

Speech: Justine Greening: teacher development key to school improvement

Thank you Malcolm, and thank you for the excellent work you have done as interim General Secretary.

I'd like to congratulate Geoff on his election – I look forward to us working together over the coming years. And I want to thank ASCL for its constructive support since I became Secretary of State.

Many of you will have heard me say it's the role I always wanted – a chance to have a positive impact on the education system that made me.

To do that, I recognise clearly how vital it is that I really engage with and listen to you, and I am struck by how much we are trying to achieve the same thing.

Yes, there is real debate in some areas and that's natural. But in other areas there's real consensus and I don't want us to lose sight of that.

As Malcolm said, there are areas where we may not always be on exactly the same page.

On funding, ASCL has been calling for the introduction of a national funding formula for years. Taking a consistent pot of investment and spreading it more fairly is always going to be a challenge – that's why this issue has been left alone for 25 years.

There isn't a perfect route, so that means making difficult choices and I'm grateful for the mature and considered support and challenge ASCL has provided during the ongoing consultation process.

Malcolm also mentioned grammar schools. Our consultation is about leaving no stone unturned to increase the number of good school places available. This is not just about selection – we want to see our universities, faith and independent schools playing a bigger role in capacity building too.

Of course, part of that is about funding and – alongside extra investment in post-16 skills – we secured investment in the budget for school infrastructure. Not only for next wave of new schools, but money for existing ones too.

What's really important is our response to the consultation. We're listening carefully to a wide range of stakeholders.

I want to make sure the proposals we come forward with are about selective schools that drive social mobility and sit comfortably and effectively within the modern schools system.

I want to come back to these specific issues in detail in the Q&A. But

actually, these 2 consultations are part of a much broader conversation about how we create a smarter education system, one that is built on an ethos that harnesses and spreads the expertise of great teachers and leaders.

I see my job as Education Secretary being to do everything I can to create the right environment that allows teachers and leaders to flourish. I'm passionately pursuing how we can better drive social mobility.

It's about taking – or often not taking – action to enable you to get on with what you do best: helping young people to reach their potential, whatever their background, wherever they are born. This is one of most important generational challenges. Teachers are at the heart of making that happen.

I know you are driven by that common aim.

So, whilst there's so much I could cover today, I want to take this opportunity to talk about where I see the biggest potential for gains in education. That is teachers and teaching as an increasingly mature profession, with evidence and best practice at the core of everything it does.

In particular, that means:

- a core commitment to the ongoing professional development of our teachers and leaders
- making sure there are clear and rewarding career pathways for the people entering and progressing in teaching
- taking a practical approach to supporting you to recruit and retain the high-quality staff you need

Because ultimately, I believe that teacher professional development and school improvement are one and the same thing.

I then want to talk briefly about how this all fits together: about how we can build an education system that really supports and spreads great teaching.

In particular, a system that supports great teaching not just in those areas that are already set up to succeed, but – more importantly – in the areas where it is needed most. I want education to be how we level up opportunity.

Teachers and leaders as the drivers of social mobility

Let me start with the profession.

I feel privileged to do this role as I do being a local MP – for me it's very much a vocation. When I visit schools I have that same sense. I know for most teachers it is a vocation.

Most of us have our education, make the most of our teachers and then go out into the outside world.

Teachers by contrast stay to nurture the next generation of children and young people. For me, one of the reasons I care so much about this role is that – as someone who went through the state education system – I have the chance to make it better for the children and young people in it now.

I've said many times that I want to use my time at the DfE to focus squarely on how the education system can be the catalyst to improve social mobility in this country – so that where a person comes from doesn't define where they get to in life.

As you know, I'm the first Education Secretary to have been educated wholly at a comprehensive school.

The thing that really made the difference for me outside of my family – the factor that mattered the most – was the great teachers who inspired me. In fact, I could do a whole speech on how transformational great teaching is. It certainly was for me.

I had wonderful teachers who inspired me – like Mr Tranter, my French teacher – but he wasn't the only one. They were the teachers who 'built' me. The way they were able to inspire me was so important.

As Malcolm already mentioned, I spoke at the Chartered College of Teaching recently about the importance of being part of a profession – a body of experts with a clear commitment to high standards and best practice. I believe teachers and school leaders are the experts who not only inspire our children and young people, they inspire the professionals of the future.

When I'm in schools, I see a growing culture to find out and spread 'what works', enshrining evidence-based practice. I believe that's because teaching is and should be a profession on a par with any other top profession, and a profession that wants to stay at the cutting edge of research and practice.

So the establishment of a professional body for teachers represents an important step forward. Career progression and professional development

Secondly, career progression has to be grounded, first and foremost, in a teacher's professional expertise and qualifications.

I want there to be a culture of high-quality ongoing professional development running like a golden thread through a teacher's career, and I want this to be shaped increasingly through access to clearer career pathways for the next generation of teachers and school leaders.

The newly strengthened set of gold standard national professional qualifications (NPQs) that will be delivered from September this year are a big step forward. I want to thank ASCL, and the new Foundation for Leadership, for its help in reviewing and reforming them, as part of our expert group.

At the heart of these new NPQs will be a focus on evidence and an emphasis on the role of leaders helping their own staff to develop.

The £75 million teaching and leadership innovation fund is all about providing high-quality professional development for teachers and school leaders especially in challenging areas.

From this fund we have earmarked £10 million specifically to support the take-up of the reformed NPQs in schools where they can make the biggest difference.

But it really struck me coming into this role, how we had worked on ITT routes, we've now strengthened NPQs once teachers got into their careers, but there was a real gap in the early years of a teacher's career. That's often the time when it's toughest and a new career feels like a vertical learning curve.

You're having all these new experiences, and I want to try to make sure it's about learning from them, developing from them, not just coping.

As a fledgling accountant, I had a structured and sustained programme of development and support around me. That's what I want for QTS. It should be a means to ensure our newest teachers really develop and grow quickly into their roles. So I want to work hand in hand with ASCL and others in the profession to shape this. We need the same great partnership we've already had on NPQs.

I want to see QTS as foundation stone for a great career in teaching. So I don't believe QTS should be scrapped. Instead, I want QTS strengthened. I want it to be of such high quality that school leaders will naturally want their staff to have it.

I know that many fantastic teachers leave in the early years of their careers, but with a stronger approach on QTS we can make it about development from the word go in a teacher's career: strong CPD has to become the norm.

Recruitment and retention

So, investing in the teaching profession itself is where I see the biggest gains coming. I think that if we're to have a sensible approach to the third area I mentioned, which is recruitment and retention, we do need to front up squarely to the challenges.

As Malcolm said, this requires a clear, evidence-based strategy to help ensure that you are able to recruit and retain the high-quality teachers that you need. I have read what I thought was a really constructive ASCL paper on teacher supply and I agree squarely with many of your conclusions.

One of the first things I recognised coming into this role is that you can't just look at recruitment on a national level.

We know that schools in different circumstances face different problems, and that's part of the difficulty in fixing this. Some of it is to do with the geography, some of it's to do with the subject, some of it's to do with the school. So there's no one-size-fits-all answer.

For me, it's less about how we label the challenge on recruitment and retention – it's more about properly understanding it so that we can finally get beyond that and I want to get and work with you to develop an effective range of solutions.

That starts by getting the right evidence base at the right level of detail – it's not easy because we've always done modelling at a national level.

So, I have tasked my department to get under the skin of the data, so we can really start to understand the recruitment and retention challenges at a more local level.

What's already becoming clear is that there are – as we know – many different combinations of challenges facing individual schools – including deprivation, Ofsted ratings, and leadership vacancies, among others. That's also what school leaders tell me when I visit your schools.

So we need a better picture of the regional and sub-regional pressures and that work is now underway. We'll complement this work with a deep-dive analysis, to really understand what's happening on the ground in particular areas, including urban, rural and coastal areas with different types of challenges, and some of the new opportunity areas.

And Malcolm – as your paper recommends – we do need to take coherent, concrete steps to identify how we can tackle the challenge in areas that need it most. We will begin by investing a substantial portion of the £70 million for the northern powerhouse schools strategy in piloting new approaches to attracting and retaining teachers in the North of England.

That money will be focused on schools facing the most critical difficulties and providing very practical support, like on workforce planning, resourcing better CPD, and tackling workload issues. From that work I hope we'll really learn what works and what doesn't. We can then take that and spread it around the country.

My department is already working with schools to design the pilots and I look forward to setting out the next detailed steps very shortly.

Again, I want to go further to make sure that our efforts have the greatest impact in some of our more challenging schools.

So I will be inviting expressions of interest from providers with innovative teacher training models – school-led, universities and partnerships between the 2 – that can ensure more high-quality new teachers reach the schools and areas that need them most.

Successful bidders will be rewarded with the same 3-year certainty in training allocations that I already awarded to the best-performing ITT providers this year, enabling them to look forward, plan and invest in the infrastructure to deliver more high-quality training in the future.

Finally, I want to stress that, whilst I think it is hugely important to train and recruit more great teachers in our more challenging schools, my

approach will reflect that I believe that the real key to improvement alongside that will be to invest in the great home-grown teaching talent that is often already there. We need to make sure that is developed as well as recruiting from the outside.

So it's about strengthened QTS, committing to the highest-quality CPD throughout a teacher's career, a strong profession, all backed by evidence on what works and investment behind that strategy.

Flexible working

There is also one further specific area where I think we can make real gains – not only in teacher supply and especially retention – but teacher quality too, and that is flexible working.

It is really striking to me how, compared to many other professions, teaching hasn't really ever seen flexible working take off. It seems such a massive missed opportunity.

We have these great, amazing teachers, just beginning to really get their careers underway and then, often once a family gets started, there's this huge risk that their career stalls or worse still they leave.

I want to work with you to see how we can deliver a culture shift on this, particularly because a new generation of teachers will expect teaching to adapt as their lives change. That's what other careers will offer them. Many other workplaces have flexible working embedded into their DNA now – and they often say that it allows them to work more efficiently.

Flexible working won't be the whole answer to recruitment and retention – there is no silver bullet – but it's definitely a part of it and many schools are already demonstrating what's possible.

When we were working with ASCL and others to develop our recent flexible working guidance, teachers and leaders helped us to identify some of the very practical challenges.

So what I want to do later in the year is to have a summit on flexible working in the teaching profession, to agree how to get a step change in the classroom and in schools to see flexible working become the norm. I'd like us to also focus on what good looks like for a strengthened QTS.

I want to thank ASCL for agreeing to take part. We'll get a range of people 'round the table working on this. People like Alison Peacock from the Chartered College of Teaching, Lucy Heller from Ark, representatives from Barclays and Google. It's really important that we have a wide range of people so we can make meaningful progress on flexible working.

Supporting a school-led system that can deliver

where it is most needed

So I want to now step back briefly to look at the overall picture – at how this all fits together.

I believe strongly in the school-led system – taking what happens in the very best classrooms and schools in this country and spreading it, driving improvement through collaboration and school-to-school support.

But I also recognise that, although this system has flourished in many places, it hasn't yet done so in others. So we need to take a more active, stronger approach where it is most needed, building the capacity to enable genuine and sustained school improvement in the future.

For me, this has to happen across 4 key areas.

First and foremost – as I have been talking about today – is people. In particular, attracting the best teachers to our more challenging schools and investing in the development of those currently working there.

Second, and closely linked, is on curriculum – improving the quality of what is taught and how it is taught – ensuring that we can spread best practice, such as maths mastery approaches, where it is most needed.

Third is having the right school improvement infrastructure. I want to ensure we develop a full national network of teaching schools and prioritise attracting good sponsors and growing MAT capacity in challenging areas, ensuring our best tools for improvement are not just concentrated where they are easiest to establish.

Fourth is targeted school improvement. Ensuring that the support and school improvement activity that is carried out by these system leaders is really reaching the schools that need it most, driven by our new £140 million strategic school improvement fund.

But these efforts to build the right long-term capacity will only really work if we also help to create the right overarching conditions.

This requires us to think about accountability and making sure we have the right incentives.

That's why I think the shift towards progress measures is such an important step, enabling us to judge similar schools fairly, based on how well they support every one of their pupils.

I am also working with Ofsted to review how we can ensure that school inspection can best support social mobility.

I want to see a system where great teachers and leaders who choose to work in challenging schools that we want them to work in know they will get the full credit for what they achieve.

More broadly, I want to shift the culture of accountability, so that it feels

less like a regime of punitive sanctions and is seen to be much more about a professional dialogue and timely access to the right support.

It also – crucially – requires us to build a culture where we put evidence at the very core of everything we do. So I want to work closely with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and organisations like it, to support the shift from generating evidence to implementing it.

It is by really placing ‘what works’ at the heart of classroom practice, and embedding this within our approach to professional development and school improvement – including in the new EEF research schools – that we will ensure that we have an impact where it is needed most.

Conclusion

Which brings me back to you. The teachers and leaders who I believe are the key to improving our education system.

I know I can only carry out my half of the bargain if I – and my department – work alongside you. So I fully intend for there to be a spirit of collaboration running through everything we do. That’s how we’ll make our education system work for everyone.

Ultimately, I think the most important part of my role is about having a strong strategy and helping to find practical solutions, and making sure you have the tools and the conditions that enable you to do what you do best: to level up opportunity, to drive social mobility, and to give every young person in this country the chance to make the most of their talents no matter where they are or what their background.

And I will work with you on that.

Thank you.