

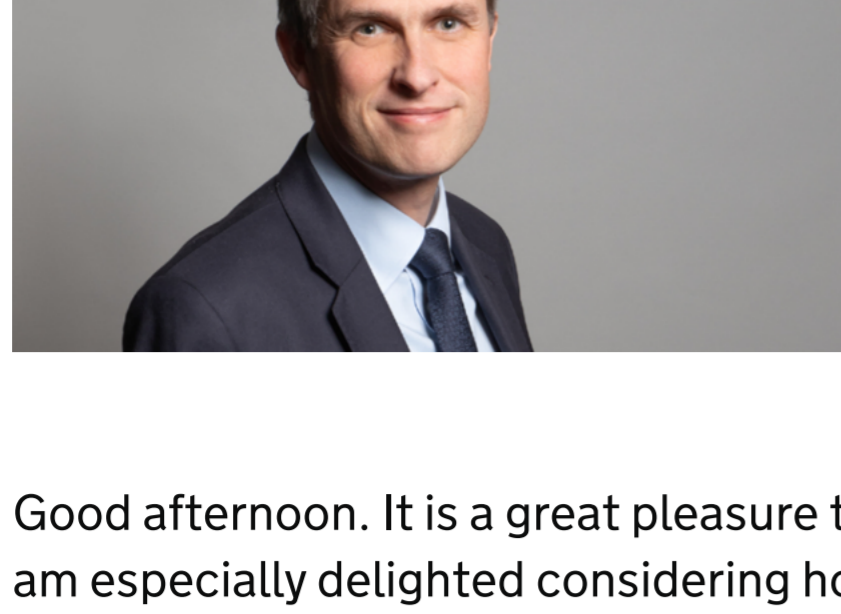
Speech

Education Secretary outlines priorities on improving pupil outcomes

Speaking at the Festival of Education 2021, Gavin Williamson set out his commitment to levelling up opportunities across the country for young people.

From: [Department for Education](#) and [The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP](#)
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Good afternoon. It is a great pleasure to be opening this wonderful festival. I am especially delighted considering how many festivals have been cancelled this year. So I'd like to congratulate the organisers for going ahead and assembling such a wide range of inspiring speakers. I shall be following as many of the debates as I can over the next two weeks.

There has never been a more crucial time for us to focus on education and how we build back better after the past 18 months.

For many of us the focus has understandably had to be on the Covid challenges.

But I would like to assure you that we have never taken our eyes off the bigger picture. We are just as determined as ever to make sure that every child gets the world-class start in life that we expect and that they deserve.

Last month I set out an ambitious vision for our country's schools. Today I want to expand a little more on that and explain how our approach is informed – at every stage – by the evidence of what works to raise standards and the things we know will improve outcomes for pupils.

Because I want to be clear - improving outcomes for pupils is our number one priority and as we build back better from Covid, it is more critical than it has ever been before.

Alastair Campbell would probably have called the school that I went to a 'bog standard comprehensive'. Now, personally, I think it was a pretty good school. But if we're honest, it's true that most state schools at the time didn't provide the teaching or opportunities that were available to the most privileged in society.

Thanks to the school reforms that we've put in place since 2010, we have started to really change that.

Our leading academy trusts and free schools now deliver an unrivalled education, whether that is in the curriculum, the quality of teaching or instilling character and aspiration. Whether it is getting bright children to Oxford and Cambridge – where our best state schools have now outstripped Eton – or opening up routes to apprenticeships with blue-chip firms or securing unprecedented numbers of children on free school meals a good set of GCSEs, our best state schools are second to none.

Michael Gove once said that our aim is to make state schools so good that putting children into private schools would be considered an eccentric choice. I agree with him and for me that means continuing to give parents more choice.

From Harris Academies in London to Outwood Grange in the North, from the Shireland Academies Trust in the West Midlands, to the Inspiration Trust in East Anglia, we are transforming education. You are transforming education. But we must go further and faster if we are to complete the revolution, end the postcode lottery and truly level up the whole nation.

I have said before that I want to see every school as part of a family of schools in a strong multi-academy trust. This is because I truly believe multi-academy trusts are the best way to advance education for the greatest good and because they can deliver clear benefits for teaching and pupil outcomes.

So what makes the best multi-academy trusts stand out? They tend to share a broad and balanced, knowledge-rich curriculum; they have a relentless focus on good behaviour and discipline; they develop and invest in their teachers, and of course they have a robust approach to strong financial management and clear governance.

Good financial management is something no school can afford to overlook. Nothing will undermine great teaching quicker than mismanagement.

This year we are publishing a new edition of the Academies Handbook. This will not just be a routine annual update. We are making significant improvements and changes to the Handbook, to make it a manual that brings together the key things that trust boards and leaders need to know. This will help to ensure that they will be spending the money given to them by the taxpayer, in the best way possible. It also makes clear some of the important duties that Trusts already have in safeguarding the pupils in their care and making sure that parents and carers have roles on trust or individual academy boards.

To properly reflect this important purpose, the handbook will be renamed the Academy Trust Handbook and we're aiming to publish this shortly.

We all know that you don't get a great school without great teachers. A good teacher can make an enormous difference to our children and can have an even greater impact on pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. As Education Secretary, I could not be more grateful or more proud of the way teachers have responded to the extraordinary demands of the pandemic, particularly for those children who don't have all the advantages of their peers.

Every child deserves to have brilliant teachers and I know that many of them do. But it's not a given. And I know that every teacher is capable of the best.

This is why we are backing teachers with one of our biggest ever investments in teacher training and development to make sure every teacher and every leader gets high-quality professional development to support them to become great teachers and great leaders.

As part of our Covid recovery plans, we are investing £400 million to provide 500,000 teacher training opportunities across the country, alongside professional development for those working in early years settings. This includes £69 million of new funding to extend the Early Career Framework reforms which are providing all new teachers with three years of structured support at the start of their careers.

We are also investing £184m to treble the numbers of funded training places available for National Professional Qualifications – up from 50,000 to 150,000 places over the next four years.

World-class teacher development requires world-class delivery. That is why we are creating a new national infrastructure, for designing and delivering training to schools.

As well as introducing a new network of Teaching School Hubs from September, we are also going to support a new flagship teacher development provider – the Institute of Teaching.

The Institute will deliver training to at least 5,000 teachers each year, who will be able to take the most up-to-date aspects of teaching back to their schools, giving future generations of teachers and leaders a fantastic resource for improving quality.

All schools have been impacted by lockdowns. And these in turn have affected children in different ways. The evidence we have shows that disadvantaged children and those who live in areas that were particularly hard hit by high Covid rates, such as the North East and Yorkshire, are among those whose learning is most likely to have been affected.

To give them the support they need we have just announced a massive expansion to tutoring. This is going to provide up to 100 million hours of tuition for 5-19 year-olds by 2024.

Evidence shows us that just one course of high-quality tutoring has been proven to boost attainment by three to five months, so additional tutoring will be vital for our young people in recovering the teaching hours lost in the past year.

It takes the money we've pledged to help young people make up for the time they've lost to more than £3 billion.

The next stage of our recovery plan will include a review of time spent in school and college and the impact this could have on helping children and young people to catch up.

Schools already have the power to set the length of the school day but we know it varies from school to school – some close at 2:45, some are open until 4:00. I think it is important to ask if this matters, if it's fair and if it affects outcomes. The findings of the review will be set out later in the year to inform the Spending Review. I have spoken before about how important behaviour and discipline is in the classroom and this continues to be a priority for me.

Every school should be a safe and wholesome environment where children don't just learn, they can play and have fun too. But there have to be boundaries.

For a start, we need mobile phones to be out of the school day because they can have such a damaging impact on children's mental health and wellbeing.

We will be consulting on banning mobile phones from the school day, alongside other revisions to the behaviour and discipline and exclusions guidance, later this year.

This will follow on from the major improvements we are already making to ensure all new teachers receive brilliant behaviour management as part of the Early Career Framework in their first two years in the profession from September 2021. This all sits alongside our £10m investment in the Behaviour Hubs programme.

We are looking at how we can improve outcomes in alternative provision as part of the ongoing SEND Review because we know the vast majority of pupils in alternative provision have special educational needs.

I know many of you will have been working so hard to ensure students get the grades they deserve this year. But like all of you, I'm aware of some speculation suggesting that grades this year will not be an accurate reflection of students' abilities.

I want you to know that I completely reject these views. I back teachers - they know their students' capabilities and the quality of work they are able to produce. With thorough guidance and a robust quality assurance process, I know teachers have been doing their utmost to ensure that every student gets the grade they deserve.

Many of you will be keen to know about next year's exams. I can confirm that it is our intention that exams and other formal assessments go ahead next year for GCSEs, A levels and vocational and technical qualifications.

We are working with Ofqual and others to consider what we need to do to make sure grades are fair, even if there is further disruption ahead.

Just as for older pupils, we continue to plan for a full programme of primary assessments in the 2021/22 academic year, including the introduction of the statutory Reception Baseline Assessment and the Multiplication Tables Check, and we will confirm full details in due course. Like last year, we'll be running phonics screening checks in the autumn so that any year 2 pupils who need support with phonics are spotted early.

I would like to finish by saying that all good festivals are at heart a celebration and I am sure this one is going to be no different.

Covid has set the most unprecedented challenges but I do feel that despite all that it has thrown at us, our teaching communities have come through with great heart, spirit and determination.

This is because I know in this country we have the finest teachers in the world.

Since 2010 we have been driving a revolution to make world-class education a reality for every child wherever they live.

I know there is still ground to make up, I know that we will not accomplish all that we want right away, but I am confident that we now have the measures in place to make the progress we need to make.

Thank you.

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