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Speech

Nicky Morgan speech at the NAHT annual conference 2016

From: [Department for Education](#) and [The Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP](#)
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Education Secretary Nicky Morgan addresses the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) annual conference.



Thank you, Kim [Johnson, NAHT President], for that introduction.

I want to start by saying thank you - to all of you. Thank you for your hard work, your commitment and your exceptional ability to bring about excellent educational outcomes for young people. You, together with your dedicated staff, are at the forefront of our education system and it's thanks to your collective efforts that

education in England has taken huge leaps forward, with 1.4 million more children and young people in 'good' or 'outstanding' schools since our reforms began in 2010.

And let me be clear that, while we may not always agree, I have enormous respect for the work you do, leading your schools to success and ensuring that every child is encouraged and enabled to reach their potential.

Primary assessment

I recognise the pressures this term brings in terms of assessments, but it's because we, like you, want to continue raising standards for young people that we made changes to primary assessment.

Let me take this opportunity to apologise again for the [recent incident where a section of the key stage 1 final test was published early](#), alongside the sample papers. I have received a personal assurance from the Chief Executive of the Standards and Testing Agency that she and her team will be taking every possible step, working closely with my department, to ensure that such a mistake can never happen again.

We all agree it's critical that we get primary assessment right, with tests fit for purpose, because mastering the basics in primary school is vital to the future success of young people.

But in terms of evaluating school performance, the primary school floor standard has 2 parts: attainment and, crucially, progress. We are increasing the emphasis on the progress pupils make, because it's a fairer way of evaluating school performance, particularly for those schools making great progress for pupils from a low starting point.

Although one part of the floor standard is more challenging this year, with the new expected standard, we are really clear that schools will be judged on their pupils' progress as well as their attainment.

As you know, if a school meets the progress standard it is above the floor altogether. We have made sure all who hold schools accountable are aware of this too, and we will continue to do so.

Historically, the floor standard has identified only a small proportion of schools every year which are below that standard - and this year I can reassure you that no more than 1% more schools will be below the floor standard than last year.

To get primary assessment right we have to make sure teachers have the time and resources to prepare, so we appreciate that we have to make primary assessment run more smoothly, with as much support as possible.

But I don't accept the claim from some outside this hall, that the higher expectations embodied in the new national curriculum are somehow 'inappropriate'. Virtually all children have the potential to become properly literate and numerate and I am unwilling, as I know you are, to settle for anything less.

In countries like Korea and Singapore, the proportion of functionally literate and numerate pupils aged 15 is over 90%, according to the 2012 PISA survey. In Ireland the proportion of functionally literate pupils aged 15 is more than 90% too, but in England it's only 82%, and only 77% are functionally numerate.

According to the materials used by PISA, this means that one year prior to leaving school, just under a fifth of our pupils cannot read and understand the moral behind one of Aesop's fables. And more than a fifth are unable to work out how many people on average climb a mountain each day, when given the annual figure - while more than 90% of their peers in Korea and Singapore can do so.

'Will more rigorous tests at key stage 2 actually address this gap?' you might ask. My answer is yes. These new key stage 2 assessments give a better picture of whether a pupil has the reading and mathematical ability, to prosper at secondary school. Because literacy and numeracy are not just 2 subjects among many, they are the foundation on which all other subjects rest.

And to those who say we should let our children be creative, imaginative, and happy - of course I agree, both as a parent and as the Education Secretary. But I would ask them this - how creative can a child be if they struggle to understand the words on the page in front of them - they certainly can't enjoy them? What are the limits placed on a child's imagination, when they cannot write down their ideas for others to read?

That is why the campaign being led by some of those who do not think we should set high expectations, who want to 'keep their children home for a day' next week, is so damaging.

Keeping children home - even for a day - is harmful to their education and I think it undermines how hard you as heads are working. I urge those running these campaigns to reconsider their actions.

The case for every school as an academy

I realise some of you have concerns about our plan for every school in England to become an academy, so I want to take this opportunity to explain why I believe it's the right step for our education system.

The autonomy [academy status](#) brings means putting power into the hands of school leaders, because we improve outcomes for young people by ensuring the teachers who teach them, and the heads who lead their schools, are given the freedom to make the right decisions in the interests of those children.

The status alone doesn't raise standards, it's the framework of collaboration and support it provides that does. Far from creating a system of survival of the fittest, we want to build the scaffolding that will make it easier for swift action to be taken to support struggling schools with a range of solutions, facilitating excellent leaders to have a positive impact where they are needed most.

Academies make it easier to spread the reach of the best leaders over several schools; recruit, train, develop and deploy better teachers, incentivising them to stay in the profession through

new career opportunities; and ensure teachers can share best practice on what works in the classroom.

On current projections, around three-quarters of secondary and a third of primary schools would convert to academy status by 2020. Before the [white paper](#) was published I was constantly being asked, at events like this one, whether this government wanted all schools to become academies. So I wanted to give you all a clear sense of direction and a 6-year time frame, so that all schools including those who had not yet considered academy status, can make the right choices, planning effectively for a sustainable future in the model - standalone or multi-academy trust - that works for them, keeping in place local arrangements that work and looking at new arrangements aimed at driving up standards.

We believe that most schools will choose to work in local clusters, which will enable you, our most effective leaders, and your best teachers to extend your reach locally, in order to support one other to succeed, as many do already.

Rowanfield Junior School, which I visited just 2 days ago, is a great example of how local schools can group together. A single converter academy, Rowanfield has expanded to form a MAT cluster in the Cheltenham community. Through this partnership it extends professional development, career opportunities and provides school to school support. Children benefit as teachers develop best practice and model excellence to develop the skills of colleagues within the trust.

Most multi-academy trusts are small and 80% are entirely based in a single local authority area - because collaboration works well. But I should be absolutely clear that there is a place for successful, sustainable, standalone academies.

For local authorities we envision a new role, continuing to provide special educational needs services and acting as champions for SEND young people, making sure every child has a school place, and offering excellent local services, which academies can continue to purchase - as many do now.


I know there are concerns about the costs of this policy but it is fully funded, and we have set aside more than £500 million to build capacity in the system, including the development of strong local trusts, so that no school will be left behind.

And as I know this is a particular concern for some members here, I want to be clear that no good rural school will close as a result of this policy.

‘Educational excellence everywhere’ white paper

But actually, despite what you might see in the media, or hear from the opposition, every school gaining academy status is only one chapter of a much bigger story told in the ‘Educational excellence everywhere’ white paper. In fact, much of it addresses issues raised by the teaching profession itself.

[Our white paper is about great leaders, great teachers, intelligent accountability, fair funding and targeted support in challenging parts of the country](#) - it’s about building the framework of school-led working and collaboration that will allow all schools to succeed.

We know that NAHT believes in the impact collaboration can have. The [Aspire project](#)  demonstrates the potential of what can be achieved when schools work together to share expertise and drive up standards, and as we move towards a more school-led system that collaboration will soon be commonplace across the country.

Great leaders

We know that the leaders in our education system have an enormous impact on educational outcomes, with effective leadership shown to raise achievement, in some cases by the equivalent of many months of learning in a single school year.

So we need to make sure there is a healthy pipeline of leaders, and schools will take the lead on this. And through the new

[Foundation for Leadership, led by NAHT, ASCL and the NGA](#), we will be working with the best leaders and other experts, to develop a new suite of voluntary national professional qualifications for every level of leadership.

Through our new Excellence in Leadership fund we will encourage the best providers and multi-academy trusts to look at innovative ways of developing leadership in system cold spots, and through the new [National Teaching Service](#) we will put the very best leaders and teachers into the schools where they are needed most.

We envisage a dynamic new approach to collaborative system leadership with up to 300 more teaching schools and 800 more national leaders in education, targeted so that no part of the country misses out. And with new achieving excellence areas we will focus intensively on driving up standards where they have been too low for too long.

We want to ensure that accountability does not discourage excellent leaders from working in the most challenging areas, so as I've already said we are putting more emphasis on progress in accountability, which is fairer to schools with lower attaining intakes.

And we are introducing improvement periods, during which schools won't be inspected, where a new headteacher is brought into a challenging school, so they can be given enough time to turn a school around before being judged by Ofsted.

And we're doing it because you told us that you had concerns about taking the leap to schools in challenging circumstances, without sufficient time to make your mark and the potential career implications.

Excellent teachers

The white paper outlines our plans to get excellent teachers into the profession, recognise their proficiency in the classroom, and deploy them where they are needed most.

You have made it clear that recruitment is a challenge, so we have taken steps to help, like putting in place bursaries and prestigious scholarships for the subjects most difficult to recruit for.

But now we must go further, so we will reform the National College for Teaching and Leadership to plan and execute targeted incentive programmes, teacher recruitment campaigns, and opportunities that will attract the best graduates and entice back those who have left the profession.

We are continuing to drive up quality in initial teacher training, giving schools a greater role in selecting and training great teachers, and ensuring that there continues to be a clear role for high-quality universities, recognising the strengths they can bring to teacher education.

Crucially, we are replacing the arrangements for awarding qualified teacher status with a stronger accreditation that recognises consistently high standards of practice in the classroom. It is vital that school leaders and parents have confidence in the quality of teachers so the new accreditation will only be given to those demonstrating real proficiency in the classroom.

And we want the people best placed - leaders like you - to decide what good teaching looks like, and when a teacher should be accredited. And we want you to have the freedom to bring in subject experts who can have a positive impact on the lives of young people, developing and supporting them so they too can achieve accreditation.

Workload review reports

This government wants to make the school-led system a reality and we need your input to do that, as we develop the policies outlined in the white paper, so we will continue engaging with the teaching profession, as we do on things like workload.

The [teacher workload reviews carried out by 3 outstanding school leaders](#) - one of whom, Dawn Copping, is here today - with input from teachers and unions - including the NAHT's very own Kathy James. The reviews were launched because of the concerns you highlighted.

I am committed to rising to the challenges set for the government and I hope you will consider the impact the recommendations have on the way you work, because reducing workload is not about one single policy from Whitehall, it's about us in government, you in schools and Ofsted delivering on the report's recommendations.

As I said at the beginning of this speech, for everything on which we disagree, we continue to be united in our desire to do better, be better and achieve more for children and young people in this country.

So let me say thank you once again, for everything you do already to bring about excellence in our system, let me reassure you that my door is always open and I always want to hear your views on how together we can achieve educational excellence everywhere.

Thank you.

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The Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP

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