

Speech

Nicky Morgan: end the demography of destiny

From: [Department for Education](#) and [The Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP](#)
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Education Secretary speaks at the Association of School and College Leaders Conference about providing educational excellence everywhere.



Thank you, Allan [Foulds, President of ASCL], for that kind introduction.

It's fantastic to see so many of you here, and particularly to see those familiar faces from all the schools I've had the pleasure of visiting over the past 18 months.

Please do keep the invitations coming, because I can say, hand on heart, that the very best part of my job is when I'm able to

leave Westminster and Whitehall, to see beyond the headlines, the statistics and the speeches, and to witness first-hand the fantastic work that you're doing to change young lives in schools right across the country.

It truly is a privilege.

That leads me on to the first thing I want to say to you today, to acknowledge something which isn't said enough, perhaps because it doesn't make for good copy for journalists, or it doesn't have the same appeal as eye-catching initiatives for politicians.

And that is this: the vast majority, more than 8 in 10 schools in this country, do a good or outstanding job; the vast majority of school leaders are tireless and passionate advocates for the young people they serve; and the vast majority of teachers are engaging and inspiring their pupils to achieve their all.

You don't have to take my word for it, the figures speak for themselves. More children are joining secondary school with a better grasp of the 3Rs; there are record numbers of 'good' and 'outstanding' schools; and fewer pupils are leaving school and ending up NEET.

These improvements are being driven from the ground - by confident, innovative leaders like you, who've embraced autonomy to achieve truly remarkable progress.

The truth is, and I know it might not always feel like this, we are in a golden age of education in this country.

Expectations are higher, standards have improved, and outcomes are better than at any time in our country's history.

That is worth remembering, particularly as we engage in the debate on how to drive our education system forward further still, because we start from a very good base.

At the same time, all of us here recognise that in a globalised world, where the young people you teach are going to have to compete for jobs not just with young people from the same town,

county or country, but with their peers from across the globe, we cannot afford to let our education system stand still. We can always do more and achieve better.

Educational excellence

Inevitably, my focus, and that of my department and Ofsted, must be on that minority of schools where the quality of education isn't yet good enough.

After all, even if a single school isn't performing as well as it could be, then hundreds of children aren't getting the education they deserve and the chance to reach their full potential.

Children get just one shot at their education and we owe it to them to give them the best one.

It is, as I have said many times before, a matter of basic social justice - our duty and our obligation to the next generation.

As the Prime Minister has made clear, this is a one nation government - focused on unlocking real social justice and improving the life chances of those who so often have been left behind.

Education is at the heart of that agenda.

So yes, we need to do a better job; and by we I mean all of us - politicians, leaders and even the media - of recognising all that is excellent and inspiring about our schools today.

But we also need to be unapologetic about tackling failure where it occurs and be ready to give those schools who are struggling a helping hand.

In November in a [speech to Policy Exchange](#), I made clear that my goal over the course of this Parliament is to spread educational excellence everywhere.

I don't need to tell you that too many of those struggling schools are concentrated in certain parts of the country - many in our

coastal towns and rural areas.

Simply hoping for improvement isn't enough, because these areas are not only underperforming, but they also lack the capacity and support that they need to improve.

Quite simply that means that just by virtue of being born in one part of the country, a child is destined to receive a worse start in life.

Delivering educational excellence everywhere means ending the scandalous demography of destiny which has no place in 21st century Britain.

It means providing the means by which the innovation that has transformed educational outcomes in cities like London can spread across the country.

It means a zero tolerance approach to underachievement, no excuses for failure and bringing a culture of aspiration back to all our towns and communities.

Leaders at the heart of the system

And the only people who can make that vision a reality are you.

Sure enough, politicians can make things easier or harder for you to succeed: we can make sure that you have the resources you need and that the accountability system we design leads to the right incentives.

But ultimately there is no substitute for good leadership.

That's why, as a government, we are such firm believers in a school-led system, with great leaders in the driving seat.

Why do we want all schools to become academies? Because we believe that the people best placed to lead schools are you - the heads.

Why do we believe in multi-academy trusts (MATs)? Because we

want the best leaders to extend their reach to as many schools as possible.

Why have we stripped back the national curriculum? Because you know - better than we ever could - how best to inspire and engage your students.

All of our reforms are about bringing power, responsibility and accountability together in your hands, where it belongs.

Let's dispense with this notion once and for all that somehow local authority control of schools led to democratic accountability.

Let me honestly ask you: how many local elections in your patch have been fought over the quality of education?

I don't ever remember being on a doorstep and being quizzed on what my local authority was doing on local schools.

But that doesn't and shouldn't mean that the school-led system is about the government leaving schools to fend for themselves.

A school-led system does not mean creating a Wild West where schools compete in a survival of the fittest - far from it.

Instead, a genuine school-led system means the government getting out of the way and focusing on providing the scaffolding that helps those good schools to turn around weaker ones.

It means the government not meddling in schools or micromanaging the process but supporting improvement through schemes like the [National Teaching Service](#), helping to build sponsor capacity and discharging our duty to hold schools to account on behalf of parents.

Having read the blueprint numerous times, I know we share a vision that is broadly aligned, where government provides a helping hand, but where improvement and innovation are driven from the sector itself.

Of course, devolving power from politicians to school leaders inevitably means more demands on leaders. If we're to have a

truly self-improving school system, then that means leadership itself must adapt and improve as well.

Already we see models of leadership adapting and evolving to meet the challenge of running a school-led system, ranging from the potential offered by MATs for young teachers to quickly accelerate to leadership positions, right through to the opportunities to become a CEO of a large MAT responsible for 30 to 40 schools.

And I'm genuinely excited by the potential offered by the work you, NAHT and the National Governors' Association are doing on the [Foundation for Leadership](#), which in time will see ever more leadership development driven directly by those who know what it takes to make a great leader.

For my part, I want to do all I can to remove the barriers to your success.

The heads I met before this speech talked to me about our accountability system. I want to be clear - I never want our inspection system to be a barrier to talented leaders taking on and supporting new schools. And I want to reiterate that just like every other commitment in our manifesto, when we said we will reduce the burdens of inspection, we meant it.

But there are other challenges as well, and I want to focus on just a couple.

Teacher recruitment

The first, it won't surprise you to hear, is teacher recruitment.

We know that recruitment is a challenge.

We hear your concerns, and we know that while headline data shows a sustained low national vacancy rate, the reality on the ground for many heads is that they are struggling to attract the brightest and the best.

Let me level with you. We have a growing economy and leading

employers intending to recruit 7.5% more graduates than last year from a smaller overall graduate pool, so even with all other things being equal, we would face a challenge.

So we are doing all we can to drive recruitment and improve retention. And we're getting more returners coming back into the profession.

Tomorrow I'll be talking more about measures we're taking to support part-time teachers and particularly women, so that our schools don't lose out on their talent.

And later this spring, [3 workload review groups](#) will be reporting to me on how to tackle the issues which have seen some great teachers leave the profession.

But I need your help to tackle this challenge.

By all means, lobby me about what more the government can do to improve recruitment and retention.

But let's not inadvertently create a vicious cycle where talk of a crisis actively puts people off entering the profession. Let's focus on communicating to the outside world what a great profession teaching is, how rewarding it can be, and what good teachers have the power to do.

Funding

I know that for some of you, funding is also a challenge, and here again I want to be as frank as I can. Compared to the rest of the public sector, the schools budget secured a relatively generous funding settlement. There simply isn't, in a time of austerity, a magic money tree from which government can find more.

But I know there are pressures and it is indisputable that we are expecting you to do more with the budgets you have.

Those pressures make the introduction of a national fair funding formula even more urgent, and we remain committed to

beginning the transition from next year - because it must be right that the same pupil, with the same characteristics attracts the same amount of funding.

We also want to help schools to reduce unnecessary costs. I know many of you have already used our school efficiency metric, and in the coming months we'll be doing much more to help schools get the best value for money from their budgets. And there are many more areas I could discuss. I'm sure you'll challenge me on some of them during the Q and A.

The prize

The long and short of it is this: achieving what we all want to see - a world class education system - won't be easy. Striving for excellence means stretching ourselves.

For me, this is why I came into politics. Nothing makes me angrier than the thought of potential lost through lack of a decent education, which is why I want to play my part in building a system that delivers true excellence for all.

I know from speaking to you, that for many of you, your motivations for being teachers are very similar. We are all here because we want the same thing: to offer the best education we possibly can - one which values each and every teacher and extends opportunity to each and every child.

Your generation of school leaders has already achieved so much, and as I said before, this is very much a golden age for education standards in this country.

I can't pretend your jobs will ever be easy and you know that, but my commitment is to ensure that government supports you as much as we can but doesn't get in the way - so you can set about improving our school system further.

I'd urge you to seize that opportunity. Don't be afraid to be bold, don't wait for permission, and don't be held back by fear of inspection.

Because every time you are able to open a young mind to a new concept, every time you succeed in teaching them something new, you are helping to build a piece of their future.

If we are able to make a reality of the school-led system, then the prize will be great.

We'll be able to build something that no country has yet achieved: a truly fair and meritocratic society, where life chances are determined by talent and effort, not the circumstances of birth - an end to demography as destiny.

Thank you for everything you do.

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