

Speech

Nicky Morgan: educational excellence everywhere

From: [Department for Education](#) and [The Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP](#)
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The Education Secretary sets out her vision for education, delivering educational excellence everywhere.



Thank you David [Laws, former Schools Minister)

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you so much for taking the time to be here today.

I'm thrilled we're launching our vision for education in this [white paper](#) here at King's College Maths School.

It's a real pleasure to see how the school has progressed since I

was last here in 2014 and its success really speaks for itself when more than 70% of students achieve AAB in their A levels.

And it's no wonder because the approach they take is innovative, inclusive and inspiring. Its head, Dan Abramson, is exactly the kind of leader we need in the education system if we are to make that sort of approach a reality everywhere.

I have to applaud the whole school - students and teachers alike for what they have achieved here in such a short space of time.

Raising our sights

You'll often hear politicians talking about the future.

In part that's because we all like to see ourselves as visionaries plotting a path for the nation's future. Because we want to change our country for the better. And the way to change our country is to have a clear plan for what the future looks like.

The administrations which have been most successful - from Asquith and Lloyd George overseeing the People's Budget, to Attlee's formation of the welfare state to Thatcher's economic reforms - are those which didn't let themselves get buried in the day-to-day busy-ness that fills up every Minister's diary and red box; they worked out what was important and focused on the reforms which set our nation up to succeed for tomorrow. And their success is that we take those radical reforms for granted.

But a desire to look and build for the future runs deeper and wider than politics. If the history of human progress is bound by one common thread it is that most human of all instincts - the desire that the next generation should be happier, healthier, wealthier than we are. We want them to benefit from our work and effort, and to be ready to take the next step forward.

The Prime Minister made this point eloquently, in his [life chances speech](#) in January. Education is at the heart of this government's mission - because a good education transforms a child's future. I'm convinced that no aspect of public policy can be more

focused on the future than our education system.

That's why in a time of austerity, when public spending faces ongoing reductions, the Chancellor chose yesterday to invest more in our education system and put the next generation first. He did that, because he, like me, and like the whole of this government recognises that education is the best investment that we can make in the future of our country.

And we have to make this investment. Because the latest data from OECD showed us that in 2012 our children were no more literate or numerate than their grandparents' generation. Because in other parts of the world from Germany to Hong Kong, we see our competitors in the global economy, surging ahead, demanding more of their children and reaping the rewards.

And so today's white paper is about raising our sights - taking pride in the huge steps that schools, teachers and children have made over the last 5 years, but also setting our sights on the future. It is about:

- making the most of the fact that we have the best generation of teachers ever - giving them the same status as other professions such as those in law, medicine and science, and the freedom to drive forward the future of their own profession
- giving every school the freedoms that come with being an academy, and the support to make the most of those freedoms
- putting an end to the inequality that means that there are some areas where parents - frankly - have no chance of getting their child into a good school - and making a reality of educational excellence everywhere
- equipping parents with the knowledge and influence to play an active, informed role in their child's education

A new model - and a new approach to change

My white paper isn't just about a new set of ideas about the future - it is also a radical departure from the approaches to

education policy of government's past.

From Butler's 1944 Act, to Baker's national curriculum, to Blunkett's national strategies, major interventions in education have always been top down.

All have seen the state asserting more control and management - right down to the level of individual classrooms.

That approach is understandable. After all, the concept of universal state education to 16 is actually a relatively new one to our country, and standardisation was necessary to guarantee every child received that core entitlement.

But such an approach can only take you so far. As Michael Barber and Joel Klein have said: "You can mandate adequacy but you cannot mandate greatness; it has to be unleashed."

It is greatness that we want to see everywhere in our education system today.

That desire for greatness has underpinned all of our reforms since 2010 - and it is why we chose to free teachers and school leaders from the shackles of central government diktats, allowing them instead to innovate, challenge orthodoxies and tread new ground.

This is what has made our education reforms so transformational - they are devo-max in the truest sense of the world.

They were founded on the core belief that the future of our education system was best served in the hands of professionals on the frontline, not politicians and bureaucrats in Whitehall or town halls.

This white paper is the next stage on that journey.

It does not propose another big idea to be imposed on schools - instead it lays out how we will give schools, school leaders, and the education profession the power, incentives and accountability to give every child an excellent education. And it sets out the underpinning infrastructure that will equip schools to

succeed and build an adaptive, dynamic school system, which rewards innovation, spreads excellence and is intolerant of failure.

The vision you will read in the white paper is the vision for a truly future-facing education system, based on learning from the best systems around the world, and designed not just to deal with the challenges of today but of years to come.

Autonomy not abdication

Reading the white paper should leave you with no doubt that we are strong proponents of school freedom. But let me be clear that giving every school autonomy does not mean the government will be abdicating its responsibilities. I am not so naïve as to believe that academy status in itself is a magic wand.

There is and always will be a role for government in education. The public rightly expects their elected government to hold schools to account for the outcomes young people achieve and the investment tax payers put in.

This white paper outlines a radically different role for government to play - my job is to create the conditions for autonomy to succeed right across the country.

The past 5 years have demonstrated incontrovertibly that autonomy and freedom in the hands of excellent leaders and outstanding teachers delivers excellence. We also know that excellence can be delivered in the most challenging of environments.

Just ask the pupils at Lowedges Junior Academy in Sheffield where 45% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Aston Community Education Trust, an experienced sponsor with a track record in turning around primary schools became its sponsor in 2014. With the trust's support the school has managed to bring about a 36% jump in pupils achieving level 4 in reading, writing and maths at key stage 2 from 45% when it took over to 81% now.

And it's not just a few isolated examples. We have 1.4 million more pupils in 'good' and 'outstanding' schools since 2010 because our reforms, translated into reality on the ground by the hard work of school leaders and teachers, really do work.

But, for all that we have unlocked excellence, as I have said many times before, we do not yet have that excellence everywhere and for me, the everywhere is non-negotiable.

Pockets of excellence are fantastic and act as trailblazers for the system, but their impact will be marginal if we cannot find a way for the rest of the system to learn from their success. Because we're not asking schools to do any more than the best schools are already doing.

Our country can't afford a 2-tier education system with London streaking ahead and areas like Knowsley and Medway lagging behind. It's morally wrong and economically self-defeating.

Instead we have to enable every area to excel. And I do mean enable - we will not be directing and driving from Whitehall. But we will do more to ensure that autonomous leaders across the country have the tools they need to succeed. We know that schools improve fastest when they work together - and we will focus on helping that to happen, through MATs and teaching school alliances. And all the more so in areas that have seen entrenched educational failure for generations.

Dynamism

One of the first acts of the coalition government was to turbo-charge Lord Adonis' academy programme.

We saw how autonomy gave strong sponsors the freedom and flexibility they needed to turn around failing schools, and we saw no reason why 'good' and 'outstanding' school leaders shouldn't have that freedom as well.

I'm talking about schools like Harris Academy in Peckham which runs a year round academic Saturday school for key stage 4 and

key stage 5 pupils or King Solomon Academy which runs an extended school day for its students or Kings Leadership Academy in Warrington which teaches character through weekly public speaking, philosophy and ethics classes.

We now have well over 5,000 schools as academies, the majority of secondary schools and increasing numbers of primary schools.

Our [Education and Adoption Act](#), which received royal assent yesterday takes that approach a step further, allowing us to turn around not just failing schools but those that have coasted over a period of time and failed to stretch pupils to reach their potential. It also gives us the same powers to intervene in those academies which have, for whatever reason, fallen behind.

And yesterday at the budget the [Chancellor announced the next phase of the academies programme, which will see every school on the path to become an academy.](#)

Why have we done this? Because it's abundantly clear that academy status leads to a more dynamic, more responsive and ultimately higher-performing education system, it allows successful school leaders not just to consolidate success but to spread that excellence right across the country.

I can hear the howls of derision from opponents of academies - asking "what about this one or that one that struggled?"

It's true some academies have been weaker than others, some haven't met the high expectations that we've set for them. But here's the crucial difference, when a local authority school failed, it was stuck with the local authority, end of story.

Under a system of academies and multi-academy trusts we have the power not just to intervene swiftly, but to actively move schools to new management to turn them around.

Rather than the perverse situation which persisted before in which schools were islands and stronger heads were unable to spread their reach and influence and weaker schools were left to

languish under the monopoly of LA control. We now have a system where the best leaders can take control of those weaker schools, turn them around and in doing so transform the life chances of young people that attend them.

Outstanding sponsors, great heads, successful trusts aren't constrained by geographical borders; they can extend their reach to wherever they're needed, wherever they can make a difference.

For that reason, this white paper places a premium on the growth of multi-academy trusts - because they allow for strong governance, sharing of resources, true collaboration and better opportunities for staff development.

There will always be a role for schools which can make it on their own, but we want to see more schools embracing the benefits of partnership that only multi-academy trusts can offer.

And to ensure that the system remains responsive we will allow new entrants to come in where there is basic need, educational need or a demand for innovation.

That is what the free school programme gives us; it allows parents to demand more for their children and for pioneering visionaries to establish schools that bring in cutting edge ways of engaging and inspiring young people.

A system based on academies and free schools working dynamically together can't stagnate, because where schools are struggling, they'll be able to benefit from collaboration and support, and where they simply aren't delivering the school can be re-brokered to a new MAT or parents and teachers will be free to set up new schools. This system of collaboration and competition which lies at the heart of a MAT-based system means that schools will continue to strive for excellence and be firmly focused on the future.

Supported autonomy

But before that system of collaboration and competition can really work, we need to tackle those areas where there has been entrenched failure and there simply isn't the capacity to take advantage of the promise that autonomy offers.

Autonomy cannot be a recipe for allowing the highest performing areas of our country to grow in strength, while the weaker ones fall further behind.

That means we must take a smarter approach to autonomy with a clearly defined role for the government within an autonomous system and that is the second theme of this white paper - supported autonomy.

Let me be clear what that means. It means that the government fund schools fairly, and hold them to account by setting clear but ambitious expectations for outcomes.

Where schools are meeting those expectations and performing well, government will get out of the way, and let schools get on with delivering for young people.

But where capacity is lacking, for whatever reason, we will make sure that schools and trusts get the support they need to improve.

We'll ensure the schools that need it most can draw on the support of other 'outstanding' schools and leaders by approving 800 more [national leaders of education](#) and 300 more [teaching schools](#) where they are needed, resulting in full coverage across the country.

We'll ensure they can benefit from great leadership and challenge by developing sponsor capacity, from other schools, businesses and the third sector right across the country.

And we'll ensure that they can attract and retain the great teachers and leaders they need through schemes like [Teach First](#), the [National Teaching Service](#), and [Teaching Leaders](#) and our forthcoming senior leadership development programmes in the areas that need them most.

Crucially all of these interventions are about making sure the best elements of our education system get to those schools that need them the most - ensuring that no school is an island.

It is not about the government itself doing improvement, it is certainly not about regional schools commissioners interfering in the day to day running of schools. Instead, RSCs will act to ensure that those with a proven track record of improvement can support those schools most in need.

[When I spoke about educational excellence everywhere in November](#), I highlighted those areas where underperformance is most entrenched, where educational standards are not just low, but where a culture of aspiration is almost entirely lacking.

This white paper proposes new measures firstly to identify those areas, but secondly to create new achieving excellence areas, including coastal and rural areas where a history of chronic underperformance is coupled with a lack of capacity to improve.

We won't be reasserting top-down bureaucratic control in these areas - but instead targeting and directing our programmes of support intensively on particular areas and making sure they have the great teachers, leaders, system leaders and sponsors the need to succeed.

Empowered leaders

The best schools that I have visited have leaders with a vision and ethos for their school which is evident in everything they do. They have a sense of purpose for their school and that is not about pleasing me or pleasing Ofsted. It's about getting the best possible outcomes for the young people. These reforms are about giving more power and responsibility to those excellent school leaders. In fact the system I am outlining today depends entirely on strong school leaders, which is why we will place a premium on ensuring leaders have the tools that they need to succeed, and that we have a strong pipeline of future leaders to steward our schools for years to come.

Multi-academy trusts have a key role to play in this, because of the fast track opportunities and a clear pathway they create.

Within a MAT you can move from subject teacher, to head of that subject across 30 schools, to head of a school, but at the same time have the support of an executive head above you and a MAT CEO who takes responsibility for overall governance, letting school heads focus on the day to day management of their individual schools.

This is a total break from how we have viewed school leadership in the past, with a linear route that stopped at school head and often took many years. In the future we will see multiple pathways, better support and faster progression.

We'll support MATs to develop strong leaders, by bringing the best educational leaders together to develop new professional leadership qualifications. To be clear these will not be mandatory, nor do we expect them to be the only qualifications, but rather they will act as a standard against which MATs, and others can benchmark against - ensuring school leaders receive world class preparation and support to run schools well.

And most crucially, we will give our backing to leaders who step forwards to help turn round a struggling school. We will remove the perverse incentives which stopped the best leaders from working in our most challenging schools. It is unacceptable that our accountability and inspection regime actively discourage school leaders from taking up a challenge - because they'll be penalised for the prior attainment of the pupils they'll teach, or because they'll face inspection before they've had time to really make a difference.

The measures in this white paper will start to change that, introducing inspection holidays and reinforcing our commitment to holding schools accountable for pupil progress as well as attainment.

Outcomes focused

And because we trust professionals from school leaders to classroom teachers this white paper makes clear our focus will be on outcomes not methods.

What I care about, and what any government should care about are the outcomes that young people achieve. We want our schools to produce knowledgeable, skilled and confident young people and we should hold schools to account for getting them there.

But how can they do it?

That is for teachers as professionals to decide on the basis of evidence.

No matter how well intentioned it might be micromanaging classrooms from Westminster doesn't work and at its very worst it can stamp out the very innovation that drives pedagogy forward.

And when I see the outputs of conferences like ResearchEd and read blogs by countless teachers it's abundantly clear that this is not a profession that needs me to tell them how to do their job.

We have not only the best qualified workforce in history, but also a workforce that is increasingly focused on constant self-improvement, that is driven by the evidence and which like other professions is breaking new boundaries, sharing what works, challenging one another and unleashing greatness.

This white paper recognises this, and goes further than any government has done to recognise teachers as the professionals they are.

It reaffirms our commitment to support an independent College of Teaching.

But more fundamentally it also proposes a radical shake up of how we accredit excellent teachers. We will replace the outdated [QTS mark](#), and instead introduce a more meaningful accreditation.

Rather than being an almost automatic award to staff who complete ITT and a year in the classroom, the new accreditation will be awarded when teachers have demonstrated deep subject knowledge, and the ability to teach well.

Most fundamentally of all - as in other mature professions like medicine and law - it will be for the teaching profession itself to decide when a teacher is ready to be accredited. This will ensure that the decision is made by those who know best what makes a great teacher: outstanding schools and heads.

And because we respect teachers as professionals, we'll do all that we can to reduce the central prescription and bureaucracy and workload that distracts from their core job of teaching, engaging and inspiring young people.

Shortly our [workload review groups](#) will report on planning, marking and data collection. But in the meantime this white paper also proposes that Ofsted will consult on removing its judgement for quality of teaching - because we know it both drives workload and because, and I'll repeat it again, it's outcomes that matter. If pupils are achieving well and making sufficient progress they are being taught well, end of story.

So this white paper envisions an increasingly confident, highly-skilled workforce driving forward their own development.

I believe that this will make teaching an even more attractive profession for potential new entrants, who'll see the opportunities that teaching offers and will know that they'll enter a profession which is not only rewarding and engaging but where they'll be respected and trusted to lead their own development.

Yes we will continue to do all we can to bolster recruitment, particularly as there are more graduate opportunities, and to keep the excellent teachers we have through our package of support ranging from bursaries to support for returners.

But ultimately we know that the best way to get more people into teaching is to make the career itself more attractive and ensure teachers are treated as the professionals they are

High expectations

And while we will not prescribe the methods, the outcomes we expect will be based on the highest of expectations.

That's why our reforms to the curriculum and qualifications place these high expectations at the heart of what pupils learn:

- through a knowledge-based curriculum that ensures young people master the basics, and then introduces them to all of the very best that has been thought and said
- through a rigorous academic core, which see all young people who are able study the EBacc combination of maths, English, 2 sciences, a humanity and a language up until the age of 16
- through gold standard qualifications, that might not allow politicians to trumpet ever higher pass rates, but do command the respect of employers and academics and so set young people up to succeed in the global race
- and through a new grading system, that gives every child in primary school the chance to attempt more stretching questions, and distinguishes better between the most exceptional candidates at GCSE level

But ensuring high expectations, means ensuring them for all pupils and this white paper identifies 2 groups of pupils who have often been neglected by our current system.

Firstly the most able, who in some cases, were ignored because they weren't a worry and were sure to bank that C grade. As a result their vast talents and promise were lost. This isn't the approach they take in competitor countries in the Far East - in Shanghai and Singapore and South Korea, they make sure that every child is stretched to the very bounds of their ability.

So we will engage in a new programme of work, to fund new and innovative approaches to stretch the most able, ensuring our country benefits from the very brightest achieving their full potential.

At the same time we are determined to improve outcomes for

young people who, for whatever reason have fallen out of mainstream education and ended up in alternative provision. By many objective measures, pupils who have spent time in alternative provision do considerably worse than their peers.

I will not tolerate a situation where we effectively give up on a whole group of young people and where alternative provision becomes a dumping ground.

So the white paper proposes a number of measures to transform AP - most fundamentally, changing accountability arrangements so that a pupil's mainstream school will retain accountability for their educational outcomes, reversing the incentives, creating a drive towards high-quality provision and encouraging MATs to set up their own alternative provision.

Parents and pupils at the heart of everything we do

We know that parents have high expectations for their children and we believe they have a real role to play in realising them. But the truth is that for too long parents have been side lined in our education system.

Slots for parent governors gave a handful of informed parents the chance to express concerns, but that isn't a real parental voice.

Parents I speak to often tell me the biggest barrier to their involvement in their children's education is that they don't know what to expect, what to demand and what they can do to help.

For a self-improving, school-led system to work it needs to allow parents to challenge the system and ultimately to vote with their feet, and that means giving them the information they need. So far, we've helped parents to do that by expecting new academies to display important information about their curriculum and offer to students on their webpages, and reformed performance tables to allow parents to compare local schools.

Now we'll go further, with the creation of a new parent portal. This

portal will provide parents with everything they need to understand their children's education, it will cut through the jargon we're all guilty of using and explain what they should be able to expect and when, it will show them how to raise complaints and what the options are available to them.

At the same time we'll create a new mechanism for parents to raise complaints, ultimately right up to the new Public Sector Ombudsman.

And empowering parents means a new role for local authorities as well. Rather than running schools, local authorities will instead play a role in ensuring the system works for parents, focused on ensuring there are enough places, overseeing admissions complaints and commissioning support for children with specific needs.

Alongside this, the opportunities provided by local devolution give local authorities the opportunities to act as champions and advocates for the education their community wants and deserves.

This white paper sets out our vision for schools, but it is just one strand of my department's work to transform life chances for the next generation.

I am also publishing the [department's overall strategy](#), which sets out how we will work towards achieving our vision of world class education and care during this Parliament.

I'm occasionally accused of being a zealot when it comes to our education reforms.

Well to tell you the truth I am a zealot about our education reforms.

I'm a zealot because I believe in social justice, I'm a zealot because nothing makes me angrier than wasted potential, I'm a zealot because children get one shot at their education, and it's my job to give them the best one possible.

And I can be a zealot about the reforms I've outlined today,

because we know they work, we've seen them work across the country and around the world.

My promise to the hardworking professionals in schools up and down the country is this: like you, this government won't shy away from seeking the best for every child, wherever they are.

But we do understand how hard it is to deliver the high standards that our children really need and deserve - especially in our toughest schools, colleges and communities. We'll do more to offer support where it is most needed. And we'll be disciplined in resisting the temptation to make changes from the centre.

Each part of the strategy I have outlined must work together. It relies on a number of actors playing their part: autonomy demands accountability; a system led by the front-line only works if there's sufficient capacity where it's needed.

But just think about the prize if we succeed - a fairer society, a more productive society, a society where reward is based on talent and effort, where potential is unleashed, where young people's dreams can be realised.

All of us in education, from politicians and civil servants in Westminster to our phenomenal teaching workforce in classrooms across the country do what we do, because we believe in the potential of the next generation.

This white paper is about ensuring that all of us can play the role that we do best, it's a blueprint for how we can work together, not just to improve standards, important though that is, but to create a fundamentally different education system - an education system fit for the 21st century, an education system which is truly focused on putting the next generation first.

Thank you.

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The Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP

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