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Speech

Education Secretary speech to NASUWT Annual Conference

Gavin Williamson addresses the 2021 Annual Conference of teaching union NASUWT

From: Department for Education and The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP

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Thank you very much for inviting me to join your conference today. I'm delighted to have this opportunity to speak to you personally.

You will often hear people say that the most important person in a classroom is the one that's standing at the front of it. That has never been more true, even though over the past year, you may not always have had a classroom to stand in front of.

I have taken every opportunity to repeat my thanks for the way everyone in our teaching communities has responded to the covid pandemic and before I go any further, I want to do so again.

I want to thank you for the way you have kept schools open.

I want to thank you for the inspiring way you switched to remote learning. And I want to thank you for the huge lengths you have gone to, to keep everyone in your school and wider community safe.

This has involved overseeing some important safety measures, such as lateral flow tests, which have enabled all our school children and students to return to classrooms after this latest lockdown.

We have all faced many challenges over the past 12 months and often this has meant doing the day job but learning to do it in an entirely different way.

For those of us in education, it has meant coming together and working together, in ways we haven't necessarily done before.

I always value talking to heads, to teachers, to carers and child minders, and of course to unions. But now more so than ever.

So I would like to pay particular tribute to Dr Patrick Roach. Our two roles don't always lend themselves to easy conversations but we have been working hard together and I welcome the constructive engagement he has brought to our ongoing management of the pandemic.

I hope that this collaboration will continue to develop over the weeks and months ahead as we build back better.

I know that whatever job you do in our schools, whether you're a teacher, a school head, a classroom assistant, the pandemic has undoubtedly made it much harder.

You all deserve support at every stage in your careers and making sure you get it when you need it, has been high on our list of priorities.

I see for myself, regularly, the dedication and professionalism of teachers right across the country and I want to assure you that making sure that you feel that you are supported at every stage of your career is something I care passionately about.

However it is particularly important in the first years of teaching when the learning curve is steepest. I know far too many teachers leave within the first five years of joining the profession.

Every teacher who leaves the profession is a loss that we can ill afford.

After all the disruption to our schools, including to teacher training, over the past year, investing in our next generation of teachers, and enabling them to deliver high quality teaching to inspire and motivate a new generation, is more important than ever and crucial to our long-term recovery plans.

It is also central to closing the attainment gap, which the pandemic has cruelly exposed between disadvantaged pupils and their peers.

Our Early Career Framework reforms will directly support those at the start of their teaching careers and it is being backed by £130m per year when fully rolled out. When combined with Initial Teacher Training, new teachers will now be entitled to at least three years of support in the first years of their career.

From September, we are extending induction for early career teachers from one year to two years, providing a funded entitlement to a structured two-year package of high-quality professional development.

This will not only have a positive impact on the quality of teaching, but on the retention of new teachers. It will equip new teachers with the skills and confidence they need for a successful, rewarding long lasting career.

There will be a range of new National Professional Qualifications to give teachers and leaders at all levels training, support and practical guidance helping them to become more effective teachers and leaders inside and outside the classroom.

Teaching School Hubs which will be centres of excellence for delivering these teacher development reforms and our new Institute of Teaching will be the cornerstone of these reforms. Together these are going to set up career-long development from trainee teacher through to executive headship.

All of these are building blocks but the single most important factor in schooling, the one that everything hinges on, is the quality of their teacher.

We need to go further, faster, to improve the professional training we offer teachers - at all points of their career - and ensure every teacher benefits. This will be central to the recovery plan that I am working on with Sir Kevin Collins, and while I do not want to pre-empt his findings, let me say I am confident this is going to feature strongly.

I have said before that people now have a far greater appreciation of what you all do for our children. They have seen the way you have risen to the numerous challenges that Covid has caused.

These challenges are not over by a long chalk but I want you to know that I am always ready to work with you when they arise and I am confident that between us we are going to emerge stronger, more resilient and better equipped to deliver a world-class education for all our children as a result.

Thank you.

Published 3 April 2021

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