almost uniquely among the public services, all of us have experienced one form of education or another. But I think it's also about something deeper - our nation's recognition of just how important a good education is, and the truly life-transforming potential it holds.

No one recognises that more than you. Because the one thing that has shone out to me, from the 700 teachers I've spoken to on school visits across the country since taking this role, is not only the dedication of our heads and teachers, but how much they cherish the work they do to open young minds and change lives.

Engagement with teachers

Let's be honest, you haven't had it easy, you never have, and this government has expected more from school leaders than almost any other - you have been at the forefront of our plan for education, delivering significant changes to how and where our pupils are taught.



But away from the rhetoric, away from the personality-obsessed politics of the Westminster bubble, school leaders like you have been the ones translating our policies into concrete action on the ground.

You haven't agreed with everything we've done, and we'd have been surprised if you had.

From my Teacher Direct sessions, which for those of you who don't know are question-and-answer events I've instituted with teachers and heads around the country, I know that there have been concerns. But what I hope, is that in those areas where you've told us we haven't got it quite right, we've been able to work with you to get it better.

Take for instance the issue of assessment levels.

I remain convinced that school leaders are best placed to come up with assessment systems which work for them, and their students - and crucially are understandable for parents.

We know that assessment levels often weren't trusted by secondary schools because they didn't really reveal what children knew and forced them to move on to new material before they were ready, resulting in serious gaps in their knowledge.

So I'm pleased that we're moving to a system that schools are free to develop their own systems of assessment of 'real' things - like how well a child can read and the specifics of what they know and can do in maths. Things that can inform better teaching and provide clearer, more incisive evidence of attainment and progression.

But I'm also aware that the transition hasn't been easy. In fact, levels come up in almost every one of my question and answer sessions.

So to address those concerns we recently announced the launch of a commission, led by teachers, on assessment without levels to help schools learn from the best and provide that extra support. Because, and let me be crystal clear on this point, I want the changes we've made to be changes that allow teachers to do what they do best, ie teach.

Our plan for education

The good news is that these tricky issues seem to be the exception, rather than the rule. And the general picture I find on school visits, is that school leaders are relishing the new freedoms we've offered to them, relishing the fact that they are being treated as professionals, and relishing the fact that this government recognises they know best what's right for their pupils.

I'll go on to talk about my reaction to your blueprint shortly, but the message that stands out from that document so clearly, is that the profession wants to see those freedoms go further, faster and deeper.

That is a direction of travel to which I'm wholly prepared to commit.

Because the results of trusting professionals and giving schools greater freedom speak for themselves:

- we now have 1 million more children in schools rated 'good' or 'outstanding' than in 2010
- over 100,000 primary school pupils are on track to be more confident readers as a result of our phonics check
- and on top of that, 90,000 more young people are also taking the core academic GCSEs that open doors to good jobs, apprenticeships and university places - an increase of 71%

This is what you have achieved.

As a result, every day we are moving closer towards tackling that 'soft bigotry of low expectations' towards a society where no child is held back by the circumstances of their birth.

And towards a country where every young person leaves school equipped with the knowledge, skills and values they need to truly succeed in modern Britain.

The future

This is just the beginning and you know as well as I do, how much there is still left to do:

to close the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers

to ensure the excellence that school freedom has delivered reaches all across the system

to ensure that the brightest pupils are properly stretched and less able students are taught to master the basics

and to ensure that every school has access to truly excellent teachers

I want to reassure you about what that means in practice, it doesn't mean 5 years of constant upheaval or constant change.

What it does mean is ensuring that the impact of those changes reaches every part of the country, every child, every family and every community.

Both the Prime Minister and I are very clear that the changes we've made need time to bed in and take root. ASCL's 'Blueprint for self-improving system' calls for an accountability framework that has been in place for the term of the government, a vision that I share.

From the introduction of the National Teacher Service, to requiring every young person to master the basics in primary school and boosting the number of young people taking the EBacc, there is a common thread: that a combination of high expectations for young people and unleashing teachers' freedom can produce fantastic results.

What we haven't achieved is excellence everywhere. In particular in some of our coastal areas and small towns educational performance is a scandal.

Take just one example:

72% of young people growing up in Trafford get

5 or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and maths GCSEs, but just a 30 minute drive away in Knowsley the number is less than half that at 35%

put more simply: if you're a child born in Knowsley you are less than half as likely to get the standard of education you need to succeed in life as a child in Trafford, and I think that is deeply unfair

So the priority will be to work with you to spread excellence across the system, to make sure we get our best teachers everywhere, and that we give every young person the skills they need to compete not just with their peers in Britain, but across the globe.

I know it's a vision that ASCL shares. Government standing back and trusting the profession, and instead focusing our attention on addressing those strategic issues that threaten future success.



Supporting school leaders and teachers

It's now a hackneyed phrase - but is undeniably true that no system can be better than the teachers that teach in it and the leaders who lead it.

It's why we've given you more input in the recruitment and training of teachers through our School Direct programme - and looked to attract top talent through initiatives like Teach First and the £67 million push to boost maths and science teaching that the Prime Minister has just announced.

It's the reason we're supporting high-quality professional development through projects

like our exchange with Shanghai, which has seen teachers from this education powerhouse teaching maths in primary schools across England.

And why we're encouraging school leaders to work together more closely to share expertise and help others improve through, for example, our growing network of over 650 teaching schools and system leaders such as national leaders of education, specialist leaders of education, and national leaders of governance.

And we've worked with the professionals to develop new headteacher standards that aren't simply a baseline, a hurdle for school leaders to clear. They're aspirational and ambitious, they don't specify the acceptable, but instead describe the exceptional.

Workload

One of my priorities has been to make sure that teachers and school leaders can spend more of their time doing what they do best- inspiring young minds. Ensuring that teachers can spend more time in the classroom and that you as school leaders don't face losing your best and brightest staff.

That's what underpinned our workload challenge, which generated one of the largest number of responses to a consultation my department has seen. It created quite a workload challenge for us too.

As you know, we've announced some important actions in response to this - such as a commitment to give schools more notice of significant changes to the curriculum, qualifications and accountability.

I hope these will go some way to eliminating the bureaucracy and duplication of work that's taking teachers away from teaching.

I know the results haven't pleased everyone, some were clearly expecting a silver bullet that simply wasn't there.

But what I am clear about is that this is very much the start of the journey - not the end - and we will continue to listen and work with you to tackle these issues.



Accountability is clearly one of those areas where we have more work to do to ensure the way we inspect our schools is fair and proportionate.

I'm pleased that Ofsted is continuing to look at ways to improve the quality of inspections, ensuring that inspections are focused on providing information for parents and families, rather than driving the behaviour of schools and teachers.

Like you, I'm excited about the potential that open data has too, as the blueprint puts, it 'further empowers parents and the community' and I'm convinced the more we do to unlock that data and make it accessible to families, the less we'll have to rely so heavily on external inspection.

Trust

The theme of this conference is trust, and over the course of the conference Peter [Kent, ASCL President], Brian and many of the delegates have made the powerful case for trusting school leaders and trusting the profession. We accept that case wholeheartedly.

It's trust that inspired the Prime Minister and I to announce yesterday that we'd do our bit to facilitate the creation of a college of teaching: fully independent of government and a champion not just for the professional development of teachers but also the development of their practice on the ground - a key part of the first element of your blueprint, 'refining, challenging and developing the teaching profession'.

Alongside this we've committed up to £5 million to establish the first phase of a new professional development fund, to support more high-quality

CPD programmes, delivered by our growing network of teaching schools. Another marker of the profession taking its destiny into its own hands.

Like you, I also share a vision for even greater collaboration between schools, and I hope that over the course of the next Parliament we see even greater school collaboration through academy chains and trusts. Because whether it's Ark in Portsmouth, Perry Beeches in Birmingham or Harris in London, we know that working together through multi-academy trusts, schools can achieve truly extraordinary outcomes for young people.

Because where I think the blueprint has hit the nail on the head is in its insistence that 'self-improvement' means something more than simply 'school-led'. 'Self-improvement' demands a mature and measured approach to challenging practice, to driving continuous improvement and to working together to push boundaries.

The curriculum

Of course there will still be areas where we will still disagree. It would be easy for me 6 weeks before an election to simply say I agreed with everything that the blueprint lays out. Much of which I do, but that wouldn't be a very good basis for the kind of dialogue that your blueprint demands.

And there is one area where I depart from the blueprint - in its suggestion of taking control of the curriculum away from ministers. Because it's my belief that what our children learn in schools must be something that is decided by democratically elected representatives.

That isn't because I think I understand algebra any better than you do, or that Nick Gibb understands phonics any better than the teachers that teach it, although don't tell him that. But because I think that parents should be able to hold us to account for the decisions we make about what their children are learning and what they're not; and the surest way to make sure they can do that is at the ballot box.

That doesn't mean that we fly blind. As I hope you've seen throughout the process of reviewing curriculum and qualifications we've involved

experts at every step of the way - but those taking the final decision must remain accountable to the public at large.

Conclusion

But as a whole, your blueprint for the future of our school system outlines a vision that I share. Of a confident teaching profession, of practice driven on the ground, of government as the supporter and facilitator of progress - but not the director.

I've had a fantastic 9 months working with you all. I very much hope that the electorate will give me the chance to carry on.

But regardless of the result in 46 days' time, I want to leave you with this message.

On every school visit, in every corner of the country, I am truly inspired by the work you do to change young people's destinies, opening their eyes to the future, their minds to the possibilities.

I will always be in awe of your skill and dedication, of your determination to secure the best for your pupils.

And I, and the Prime Minister, and for that matter thousands of parents and families across the country will always be grateful, not just for what you do day to day, but for the leading role you have played in delivering our plan for education.

Those million extra pupils in 'good' or 'outstanding' schools are your pupils, the record levels of students going on to university or in to an apprenticeship are your students. And those children who are leaving school today prepared and ready to succeed in modern Britain are your children. You should be incredibly proud.

Thank you for everything you do.

